

# Kankakee River priorities protect 'good stuff first'

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"Protecting the good stuff first" is part of a new approach to river restoration being used by the Kankakee River Basin Partnership.

The group is among the first of the state's Conservation 2000 Ecosystem Partnerships to break down priority areas into strategic sub-watersheds.

It also broke ranks with state planners who wanted only 5 percent of the river basin identified as priority areas.

"No way could we do that," said Partnership Chairman J. R. Black. "We selected 14 sub-watersheds out of 75 identified in the Kankakee River basin."

"Our dilemma stems from the fact that the river is threatened from sand bed load and sediment that is not measured by the state's threat index," Black said.

Part of the problem is differing definitions of "pollution" used by the state's Environmental Protection Agency and the Federal Clean Water Act. Sand and sediment are not considered "negative impacts" by the EPA but they are listed as pollutants.

"We've included the entire main stem of the river and three priority areas, the Rock, Trim and Langan creek watersheds," Black said. Other priority areas include the Momence Wetlands, the Iroquois River from the Indiana line east of Watseka to the Kankakee River at Aroma Park, including the mouths of Sugar and Spring creek.

"Identifying these as 'strategic' doesn't mean that there are no problems outside of those areas," Black said. "It means that our major focus will be these areas but we can still do work elsewhere in the basin."

"I think that this is a major

improvement," said Richard Schultz, vice-president of the partnership board. "We can now clearly show areas of our major concerns."

"This can be used as a roadmap in setting our priority projects for next year," Black said. "These are the areas that hold the greatest impact for improving the Kankakee River."

They also ranked as the most "at risk" sub-watersheds based on their mix of urban and agricultural lands, recognized threats and channelized sections.

Each year the C2000 program selects a number of local ecosystem projects for funding based on recommendations from partnership councils such as Kankakee.

The deadline to submit projects by mail for fiscal 2006 is midnight Jan. 31 to Department of Natural Resources, Conservation 2000, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271. Projects can also be submitted by 5 p.m. Feb. 28 via the state's C2000 website at <http://www.dnr.state.il.us/orep/c2000/ecosystem/fy06/index.htm>.

Black said that the sub-watershed strategy will be used in prioritizing local projects.

Partnership members working on the strategic sub-watershed plan include Black, Howell, Schultz, Don Anderson, Jack Beaupre, Tom Bunosky, Alan Carley, Jan Hartman, Terry Johnson, Brent Langman, Matt Lindgren and Jim Reed.

So far C2000 has funded over \$1.2 million for 21 local projects with leveraged funding adding \$126,215 for a total value of over \$1.3 million.

The Iroquois County Soil & Water Conservation District has also been working on local projects and recently won federal funds from the Illinois Rivers 2020 program for logjam removal along the river.

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