

IT TAKES A TEAM

After years of planning and advocacy, the Kankakee River flood hazard known as State Line Bridge will finally be leaving the river for a new home.

On behalf of the Commission, I sincerely thank the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the State Historic Preservation Officer, the Indiana DNR, our consultants and contractors, and Lake and Newton County officials for bringing us to this momentous juncture.

We are especially grateful to the residents, farmers, and local leaders who pressed for removal of this floodwater obstruction for decades. This achievement reflects a clear and persistent commitment to public safety while respecting our area's special history.

The hard work of actually removing the obstruction now begins. It took a team to make it happen.

Sincerely,



Scott D. Pelath, CFM
Executive Director
Kankakee River Basin and
Yellow River Basin
Development Commission



Major obstruction at State Line Bridge in Lake Village, IN (September 2019)

IT'S COMING DOWN

VALPARAISO — The Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission (“the Commission”) has received the final federal permit needed to remove and preserve State Line Bridge, a decades-old obstruction to floodwater and debris on the Kankakee River at the Indiana-Illinois state line. The approximately \$2.5 million project is expected to begin this fall and be completed by December.

“I was chair of a previous Kankakee commission way back in the late 1970s, and we dreamed of removing the thing even then,” said Commission Chair John McNamara. “The bridge has been closed for almost thirty years, and it holds up high water every flood season.

“This is a momentous day. The next big day will come when two cranes walk it off the river.”

According to Executive Director Scott Pelath, removal of State Line Bridge has been a top priority since the Indiana legislature formed the Commission in 2019. Pelath said that because the antiquated structure sits so low above the river, it continually traps heavy debris that would not accumulate naturally.

“The problem isn’t just that the bridge traps debris and blocks floodwater,” said Pelath. “The bigger dilemma is that because of the bridge’s location, it is impossible to remove the obstructions in the middle of a flood—right when you most need the water to move.”

Newton County Commissioner and local farmer Rob Churchill strongly agreed.

“Farmers like me have been worrying about this bridge as long as I can remember,” said Churchill. “The snow will melt, the rain will come, and we think about our drainage running into tons of steel. The bridge’s removal will be huge for farmers.”

Pelath stated the bridge’s historic status was a major factor in seeking project approvals. Because it is subject to state and federal rules for historic structures, Pelath said the bridge will be carefully disassembled, labeled, and stored for anyone who might want to restore the structure for the public’s enjoyment.

“The bridge has some historic qualities, and we will fully respect those,” said Pelath. “This is not a salvage operation. We will take it apart piece by piece and safeguard the pieces for a community or organization that might want to reconstruct this piece of historic engineering.”

The engineering firm of Butler, Fairman, and Seufert in Merrillville developed the plan to remove the bridge using two cranes atop a temporary river causeway. In June, the Commission selected F.H. Paschen, also with offices in Merrillville, to remove the structure. The Commission has fully budgeted for the project.

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RIVERBANK STEWARDSHIP

BUSH HONEYSUCKLE

An invasive threat to stable riverbanks



Opposite leaves and paired red berries are useful identification clues. Photo: T. Ransburg

Asian bush honeysuckle may look harmless, but it is one of Indiana's most destructive invasive plants—and along rivers and streams, it can contribute to erosion and increased flood risk.

Originally introduced from Eurasia as an ornamental shrub and for wildlife cover, bush honeysuckle now thrives in disturbed areas, including roadsides, abandoned fields, woodland edges and river corridors. It grows into dense thickets that block sunlight from reaching the ground. Native grasses, wildflowers and young trees then struggle to survive, often leaving bare soil beneath the honeysuckle canopy.

Why It Matters Along Rivers

The roots of native grasses and plants help hold riverbank soil in place. When bush honeysuckle shades them out, banks can become more vulnerable to erosion during high water. Eroded soil also adds sediment to rivers and drainage systems, reducing their ability to carry floodwater efficiently.

How to Recognize It

Asian bush honeysuckle commonly grows from 6 to 15 feet tall and has upright, arching branches. Its leaves grow in opposite pairs, and its red or orange berries usually appear in pairs as well. The branchlets are hollow. It is often among the first shrubs to leaf out in spring and the last to lose its leaves in fall.



Dense thickets suppress the native vegetation that protects soil from erosion. Photo: Indy Parks

Property Owners Can Help

Small plants and seedlings can often be pulled by hand, provided the roots are removed and surrounding soil is disturbed as little as possible. Established shrubs usually must be cut near ground level and the stumps appropriately treated to prevent regrowth. Anyone using herbicide should select a product approved for the location and always follow its label directions.

After removal, native vegetation should be restored to stabilize the soil and discourage reinfestation.

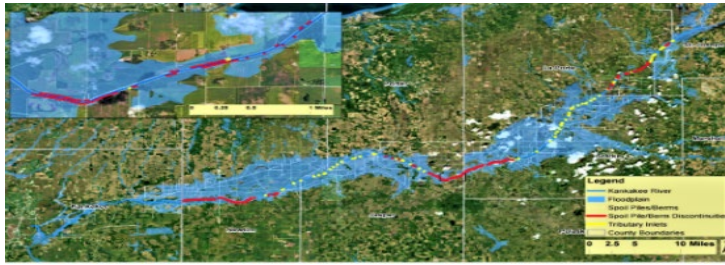
WE'RE READY TO WORK WITH YOU

The Commission encourages property owners to reduce Asian bush honeysuckle, particularly along rivers, streams and drainage corridors. We will work with landowners who request assistance identifying the plant and determining an appropriate approach to controlling it.

Removing bush honeysuckle is not merely a matter of improving appearances. It helps restore native habitat, protect riverbanks and strengthen the vegetation that supports effective flood and sediment control.

Source: Indiana DNR, Division of Forestry, Asian Bush Honeysuckle fact sheet.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Who started the Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission?

The Indiana General Assembly passed legislation to form the Commission in 2019. Once Gov. Eric Holcomb signed the measure into law, the Commission came into being on July 1, 2019.

What are the powers and duties of the Commission?

Indiana Code 14-13-9-18 gives the Commission the ability to conduct 1) bank stabilization; 2) tree removal; 3) the construction and operation of sand traps; 4) channel reconstruction; 5) sediment removal; 6) acquisition, construction, and maintenance of access roads to levees and the channel of each river; and 7) other flood control actions considered necessary. The Commission may acquire interests in land, including easements, for the Commission's use in providing flood storage and constructing levees or other flood control improvements. Any acquisitions are completely voluntary on the seller's part. The law also grants the Commission an exclusive, 75-foot easement from the top of each bank of the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers to conduct flood control and sediment management activities.

Does the Commission have a long-term plan to address flooding and erosion?

Yes. In September 2019, the Commission adopted a 40-year plan to address over a century of mounting flood and erosion problems. The state of Indiana funded the plan's development, and our neighbors in Illinois contributed to a share of the total cost. The full document is available for review at kankakeeandyellowrivers.org.

How are we paying for flood control and sediment management projects?

In 2019, the state of Indiana contributed \$2.3 million to begin work. Since May 2021, capital projects are funded by a limited annual assessment of properties within the Kankakee and Yellow River Basins. Under Indiana Code 14-13-9-21, these assessments are \$7 per residential parcel; \$1 per farm acre; \$2 per undeveloped commercial acre; \$50 per commercial parcel; and \$360 per industrial or utility parcel. Funds are used for capital improvements, and Indiana workers and businesses are granted preferences for the work.

At any time, counties may choose to enact funding of their own as a substitute for these assessments. Otherwise, the amounts in state law took effect in January 2021.

MISSION

The Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission advances Northwest Indiana's safety, economic prosperity, and quality of its natural resources.

VISION

The Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission is building a region where its residents, farms, and communities prosper in concert with one of the nation's most unique natural environments.





KANKAKEE FISHING

According to Illinois DNR, the Kankakee River is a very high-quality system, supporting a high diversity of fishes. It is well known as an excellent sport fishery for smallmouth bass, walleye, channel catfish, rock bass, and northern pike.

The best smallmouth action occurs in early spring and fall. Spinners, crankbaits, jigs and similar artificials are good on the spunky fish, but minnows, worms, frogs and crayfish also are effective.

KANKAKEE RIVER BASIN: AN OVERVIEW

- The Kankakee River Basin in Indiana consists of areas that drain to the Kankakee River and its major tributary, the Yellow River.
- Prior to the Twentieth Century, the Grand Kankakee Marsh was once the second-largest freshwater marsh in the United States.
- A measurable increase in major precipitation events, relentless sediment erosion, and an inefficient use of flood control assets have made the Kankakee and Yellow River channels increasingly difficult to manage.
- Precipitation volatility is predicted to continue, suggesting that a management strategy for economic vitality, sustainable agriculture, and our natural resources is necessary.
- Investments in the Kankakee River Basin are intended to reduce the future costs resulting from flood frequency and severity.

