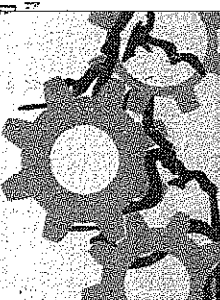


J.R. Black examines the more than foot-deep sandy sediment left at Fisherman's Park on the Kankakee River in the wake of flooding earlier this year.

The Daily Journal/  
Bill Byrns

# Smothered in sand

## RIVER CONNECTIONS



### 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 levees 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?

### ON THE WEB

- Interactive map of the Kankakee River Basin and its connection to the Illinois and Mississippi basins
- Plus: Stories, photos and more.

## The Kankakee River is disappearing under a wave of sand

By Bill Byrns

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Just imagine several hundred semi trucks dumping sand into the Kankakee River's Six Mile Pool between Aroma Park and the dam at Kankakee.

That helps visualize the amount of suspended sediment that continually washes into Six Mile. In 1995 it amounted to over 1.3 million tons.

Most of that load continued on downstream but by the best estimates the amount left behind in Six Mile Pool could bury the boat ramp, marina and surrounding area along the river at Beckman Park several feet deep if placed on shore.

Now imagine hundreds more semis — all overflowing with loads of dirt and sand — waiting to unload all along the river.

It's not imagination. That's only a fraction of the sand already here, according to the United States Geological Survey.

And, the expectation of more on the way is based on hard facts.

Just downstream from the dam at Kankakee, J.R. Black kneels in a deep sand "beach" blanketing the gravel and hard clay surface of Fisherman's Park.

### VIEW THE VIDEO

www.daily-journal.com

A bird's eye view of the Kankakee River

"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, Ind., 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 Fisherman's 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.

See **RIVER**, Page A3

## 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 2,019 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 Mokena through the Kankakee River State Park. By comparison the Iroquois falls only six inches per mile over its lower 80-mile run.

# River

Continued from Page A1

"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 suspended sediment — approximately 390 tons a day — washed through the Kankakee River gauge at Wilmington during that two-year period.

Additional studies in 1999 by the Illinois State Water Survey showed that the boating pool between Aroma Park and the Kankakee dam had lost "over 13 percent of its total volume between 1978 and 1999," according to researcher Nani Bhowmik, who had spent decades studying sediment movement in the Kankakee River.

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

load and a high volume of suspended sediment.

The bed load produces the sandbars, 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.

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

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

*The Daily Journal/Nicholas Holstein*

