

Preserving Illinois waterways starts with Kankakee River

By Mary Lu Laffey
Accent editor

MOMENCE — Illinois Lt. Gov. Corinne Wood hailed the cooperative and nonpartisan work of state and federal officials and local programs in support of the Illinois Rivers 2020 initiative.

Wood was speaking at the Illinois Rivers Coordinating Council meeting Wednesday at the Momence Anchor Club.

"2020" is a long-range comprehensive effort to restore and protect the Illinois River and its tributaries. The Kankakee River is the natural headwater of the Illinois River.

Lt. Gov. Wood commended the Kankakee River Basin Partnership for its efforts to improve water quality, stabilize the land and restore native wildlife to the area.

"Illinois Rivers 2020 will further the conservation initiatives already enacted in the Kankakee River Basin," she said. "You have already demonstrated a commitment to preserving this natural resource."

"Illinois Rivers 2020 is a historic initiative aimed at erasing some of the damage done to our rivers in recent history and regaining full use of these vital natural resources," she continued. "An entirely voluntary, incentive-based program, Illinois Rivers 2020 builds on our conservation progress and provides the tools we need to restore the river basin. We all rely on the river and we all have a stake in restoring it."

Some of the targeted problems include loss of wetlands and animal

Facts about Illinois 2020

Illinois 2020 is intended to develop new technologies and approaches to:

- Improve water quality within the entire river basin;
- Protect farmland and open space;
- Provide for land treatment of storm water and best management practices for upland areas;
- Enhance the Illinois River as a transportation corridor;
- Restore, enhance and preserve habitat for plants and wildlife;
- Increase economic opportunity for the agriculture and business communities.

habitat, polluted runoff that endangers fish and aquatic plants and erosion that silts up waterways used to move goods by barge. Each day, Wood said, 18,000 truckloads of sediment end up in the river basin which then spreads across more than half of the state's 100 counties.

Half of Illinois' agriculture, or 10 million acres, rely on the Illinois River Basin, she said, and 900,000

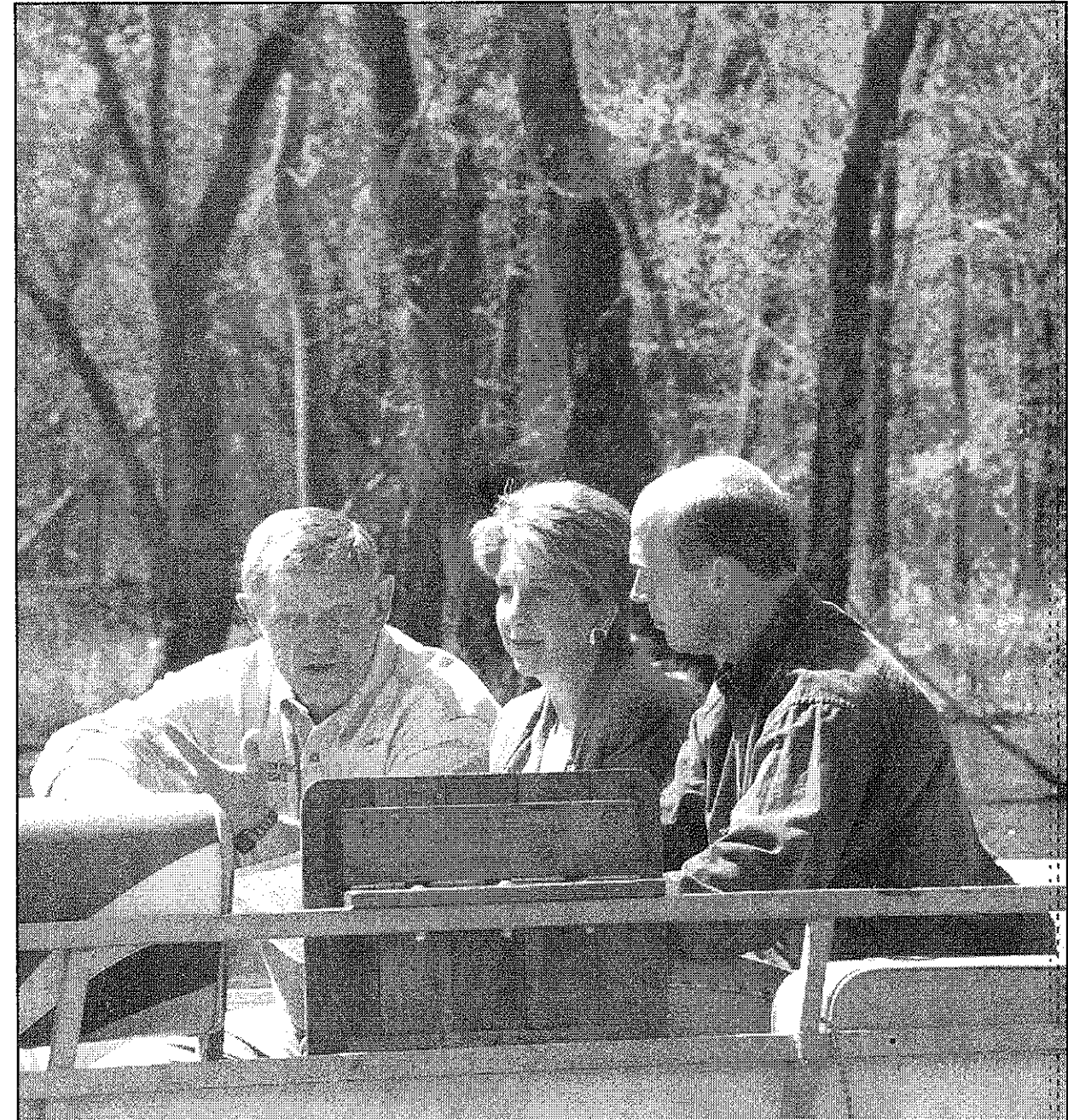
people rely on it for water. Ninety percent of Illinois' population lives along its rivers and 60 million tons of commerce, including 20 million tons of agriculture commodities, move along its rivers each year.

Wood explained that the 2020 effort is a \$2.5 billion, 20-year federal-state initiative to address these problems. Illinois is seeking a \$950 million appropriation through existing Farm Bill programs and the Clean water Act, as well as an amendment to the Water Resources Development Act.

The project is on Gov. George Ryan's short list for big ticket funding from Washington and the support for it is statewide and nonpartisan, she said. Gov. Ryan named Wood to chair the Illinois River Coordinating Council.

The program is supported by key Illinois agencies represented at the meeting by Joe Hampton, director of Illinois Dept. of Agriculture; Tom Skinner, director of Illinois Environmental Protection Agency; Jim Garner, deputy director of Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources; and J.R. Black for the Kankakee ECO Basin Partnership.

Joining them in Momence for a show of support were Congressman Jerry Weller, State Sen. Larry Walsh, Rep. Mary Kay O'Brien, and Rep. Phil Novak. "We should always be looking for innovative solutions to environmental problems," said Weller, adding that "the Kankakee River will play a critical role in the Illinois River 2020 program since it is the headwater for the Illinois River."



Journal/Oscar Salinas

CHAIRMAN OF THE Kankakee River Basin Partnership J.R. Black, at left, explains a point about the natural headwaters of the Kankakee River to Lt. Gov. Corinne Wood and Congressman

Jerry Weller. Wood was in Momence Wednesday to address the Illinois Rivers Council about "Illinois Rivers 2020," an initiative that has the full support of Weller