



Journal/Janet Cremer

The wintry beauty of the Kankakee River is evident here at the dam in Momence, where water levels are relatively low now. But a federal

Flood threat increasing on Kankakee River — USGS

By Bill Byrns, Journal writer

Both the frequency and the potential magnitude of flooding along the Kankakee River is increasing, according to the head of a federal project looking at the river's sedimentation problem.

Paul Terrio, chief of the Kankakee River study for the U.S. Geological Survey, says that the combination of increasing rainfall trends in recent years over the river basin and a reduction in channel capacity at some locations poses an "increasing chance of flood frequency and magnitude."

Recent studies show increased sediment accumulations in portions of the river near the Indiana state line and the midpoint of Six Mile Pool between Aroma Park and Kankakee, an area which also serves as the water supply pool for the Kankakee regional area.

"We divided both the Momence Wetlands study area and Six Mile Pool into thirds for our study," Terrio told a small group of farmers and agribusinessmen Thursday during a monthly Ag Breakfast at First of America Bank.

Summarizing the results of 35 cross-sectional studies of the river in the Momence Wetlands, Terrio said sedimentation was highest in the upstream section nearest the state line where "we saw sediment accumulation at every site."

Findings at other stations east of Momence showed mixed results with the middle portion of the river showing areas where sedimentation had increased greatly over earlier studies and other areas, both at the middle and downstream segments, where some decrease in sedimentation was noted.

Similarly, cross-sectional studies in Six Mile Pool found two areas "where the river had lost about half of its channel width" while two-thirds of the recreational boating pool between Kankakee and Aroma showed evidence of increased deposition compared to earlier studies made over the past 37 years.

Only near the dam in Kankakee researchers did find some evidence that the river was reducing its accumulated sediment by scouring.

In layman's language, Terrio said, "the Pool is losing its capacity much like the Peoria Pool on the Illinois River." Sedimentation is to blame in both cases.

The study recorded a suspended sediment load of nearly 2 million tons for the Kankakee River from 1993-95.

Breaking the data down, Terrio said most of the suspended sediment monitored came from the Iroquois River.

The heavier sandbed load tends to settle out more quickly, Terrio said, leading to the increased deposits in the areas cited.

"The main purpose of a ditch is to move water. You can't do that if you cannot keep the ditch clear of trees." — land owner Rollie Rosenboom

USGS calculated the sediment yield from the 2,091-square-mile Iroquois River drainage area at 410 tons per square mile.

The Singleton Ditch, which empties into the Kankakee east of Momence and drains 1,779 square miles mostly in northwestern Indiana, yielded 415 tons per square mile. The entire Kankakee River watershed, 5,150 square miles as measured at Wilmington, produced a yield of 385 tons per square mile.

Several attending the Ag Breakfast said farmers knew how to solve the problem "if the federal government and the environmentalists would just let us." Rollie Rosenboom, a land owner along Langham Creek 2 miles west of Clifton, says the watershed is being managed for boaters and wildlife rather than for drainage.

Ambrose Perreault, who lives on the Minnie Creek Drainage District in rural Chehahse, agrees. "We're tied down by drainage laws that were written in 1920 — back in the horse and buggy days — and most of those old laws don't count anymore. We have new ways to work the land and solve drainage problems."