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Kankakee's fate linked to the Illinois

By Bill Byrns

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The latest hope for restoring the Kankakee and Iroquois rivers now rests on a multi-billion dollar cleanup of the Illinois River.

Areas on both rivers were among the "critical area projects" identified Wednesday by Brad Thompson, project manager for the Corps of Engineers' Rock Island District.

For the Kankakee, the main focus falls on sediment removal between Aroma Park and the Route 17 bridge. Work could also include improving pool and riffle habitat in the Aroma Park area.

On the Iroquois, the Corps is looking at bank stabilization work on the Sugar Creek watershed and removing flow obstructions on the upper river.

Both rivers however are on hold for at least a year as the Corps spends its limited funds on three other sites. Also on hold is work on Blackberry Creek, a tributary of the Fox River.

Feasibility and design studies are moving forward at Pekin Lake, a backwater of the Illinois near Peoria and at Waubonsie Creek, a Fox tributary in Kane and Kendall counties. Construction of a sediment gauge is also set for McKee Creek on the lower Illinois.

But strong public involvement across the Kankakee River Basin has already made its mark with the Corps.

"Turnout at our Kankakee meetings



Journal/Bill Byrns

KANKAKEE RIVER ADVOCATES sent a strong message to the Corps of Engineers Wednesday that they want action on stopping sand and sediment. Brad Thompson, the Corps' project manager for Kankakee, outlined how restoration plans for the Illinois River depend on work on the Kankakee and Iroquois tributaries.

has consistently been strong," Thompson said. He also noted that "there are projects here that are ready to roll," referring to Conservation 2000 work by the Kankakee River Partnership and the Rivers 2020 Committee in Iroquois County.

In fact the Corps cites local involve-

ment as a key reason for creating its Kankakee Regional Team, one of four teams assigned to the Illinois River Working Group. Heading the Kankakee team is Jodi Staebell of the Rock Island District and Gary Lutterbie of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Still on track for the Kankakee is a

feasibility study of ecosystem restoration at the Indiana state line. The project near Lazy Living Resort is seen as a strategic area for wetland building to help alleviate flooding and curb some of the sediment entering Illinois. The Kankakee River Conservancy District at Momence already owns land for the

project which was purchased through the state's C2000 program.

Jim Mick, a state fisheries biologist and the state's coordinator for the Illinois River project, says the Kankakee and Iroquois will be key parts of restoring the Illinois River.

Despite the demise of the Corps' bi-state river basin study, Mick argues that "the difference is that this is the completion of the goals of that study."

But the scope of Illinois River restoration is massive. The first stage alone is expected to cost over \$3.3 million (\$2.1 million from the federal government and \$1.1 million from the state) with total costs hitting anywhere from \$250 million to \$3.5 billion over the 10 years authorized by Congress. But Thompson adds that a decade is just the beginning. He estimates the entire project could easily take 50 years to finalize.

Planners have set seven goals and seven alternatives for restoration of the 30,000 square mile Illinois River Basin.

Goals include maintaining and restoring diversity and sustainable population of native species; reducing sediments; restoring side channels and backwaters; restoring floodplain, riparian and aquatic habitat; increasing fish passage; naturalizing flow conditions and improving water and sediment quality.

Alternatives range from a baseline "no action" option that would see continued decline in the basin's biodiversity and native fish populations.

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SKY & METEOR Meteor mysteries

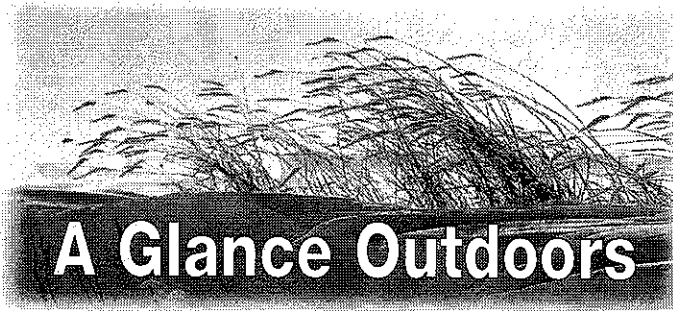
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Mid-December will bring a



OVER



A Glance Outdoors

Shotgun season ends Sunday

The second firearm deer hunt is under way this weekend in Illinois.

Shotgun season ends Sunday at Heidecke Lake and Midewin Tallgrass Prairie.

Jess Lovelace, hunting coordinator at Midewin, reports 9 deer, 5 bucks and 4 does, taken during the first weekend.

Indiana's slug season ended Nov. 30 but totals for nearby Jasper and Newton counties have not yet been posted.

The muzzleloader deer season opens next weekend statewide.

Illinois' muzzleloader firearm season is Dec. 12-14. Indiana's muzzleloader season continues through Dec. 21.

Duck hunting is picking up along the Illinois River where the latest surveys tallied 180,155 mallards out of 219,260 ducks.

'Sub-watersheds' meeting topic

The Kankakee River Basin Commission will meet at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Moose Lodge in Bradley.

The meeting will focus on the state's new emphasis in identifying sub-watersheds. A presentation will be offered by Tammy Watson and Wayne Hartel of the Department of Natural Resources.

Gun show at Kankakee

A sport and gun show will be held Dec. 13-14 at the Kankakee County Fairgrounds.

Doors open at 8:30 a.m. Admission is \$3, full time police officers are free with I.D.

Grundy Whitetails set banquet

DIAMOND — Sunday is the last day to order tickets for the Dec. 12 Grundy County Whitetails banquet.

Tickets are \$35 each. For information, call William Klegman, (815) 634-2549.

Sea turtles end Illinois journey

CHICAGO (AP) — Two baby sea turtles who began a hazardous 50-foot trip to the sea in July may finally reach their destination this week after an unexpected 3,000-mile detour.

The turtles, members of the threatened loggerhead species, had just broken free of their eggshells in the beach sand near Port St. Lucie, Fla., when they were seized — not by rapacious gulls, but by well-meaning Midwestern tourists.

Now they're on their way back to Florida and the open sea. The turtles are scheduled to fly home Thursday accompanied by George Parsons, director of collections at Chicago's Shedd Aquarium. The turtles — now just bigger than a soda can in size — will spend Thursday night at a marine research station and then be released Friday in a sargassum seaweed bed about 10 miles offshore the West Palm Beach area, Parsons said.

The turtles' odyssey began this summer when a woman from downstate Illinois and her two grandchildren spotted them crawling across the Florida sand. Parsons said they thought the turtles were in danger and that they might make

Millions of species still unknown

By Bryn Nelson,
Newsday

In his 1941 guidebook, "Key to Fishes of Alachua County, Florida," noted conservation biologist Archie Carr wrote, "Any damned fool knows a catfish."

If he were alive today, Carr might have been surprised to learn that there are now 2,855 species of the ubiquitous whiskered catfish known from around the world, representing one out of every four types of freshwater fish. But Larry Page, an ichthyologist at the University of Florida in Gainesville who formerly directed Illinois' Center for Biodiversity, estimates that another 1,000 to 2,000 catfish species remain to be discovered, suggesting that we are much more foolish than Carr's 60-year-old declaration would seem to indicate.

An ambitious project funded by the National Science Foundation is seeking to fill in the gaps by directing Page and three other teams of researchers to create comprehensive biological inventories of four eclectic taxonomic groups: catfish, plant bugs, slime molds and plants in the nightshade family.

Officially announced at a New York City presentation in late September, the five-year Planetary Biodiversity Inventory resembles a worldwide scavenger hunt, only one in which no one knows exactly what will be found or where.

The \$14-million effort, which

Although about 1.6 million to 1.7 million of Earth's species have been described in some detail, scientists estimate that 7 million to 100 million remain unknown."

includes separate groups from the New York Botanical Garden and the American Museum of Natural History, also is something of a trial balloon for supporters, who hope to persuade Congress to help fund a much larger goal: the discovery, identification and cataloging of every species on Earth in a massive virtual encyclopedia — within 25 years.

"We can't care about what we don't know about," said Kevin Kelly, chairman of ALL Species Foundation, which proposed the undertaking. And scientists agree that there is still much we don't know. Although about 1.6 million to 1.7 million of Earth's species have been described in some detail, scientists estimate that 7 million to 100 million remain unknown.

Completing a biological inventory of the world is no small feat, of course, and not everyone believes that such an ambitious goal is achievable.

But advocates are quick to point out that the successful Human Genome Project had plenty of initial detractors as

well, and they credit advances in digital photography, computational power and Internet technology with transforming the dream into at least a possibility.

Unlike other large scientific endeavors, however, cataloging a host of new species requires researchers to devote considerable time in a range of field conditions, and scientists joke darkly that the best places to look for biodiversity usually are in the most inhospitable regions.

Although many new catfish species are likely already sitting in the world's museums, Page said most of the new discoveries await expeditions to the tropics. Page's catfish group will make use of the newly constructed Trans-Amazonian Highway, with one team working its way east from Peru and the other working west from Brazil.

The site of one of the most diverse and threatened ecosystems on Earth, the rapidly declining Amazon rain forest is an apt example of why researchers feel such a sense of urgency.

Quentin Wheeler, director of the Division of Environmental

Biology for the National Science Foundation, said humans stand on the "cusp of a biodiversity crisis," with a recent acceleration in the list of endangered and extinct animals. Based on the current trends, Wheeler said, we may be the last generation with the opportunity to complete the study before many species are lost to science forever.

American Museum of Natural History entomologist Randall Schuh said the two insect families he's investigating contain about 4,000 known species. Both families belong to the insect suborder Heteroptera, or the "true bugs," whose other members include such notables as aphids, scales and bedbugs.

Schuh estimated that the researchers will describe another 1,000 species, mostly from Australia.

Among other benefits, Page said the newfound knowledge will assist researchers in making difficult conservation decisions.

A similar rationale has been espoused by supporters of a separate project known as the Census of Marine Life, which seeks to document life in the seas. So far, the census has documented more than 15,000 species of fish and 195,000 to 215,000 species of marine plants and animals — a tally that scientists say is still only an estimated 10 percent of the world's total.

Fools, indeed.

River

Continued from previous page

Thompson said Alternative 2, which would maintain current habitat conditions, could not prevent further declines of native species already affected by habitat loss. Even this "status quo" effort would cost \$400 million over 10 years with the Corps paying \$260 million and the state \$140 million.

Alternatives 3 through 7 would see increasing benefits, particularly in reducing sediments from upper tributary watershed such as the Kankakee and Iroquois. The price tag however ranges from \$700 million to \$3.4 billion

Restoration Alternatives

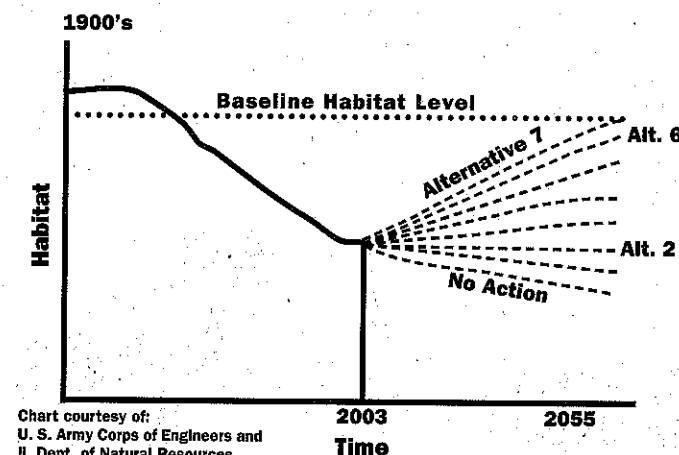


Chart courtesy of:
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and
Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources

shed tributaries such as the Kankakee-Iroquois basin. They also seek to provide fish passage

create 107,000 acres of retention basins to reduce the five-year peak flows on tributary streams

main channel of the Illinois River. Alternative 7 would add fish passages at the Starved Rock, Marseilles and Brandon Road locks and dams on the Illinois. It would also create 50,000 acres of water storage and reduce five-year peak tributary flows by 15 percent. The added storage would see a 68 percent drop in one-foot water fluctuations on the Illinois mainstem.

Studies show the Illinois receives 12 million tons of sediments each year from tributary streams but only about 5 million tons wash out of the system.

"The river has lost 70 percent of its volume since 1903 in the back-water lakes and side channels," Thompson said.

Additional information on the Illinois River efforts can be found