

River Campaign



Journal/Robert Themer

Terry Johnston of Kankakee, president of the Alliance to Restore the Kankakee, motors with passengers through the Momence wetlands area of the Kankakee River, near the state line. The island at right, growing with new sand from state line. The island at right, growing with new sand from

Congressmen shown river's woes

By Robert Themer
Town/Country editor

Another step in the campaign for the Kankakee River was launched Wednesday, when members of the Alliance to Restore the Kankakee took river basin congressional representatives on a tour to look at problems.

At the state line bridge boat launch, east of Momence, the major problem of sand filling up the river channel was outlined by ARK leaders, local government officials, and Paul Terrio, chief of the U.S. Geological Survey's Kankakee River study team.

They then took a boat tour downstream, showing examples of sand deposit problems to U.S. Reps. Jerry Weller of Morris and Tom Ewing of Pontiac; Brandt Hershman, legislative liaison for U.S. Rep. Steve Buyer of Monticello, Ind.; and others.

To an extent, the river advocates were preaching to the choir. Ewing has been the sponsor of sand deposit problems to U.S. Reps. Jerry Weller of Morris and Tom Ewing of Pontiac; Brandt Hershman, legislative liaison for U.S. Rep. Steve Buyer of Monticello, Ind.; and others.

River

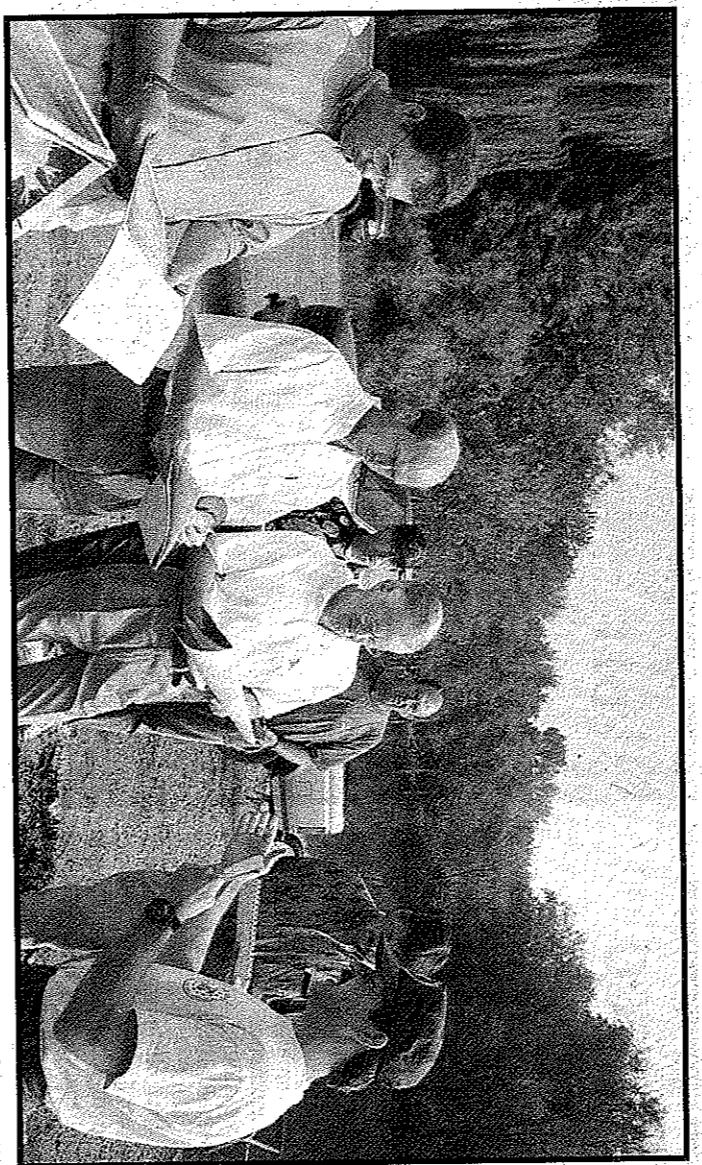
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sor for the past two years of what was first proposed as a \$500,000 appropriation for the Army Corps of Engineers to study solutions to the sand problem. This year, he has won House approval of \$175,000 for the Corps work, with action to come yet in the Senate. Weller has supported the funding.

However, the congressman and others got a first hand view of the sand that is has been slowly filling in much of the river bottom and that has been sticking in the craws of river advocates for decades. Also on the trip were Hoosiers who noted that pressure has been intense in recent weeks for dredging of the channelized river in Indiana, where destructive agricultural floods hit Stark and Porter counties at the same time major flooding struck through northeastern Illinois last month — the result of one-night rains ranging from 8 to 14 inches.

Jody Melton, executive director of Indiana's multi-county Kankakee River Basin Commission, said farmers from that region east in the river basin have been clamoring for action

Paul Terrio, right, chief of the U.S. Geological Survey's Kankakee River study project, outlines the problems of sand deposition in the river. Listening, from left in foreground, are Brandt Hershman, legislative liaison of U.S. Rep. Steve Buyer



in recent weeks.

They're angry with the commission for not dredging the main channel of the river to increase flood storage, Melton indicated. The commission has been doing the opposite

in recent years — focusing on broadening the floodway in its well-supported "wide levee" project to put 26,000 acres or more into flood storage wetland status over the next 10 years.

A couple thousand acres have already been acquired and most will to double as recreational facilities and wildlife refuges. The commission has major funding from the North American Waterfowl Alliance and is working on the project with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Indiana's Department of Natural Resources and a coalition of local and regional conservation organizations.

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torn up over half a mile or more.

Behind it, in what were once deep stretches of the river east of Momence, lie huge slugs of Hoosier sand. In one section highlighted by Terrio, a pool that had been 10 or more feet deep, now contains about six feet of sand throughout — the same problem as is noted upstream in the "Six Mile Pool," the most popular boating area of the Kankakee and the reservoir for the water for the metropolitan area.

Participants in the tour agreed that support should be given to Indiana's efforts to deal with flooding and erosion problems through the wide levee program there.

In answer to a question from Weller, Terrio said that some of the sand would eventually wash out of the Kankakee here if erosion and sedimentation can be controlled.

Melton noted that funding is a problem, labeling the total wide levee project as a \$100 million "pie in the sky" concept. The proposal included six sand traps where sand could be removed. The commission has approval to start one upstream, but lacks the money to do it, he said. It sought \$10 million from the Indiana legislature, was promised \$5 million and received \$1 million, he noted.