



Flying over the Kankakee River in Indiana, the LaSalle State Fish and Wildlife Area looms as a vision of existing efforts by both states to preserve wildlife habitat. Conservation officials from both Illinois and Indiana along with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Bill Hartwig toured the Kankakee River by air on Tuesday. During their meeting at the Greater Kankakee Airport, Hartwig and others expressed optimism that federal, state and local agencies could work together for the benefit of all in the watershed.

Common Ground

Conservation officials optimistic about working together

By Bill Byrns, Journal writer

"The easy things have already been done in America. What we are looking at now is doing the tougher things that still need to be done."

That includes protecting wildlife habitat and natural areas along the Kankakee River, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Regional Director Bill Hartwig told a meeting of top conservation officials Tuesday.

Hartwig met for nearly three hours with Illinois Conservation Director Brent Manning, deputy director John Corriero and their top division chiefs. Also attending was Ken Smith, assistant director of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, division of water; Jodi Melton, executive director of the Indiana Kankakee River Basin Commission; and J.R. Black, chairman of the Kankakee River Basin Partnership in Illinois.

Hartwig listened intently as each speaker stated their agency's views and outlined projects or programs already under way in the Kankakee watershed.

Manning said, "We need a vision for the Kankakee River Basin that includes both Illinois and

Indiana." That vision, he said, needs to consider many elements: the effects of modification of sediment and stream flow in Illinois, existing projects in both states, the presence of state-owned parks, preserves and fish and wildlife areas, county-owned sites, pending land acquisitions and the refuge proposal as all being component of a Kankakee River vision.

"I would like to see an entire river basin where we (all) use all the tools at our disposal to benefit all of the people," Manning said. "I don't think we have different views — we all have pieces of the puzzle. Your (refuge) vision isn't that far from what I've heard the partnership and others say."

Hartwig said that a final decision on the refuge

until sometime late this year or early next year. But, he noted, the important thing is preservation, whether it is done by states, local agencies or private landowners. Hartwig said FWS is willing to work together with local partners.

Speaking for his Indiana agency, Smith said, "none of us can do the things that need to be done alone. We need to stop looking at solutions in traditional ways. The concept of partnerships to one

of the better ways to get things done."

Envisioning a bi-state partnership that would bind together federal and state agencies and local groups, Smith said, "I've never seen a partnership on this scale but, without this effort, the problems we have discussed won't be solved. We've tried to address the problems of the river on our own in the past and still haven't solved them."

Still each state has made some advances.

Melton pointed to a \$250,000 KRBC project now under way to put in six sand traps on the Yellow River, the largest tributary of the Kankakee in Indiana and a major source of sedimentation.

Black spoke of the nearly \$1 million his Partnership won last year from the state's Conservation 2000 program for 10 local ecosystem projects. He noted the Partnership has asked for nearly \$4 million in project grants for the coming fiscal year.

Manning clearly indicated his agency's intent to work closely with the Kankakee River Partnership's stewardship plan.

That plan was endorsed fully last month by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Journal/Bill Byrns