



Journal / Jo McCord

**SENATORIAL OVERSIGHT:** U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin said this logjam east of Watseka was the "worst I've ever seen." Durbin inspected one of the jams Wednesday and has released \$450,000 in Ag Department funds to help fight the problem.

# 'Worst I've ever seen'

## Durbin stunned by size of Iroquois River logjams

By Jo McCord  
Journal writer

WATSEKA — "This is the worst logjam I've ever seen," says U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin perching on piled debris at the edge of the road.

Representatives of Iroquois River 2020 and the Soil and Water Conservation District took Durbin and his staff to Hatfield Bend, about a mile east of Watseka, for the eye-opening experience on Wednesday.

Did you say, the worst?

"Oh it is, I've never seen anything quite like it," Durbin said, looking at the tangle of downed trees and vegetation, peering over the massive mess — also strewn with construction waste in an effort to keep it from further eroding the bank.

"To think this is one of 20, 30 or 40 sites. I hope I can convince some people to join us," Durbin said.

He has loosened up \$450,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for use in Iroquois County. That's about half of what is needed, some say. Others say \$10 million won't touch it.

2020 member Janice Lubben of rural Iroquois encouraged Durbin to make clear that this county should be high priority. "I went to Kankakee and met with the colonel of the Army Corps for Rock Island. He sat up and paid attention when I said that Durbin had \$450,000.

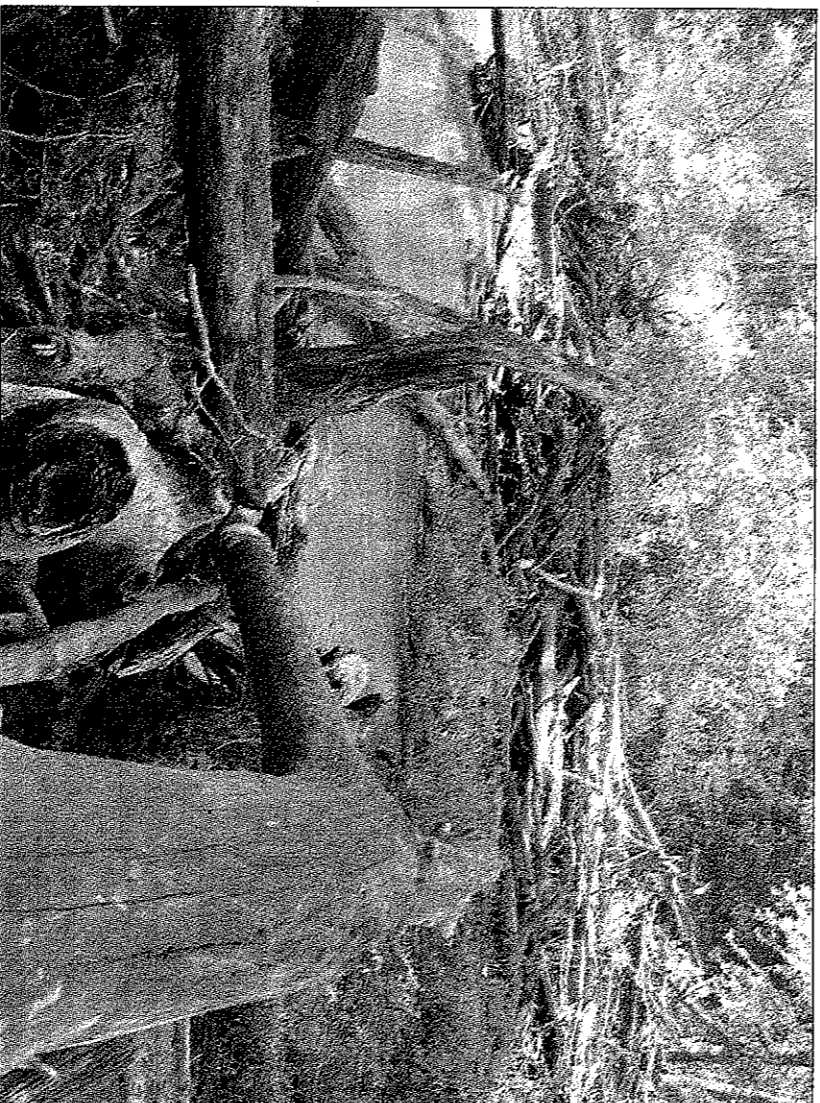
"When I talked to the colonel he said: 'We are not walking away.' They are very concerned with it but we also know that you have to tell them that it is a priority," she told Durbin.

"I will. They're slow," Durbin responded, "They study and then they study the study. And years later they get back to you. It seems to me this is all interconnected. If you just did one piece of it there's no guarantee it isn't going to recur."

Hatfield Bend is an example of that. Thad Eshleman, resource conservationist for the Soil and Water Conservation District, said the last work on the site was last winter.

"The bank has eroded back another 15-20 feet since January," he said, adding the problem has been continuing for at least 30 years.

2020 member Richard Ryan of



**YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET:** This Iroquois River logjam nears the length of two or three football fields. Durbin saw a smaller one.

Sheldon said that when he first moved here in 2001 he thought the bend was a storage site for dead trees. "I wondered why they were storing all those trees over there. I couldn't believe it was the river."

Eshleman said he knows some older fellows who remember when the river was 75 to 100 feet from the Hatfield Bend road. In 25 years it has eroded almost back to the road.

Durbin asked how they approached the work last winter. Eshleman said they used a high hoe with an extra long reach. Some men went in with chain saws and chopped the downed trees into manageable sizes.

"We'd just have to pull a couple of them out at a time. We had a great big burn pile 40 feet tall and 75 feet wide," Eshleman said. Durbin said he would "send a few bucks," (the \$450,000) to get the work started and would talk to the Corps.

Durbin then left for Mornence and meetings with Mayor Jim Saindon and the Chamber of Commerce (more on that in Friday's *Journal*).

Mrs. Lubben and her colleagues, Charles Allen of Milford and

Kenny Blanck of Crescent City, took the media to see the mother-of-all logjams at the Edgar Hustedt farm less than a mile north of Watseka.

If Durbin thought Hatfield Bend was the worst he's seen, this one would surely give him apoplexy.

You can see Hunter's Creek, the city's furthest north residential development from the jam, but it takes 15 minutes to drive along the field in a circuitous route. Mrs. Lubben said the excursion planners did not think Durbin had enough time in his hour allowed here.

Mrs. Lubben got the two car caravan past the wire gates that confine the black Angus herd. Driving along the corn field we note a loss of about 80 acres cut for silage due to the July flooding.

As we get closer to where the river's horseshoe is supposed to be, we get an indication of the flood's height. Huge clumps of dead trees hang horizontally in the branches of live trees.

The logjam itself hardly qualifies for such a puny term. Very few places show any moving water at all. It's an awesome sight, stretching two or three football

fields in length, Mrs. Lubben estimates.

There's a faint sickly smell of decaying vegetation. The massive tangle of thousands of full grown fallen trees and their root balls brings to mind an elephant graveyard.

Ryan said today he has visited the site several times. He thinks the cheapest way to solve the problem would be to just cut a new channel at the top of the horseshoe.

"We may need to just make a new route for the river. There are old bones of trees for hundreds of feet. It's sad to go along the river and see all the dead trees and exposed root balls from the trees," he said in a phone interview.

Eshleman estimates there are about 15 really bad jams among the 242 in the county. Blanck said you can't travel in a flat boat without hitting submerged trees.

In fact, Mrs. Lubben pointed out Thursday that the Department of Natural Resources has provided a very nice boat launch in Watseka. You can launch a boat but cannot travel in either direction.

"The fish are getting fat," she said.