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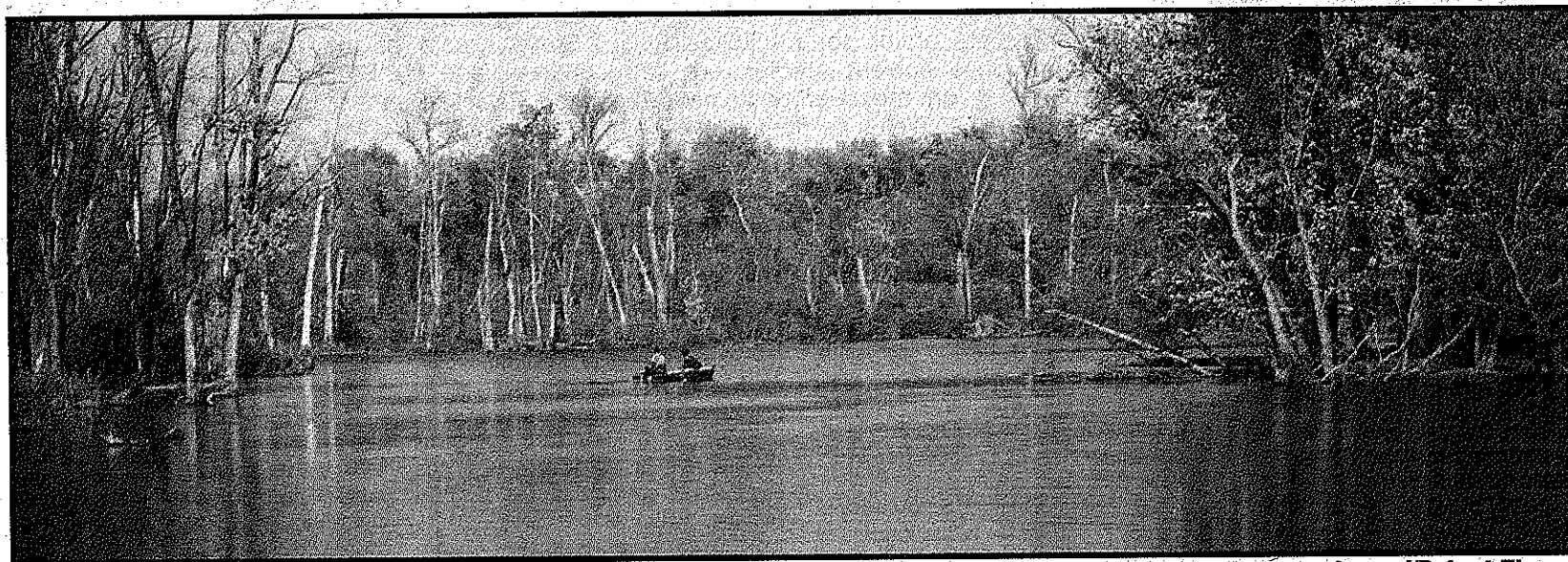
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Weller backs combined efforts to improve river



Journal/Robert Themer

The quiet beauty of this Kankakee River backwater at the state line underscores the changing nature of the river. Once the main channel of a naturally meandering stream, fishermen now probe

the sandy shallows near the channelized portion of the river in Indiana. Illinois and Indiana area cooperating in a federal, state and local initiative to improve the river.

By David F. Jackson
Journal correspondent

MOMENCE — Standing along the Kankakee River at Momence Tuesday, U.S. Rep. Jerry Weller pledged his support for an alliance of federal, state and local partners in solving the problems of the river.

"We have already spent \$450,000 on studies on the Kankakee River," Weller said, referring to the cost of only the latest studies. "We have a study underway and now it's time for action."

He said that hundreds of tons of sand a year have infiltrated the river the Indiana side in the past 14 years.

The Kankakee River Basin Partnership is working now on a regional report due out in February. The partnership is aided by soil and water conservation districts in Kankakee, Iroquois and Will counties.

Once that is done and a federal study of the river is completed, Wel-

ler says, the time to begin work is immediate.

"Restoration of the Kankakee River should receive the same priority of restoration as the Florida Everglades. Local involvement in the partnership is essential to the effort," Weller said. "Just like the Joliet Arsenal Citizens Plan Commission" which led to the creation of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie park near Wilmington.

Kirby Cotrell of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources said the agency "looks forward to being an active partner in the development and implementation of a watershed plan for the Kankakee River Basin."

Much of that support has been provided by Jim Mick, DNR streams coordinator for Northern Illinois. Mick, a fisheries biologist, has helped shepherd proposals calling for nearly \$2 million in local projects

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Briefs

Farm Focus

More legislation on ethanol expected

JOLIET — Midwest corn farmers can expect more legislative movements concerning ethanol when Congress reconvenes next year, but it's an old and recurring story.

Mark Lambert, communications director for the Illinois Corn Growers Association, told the Will County Corn Growers Monday night. "It's always been a battle to continue ethanol but look at the progress that's been made."

Ethanol annually comes up with obstacles from fossil-fuel based companies concerning grants. Ethanol is continuing to accommodate an ever larger portion of the increased corn production in the United States, Lambert outlined.

He said our largest corn export customers now are Japan, Korea, Mexico, Taiwan, China and Egypt as well as the traditional Europe market place.

"Our corn exports are going to far different places in the world than many of us dreamed possible a few years ago," Lambert added.

Lambert cited waterways and lock and dam improvements needed in Illinois to help with escalating export corn through this state. The National Corn Growers Association has sounded an alarm that inadequate river shipping infrastructure is a serious threat to the U.S. edge in world corn markets.

Will County Corn Growers board elected

JOLIET — Three producers were elected to the board of directors of the Will County Corn Growers Association during the annual meeting Monday evening.

Elected unanimously were Tim Snider of Joliet, Bob Bleuer of Channahon, and Warren Schultz of Manhattan; for the terms up for election this year.

Chairman Chuck Weber of Plainfield gave an annual report of the many activities of the Will County group.

Special guests were Bob Fitzpatrick of Custer Park, director of the National Corn Growers; and Floyd Schultz, Plainfield, vice chairman of the Illinois Corn Marketing board, director of U.S. Feed Grains Council, and director of the National Corn Development Foundation.

River

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to be funded by the state's Conservation 2000 program.

The Journal has learned from sources in Springfield that Gov. Jim Edgar is days away from announcing the initial recipients of the C-2000 grants. It is expected that several local grants will be awarded, including a few for the area from Momence to the state line.

Steve Arnold, manager of the Kankakee County Farm Bureau, stressed that the idea of local control is what farmers want for the river projects. "We don't need federal mandates coming down on us," Arnold said.

The comments were a pointed reference to continuing agriculture concerns over a vaguely worded proposal by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to create a 33,000-acre Kankakee River National Wildlife Refuge spanning the state line.

Despite hosting several local meetings, Fish and Wildlife officials have failed to answer questions of exactly which areas inside the historical "footprint" of the Grand Kankakee Marsh they would target as federally controlled refuges.

Arnold stressed two main points concerning state and federal involvement. First, the programs must be voluntary, and based on incentives rather than government regulation. Second, they must be broad-based, locally-organized efforts focusing on local communities, with emphasis on



Journal/Dave Jackson

U. S. Rep. Jerry Weller, center, called Tuesday for immediate action for Kankakee River improvement once current studies are completed. Speaking on the river bank near the Momence City Hall, Weller is flanked by, from

left, Ed Munday of WKAN, Dave Smith of WVLI, Steve Arnold of the Kankakee County Farm Bureau and J.R. Black, chairman of the Kankakee River Basin Partnership.

private, public, and corporate landowners.

"We feel things like the Kankakee River are a state resource," Arnold said. "It doesn't need to be regulated."

J.R. Black, chairman of the partnership committee, said work may be starting soon. "If we are successful, you'll see smaller projects being done in the spring. And larger projects based on the Corps of Engineers studies will be starting in about five to six years."

The most recent U.S. Geological Survey report on the sedimentation of the river says the Iroquois River contributes almost twice the amount of suspended sediment, 862,000 tons compared to 489,000 tons on the upper Kankakee River for the three years 1993-95.

USGS says "an increase in total suspended sediment load of 659,000 (tons)" was measured between Aroma Park (where the Iroquois enters) and Wilmington.

Weller said he has received support in the sediment fight from U.S. Rep. Steve Buyer of Kokomo, whose district borders includes much of the Kankakee watershed in Indiana.

"We need to come to a consensus on how to slow the water" from the channelized portions of the river in Indiana, Weller said.

After the event, Kankakee County Farm Bureau President Bill Olthoff said he thinks the project is "heading

in the right direction, and the emphasis is on local involvement and with partnerships.

"We have local involvement and with more involvement and action, we can solve the problem."

One solution that is being eyed under the Conservation 2000 project includes land acquisition.

It was mentioned that it has taken around 30 years for the river to decline to its present state, and even with projects focusing on cleaning up the river, it will still take time to restore the river.

"This isn't an overnight project," Weller said.

