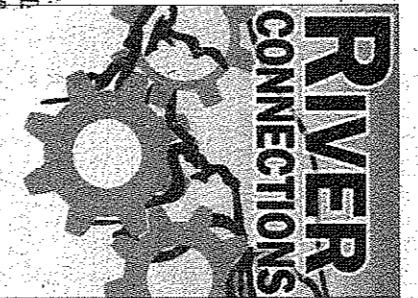


Smothered in Sand

The Kankakee River is disappearing under a wave of sand

By Bill Byrns

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Series lineup

Today: "Last winter's floods damaged more than just property — flooding damaged the Kankakee River.

Inside: Where is all this sand coming from? **A3**

Monday: Earthen levies across the country are deteriorating as the Army Corps of Engineers lacks the resources to fix them.

Tuesday: What is being done to save our river?

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"This wasn't here just a few months ago," Black said as he scooped his hands into sand well over a foot deep and wondered what is happening to the river's fragile ecosystem just offshore.

"We have to find out what effect this sand is having on the river downstream from the dam," said Black, who chairs the Kankakee River Basin Partnership.

Farther east, those who care for the upper Kankakee River echo Black's concern.

"What happens to us here in Indiana affects people who live along the river in Illinois," said Charles Daube of Walkerton, Indiana, during a tour of levees damaged during the severe storms of January and February.

Heavy rains and near-record flows along the Kankakee, Yellow and Iroquois rivers damaged four major levees in Indiana and triggered floods that damaged 771 homes and businesses in Iroquois County and over 175 properties in Kankakee County.

With the floodwaters came a new wave of sediments that has washed into the Kankakee River. Its evidence can be seen at Fishermans Park and all along the shoreline downstream through the Kankakee River State Park.

Sediment movement in the Kankakee River has become a growing concern for both state and federal agencies in recent years.

Researchers with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Rock Island are finalizing the most comprehensive look at how sediments move through the Kankakee River Basin.



J.R. Black examines the more than foot-deep sandy sediment left at Fisherman's Park on the Kankakee River in the wake of flooding earlier this year.
The Daily Journal/
Bill Byrns

Kankakee River Basin

• Drains a 5,165-square-mile area that includes five counties in Illinois, 13 in Indiana and a small portion of Berrien County in southwestern Michigan.

• The Kankakee watershed drains 2,199 square miles in Illinois, including most of Kankakee and Iroquois counties and parts of Will, Ford and Vermilion counties.

• The Kankakee River is roughly 150 miles long in an area that is home to more than 250,000 people, according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data.

• Prior to the drainage of the 400,000-acre Grand Kankakee Marsh, the river meandered along a 250-mile course across northwestern Indiana and northeastern Illinois.

• The Kankakee falls more than 5 feet per mile from Momence through the Kankakee River State Park. By comparison the Iroquois falls only six inches per mile over its lower 80-mile run.

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River

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"We have been conducting some ... surveys over the past year from the Yellow River all the way downstream along the Kankakee," said project manager Brad Thompson. "There's no doubt that the Yellow is a significant source of sedimentation in the Kankakee River.

"This study will give us an updated

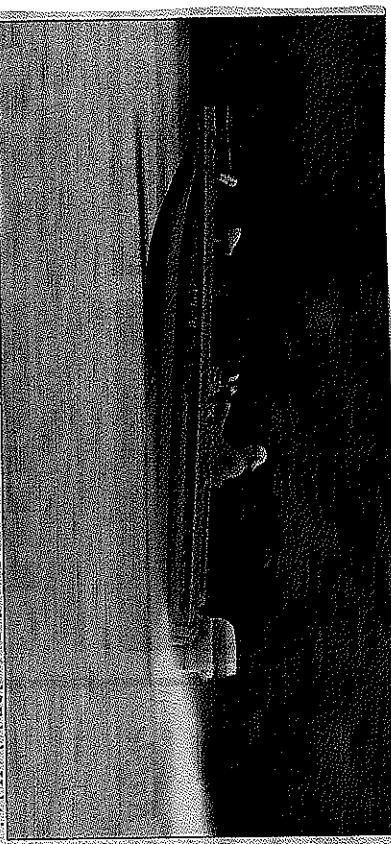
sediment budget for the Kankakee and will include earlier research by state and federal agencies," Thompson expects a public review of the

report will be held sometime this fall.

Studies conducted by the USGS between 1993 and 1995 calculated that more than 2 million tons of sus-

pended sediment — approximately 390 tons a day — washed through the Kankakee River gauge at Wilming-

A boater speeds down the Kankakee River near Cobb Park in Kankakee on Memorial Day.



The Daily Journal/Nicholas Holstein

load and a high volume of suspended sediment.

The bed load produces the sand-bars, islands and shoreline deposits seen along the river. Suspended sediments are also deposited along the way, but most of that load washes on through to empty into the Illinois River west of Wilmington.

Still, such research only seems to confirm what most who live along the river already know, that the Kankakee carries a heavy sand bed

"We can expect to see more frequent flooding as the main channel fills in," Black said.