

River project discussed; partnership commended

by Laura Bennett
Herald reporter

Congressmen Jerry Weller and Tom Ewing, U.S. Senator Peter Fitzgerald, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Army Corps of Engineers and members of the Kankakee River Basin Partnership met to discuss the Kankakee River on Jan. 11, 2000 at the Mokense Anchor Club.

Sand builds up on the Indiana side of the Kankakee River. As water and sand move downstream, they leave deposits throughout the river. Because of the sand deposits, the river is shallower, habitats are smothered, wildlife in the area is more frequently, and streams are suffering.

"My number one concern is the sand and silt sedimentation and its impact of the quality and future of the Kankakee River," said Weller. "We must act now to restore the original channels and flow patterns of the Kankakee River. It remains my number one conservation priority in the area."

The Kankakee River is also home to more than 1,000 native plants, survival for 75 is uncertain. There are also six species of fish that live in the Kankakee River that are considered endangered.

Biologists rank most of the Kankakee and Iroquois rivers as "highly valued aquatic resources." The weed shiner, one of the state's rarest fish, inhabits the Kankakee from north of Wilmington to the mouth of Horse Creek. The Kankakee Mallow, a rare plant species, is found only in Kankakee County. The muskrat muskrat, the most numerous of the Kankakee valley muskrats, is rare in other Illinois streams.

The Kankakee River Basin Partnership plans to protect, restore and enhance the Kankakee watershed, said J.R. Black, president of the partnership.

"We want to protect what's left for future generations," said Black.

The Kankakee River Basin Partnership includes people with different perspectives, stated Black. "Conservation, businesses, government, industry, labor, and agricultural organizations come together at one table for a common cause. The door is open to everyone," said Black.

"We live here, we work here and raise our children here," said Black. "We think we know what is needed in our community."

The Department of Natural Resources supports the partnership.



J.R. Black, president of the Kankakee River Basin Partnership, Kirby Cottrell, from the Department of Natural Resources, congressmen Tom Ewing and Jerry Weller met with U.S. Senator Peter Fitzgerald to discuss the future of the Kankakee River on Jan. 11, 2000 at the Mokense Anchor Club.

"DNR has helped the partnership, finding the tools they need to achieve their goals," said Kirby Cottrell, DNR representative. "At DNR we are looking for more innovative ways to keep this project moving forward."

"The partnership is looking for solutions to fit everyone," said Rich Howell, representing agriculture in the partnership. "We were involved from the beginning. Our views of protecting farmland have been respected."

The Army Corps of Engineers has worked on the restoration and improvement of the Kankakee River.

There are four phases to the river basin project. Currently the corps is in the second phase, the feasibility study.

"We are gathering information from all parties involved," said John Strles, deputy engineer for the corps. "We will then come up with a solution everyone is happy with."

"Clean-up and restoration of the Kankakee River de-

serves the same priority as that of the Florida Everglades," said Weller. "I believe we must think globally, but act locally to address the siltation problems which are devastating Illinois' cleanest river."

One proposal discussed by the Congressman included pending legislation in Congress called the Conservation and Reinvestment Act, CARA, which would provide federal

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assistance for flood control projects and river restoration projects similar to the Kankakee.

CARA is bipartisan legislation which would provide for permanent, annual funding derived from natural, non-renewable resources to create and improve resources. CARA would provide for wildlife restoration, habitat preservation,