

Kankakee River focus of state panel

By Bill Byrns

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One man has found some potential gold in all that yellow sand washing down the Kankakee River.

John Marlin's suggestion to remove sand from key areas of the river and put it to work to restore eroded beaches along Lake Michigan drew a lot of excitement at Wednesday's meeting of the Illinois River Council in Bourbonnais.

Marlin spearheads the "Mud to Parks" program which has shipped 104,000 tons of sediment dredged from the Illinois River near Peoria. That "mud" now provides topsoil for a parkland restoration at the old U.S. Steel South Works in Chicago.

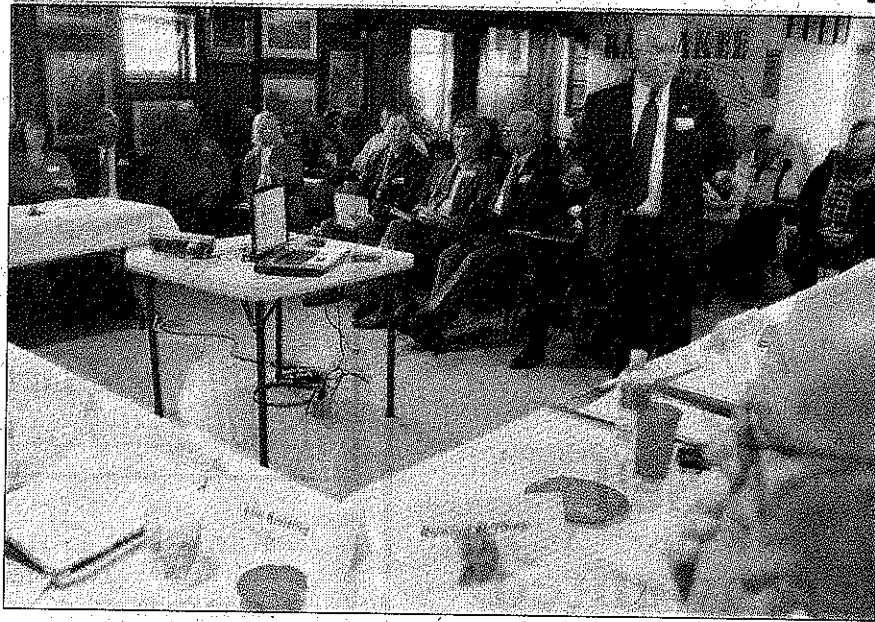
It costs \$13.50 per wet ton to ship upriver where it is sold for \$19.50 a ton for restoration.

Marlin calls the Kankakee's sand "a resource out of place" and suggests that a similar cost-effective solution could be found for its removal.

"I personally think that's the answer," said J.R. Black, chairman of the Kankakee River Partnership. "The average person just doesn't realize the volume of sand we're talking about in the river."

Marlin is already talking to "several contractors" although he warns that it must be determined if the sand is suitable for restoration or construction.

Still he noted that there are places where sand could be removed along the Kankakee in Illinois and on the Yellow River, a major sediment tributary in Indiana.



BILL WHITE of the Illinois State Water Survey reports on recent aerial surveys of the Kankakee, Iroquois and Yellow rivers during Wednesday's meeting of the Illinois River Coordinating Council in Bourbonnais.

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The Council, chaired by Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn, came to learn more about conditions on the Kankakee, one of seven areas it has deemed as "critical restoration projects."

The local project is a 67-acre wetlands restoration just west of the Indiana state line.

"The good thing is the Kankakee is still being considered as a priority area for Illinois Rivers 2020 funding," Black said following the meeting.

"The downside is the financial situation in the state," Black added. "I just hope they can come up with the matching funds for the project."

Work at the state line is jointly funded with 65 percent of the cost coming from federal revenues and 35 percent coming from the state.

"If the state provides funding

then the final feasibility of the project will begin this spring with some design work developed for actual construction," Black said.

Marlin was joined by Nani Bhowmik and Bill White of the Illinois State Water Survey who explained the scope of sand and sediment problems here.

Bhowmik reviewed river data collected over the past 45 years. He said recent studies show sedimentation is increasing and the flow capacity of the river is decreasing in key areas such as Six-Mile Pool, which lost 13.4 percent of its water flow capacity between 1978 and 1999.

Bhowmik's research shows sediment deposition is heaviest in the river near the Interstate 57 bridge and just downstream from the mouth of the Iroquois River.

He added that the Mokena

Wetlands lost over 10 percent of its capacity during the same period due to sediment build-up.

White provided a summary of recent aerial surveys of the Kankakee, Iroquois and Yellow rivers that identified hundreds of areas for further study.

Some areas show severe erosion. One 1,000-foot-long area in Indiana has spawned enough sediment to bury the Bradley-Bourbonnais Sportsman's Clubhouse where Wednesday's meeting was held.

During public comments, longtime river activist Ed Mullady criticized dredging plans by saying it would disrupt the river and harm aquatic life.

"No one has ever talked about dredging the entire river," Black noted. "There are areas where sand could be removed where nothing lives now."