River agencies report progress

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KANKAKEE RIVER UPDATE
PROBLEMS, PLANS AND SOLUTIONS

J. R. Black has found a way to remove sand from the Kankakee River.

He's bottling it and giving it away!

"Take that back to your office, put in on your desk and think about the Kankakee River every day," Black said as he handed souvenir bottles to speakers at Wednesday's Kankakee River Update meeting.

Black, who chairs the Kankakee River Basin Partnership, said the multi-agency reporting meeting at Kankakee Community College "shows where we are at with projects now underway by local, state and federal agencies."

Underscoring all the reports were "some alarming trends" in sedimentation studies conducted by the Illinois State Water Survey.

Nani Bhowmik, a state researcher who has studied the river for the past 23 years, says alterations have increased the river's slope and flow and are triggering increased sedimentation.

Two areas — Six Mile Pool and the Momence Wetlands — are losing capacity as sand and sediments fill in the main channel, Bhowmik said.

The problems are growing, Bhowmik says, because the river is "out of balance. A river knows its balance. We cannot stop it. We have to understand it."

Spearheaded by the Kankakee River Basin Partnership, an impressive array of agencies are trying to understand what is happening on the Kankakee and develop appropriate management solutions.

"Sedimentation is to a river what a tumor or a clogged artery is to a human body," explained John Marlin who is studying options for sediment removal under the state's Conservation 2000 and Illinois Rivers 2020 programs.

On Friday and Saturday, the Corps of Engineers will be testing a wedge- shaped device for sand removal at the State Line Bridge.

"We are going to give it (the device) a workout and see if we can make it stop," said Steve Russell, project manager for the Rock Island district. Testing begins at 2 p.m. Friday and resumes at 9 a.m. Saturday.

Rich Howell said the Kankakee River Partnership has received over $1.2 million for 25 Conservation 2000 projects since the group was organized five years ago.

Part of that C-2000 money went into buying nine parcels in the Momence Wetlands that will allow wetland restoration on approximately 300 acres. The parcels will be jointly managed by DNR and the Kankakee River Conservancy District.

Restoration efforts on the Kankakee will benefit from a massive effort to stop sedimentation in the state's major waterway, the Illinois River, says Jim Mick, a regional administration with DNR who is working closely with the Kankakee Partnership as well as with the Illinois River 2020 program.

"The Kankakee contributes 1.2 million tons of sediment each year to the Illinois," Mick said.

"We have to act now," said Mick. "The longer we wait, the harder it will be to deal with these problems."

Journal/Wayne Baranowski

SEDIMENTATION, such as this sandbar at Aroma Park, is increasing and causing portions of the Kankakee River to lose capacity according to the latest findings by the Illinois State Water Survey.