

Sediment takes more of river

By Bill Byrns
Journal writer

Two key areas of the Kankakee River are losing capacity — and their ability to control flooding — as sedimentation and peak flow rates are increasing.

Sandy deposits are filling sections of the river east of Momence and in Six-Mile Pool between Kankakee and Aroma Park, according to a report released Wednesday by the Illinois State Water Survey.

And the rate of sedimentation is increasing says researcher Nani G. Bhowmik, who has been studying the Kankakee for over two decades.

Bhowmik says Six Mile Pool, Kankakee's main fresh water reservoir and recreational boating area, has lost capacity at an alarming rate — over 13 percent of its total volume between 1978 and 1999.

"This is a fairly high capacity loss compared to many human-made lakes in Illinois," Bhowmik said.

During a similar period, 1980-1999, the Momence Wetlands lost over 10 percent of its total volume between the Singleton Ditch and the Indiana state line.

Since 1980, an estimated 127,500 cubic yards of sediment has accumulated in the river upstream from Singleton Ditch.

"In recent years, the Momence Wetlands has been losing capacity at a faster rate as more sediment is coming into the river," Bhowmik said during a report at

KANKAKEE RIVER UPDATE



PROBLEMS, PLANS AND SOLUTIONS

1ST OF A SERIES:

■ An overview appears in today's Town & Country Section, Page B1. Other stories will run Friday in Outdoors and in The Sunday Journal.

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River expert

Kankakee Community College on behalf of the Kankakee River Basin Partnership.

"But Six Mile Pool has shown a higher rate of capacity loss since 1995 compared to the Momence Wetlands. We don't know what has happened to account for that decrease," Bhowmik admits.

Evidence of the sediment load can be seen in new islands that have appeared near the Interstate 57 bridge. High sediment deposits have also been documented downstream from the

mouth of the Iroquois River.

The area between Aroma and Singleton Ditch — a section where river islands and sandbars are common — remained relatively unchanged between 1966 and 1999 according to the ISWS report.

Bhowmik suggests that sandbars near Koop's Island and at the state line could be used as sediment traps for future management. He also called for a sediment management program for Six Mile Pool "before it is too late."

Other findings in the report:

■ Flows on the Iroquois River are more variable than those on the Kankakee.

■ Flow on the Kankakee at Wilmington increased "significantly" — by an estimated 1,940 cubic feet per second — after 1966. Rainfall over the entire basin has also increased since 1966.

■ Peak discharges for both the Kankakee and Iroquois rivers have shown an increasing trend in recent years.

■ There is more bank erosion along the main channel of the river in Indiana than in Illinois.

Bhowmik's presentation was part of an update on river projects by local, state and federal agencies. Participants included the sponsoring Kankakee River Basin Partnership, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, The Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Illinois Conservation 2000 and the Kankakee River Basin Conservancy District at Momence.