

## C SECTION

Glance, Page C2  
Accent, Page C3-4  
Sports, Page C5-9

# the OUTDOORS

ne  
concern  
oning.

## Changing river: Year's end marks challenges for the Kankakee's survival

By Bill Byrns  
Journal writer

In its waning days, Year 2-K holds the promise of change as well as an uncertain future for the Kankakee River.

The past 12 months saw the river eyed as a new source of drinking water for two Will County communities while just this month scientists in Champaign warned that sedimentation is increasing in key sections of the stream.

In May, a kind of biological CPR began as 80,000 walleye fry were released along the Kankakee and Iroquois rivers in a desperate attempt to maintain the fishery. Stocking native off-spring walleye is seen as a stop-gap measure until state and federal habitat restoration projects can be completed.

The year also saw the revival of the Kankakee River Valley Fishing Derby, though participation sank to an all-time low of just 1,299 people.

Despite the disappointing numbers, derby coordinator Lanny Chouinard saw success in just running the 10-day event after it was prematurely canceled in February.

Changing times are forcing reassessments of age-old river issues, resources and events.

Leading the way in that reassessment is a basin-wide study by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The study will determine the feasibility of projects to reduce sedimentation and flooding and improve water quality.

Another federal project, creation of a 30,000 acre wildlife refuge, is still trying to define its scope and boundaries. But even

here, as the Fish & Wildlife Service begins its defining conservation plan, the project is suffering an identity crisis.

Second thought is being given to the name "Grand Kankakee Marsh," National Wildlife refuge. The concern is that the name might be confused with existing park lands and a grassroots waterfowl restoration project in Indiana.

Plans are underway for pipelines stretching north from the Kankakee River to provide safe water for Joliet, University Park and other Will County communities where local wells are laced with iron, sulfur and radium.

Earlier this month, federal regulators approved a \$70 million project to pump water from the river near Wilmington 13 miles north to Joliet's west side.

That plan would withdraw 20 million gallons of water a day.

A second proposal eyes a \$5.6 million pipeline carrying river water from Manteno, now served by Consumers Water, to 1,600 customers in University Park. Water demand there is estimated at 1 1/2 million gallons a day.

How added demand and withdrawal will affect the river's survivability remains unknown.

What is known is that the river — between Kankakee and Aroma Park and upstream from Mokena — is filling with sand and losing its capacity. "It means the river is getting shallower and narrower," said Vani G. Bhowmik, the principal scientist for the Illinois State Water Survey and the top scientific expert on the Kankakee River. Bhowmik's latest study shows sedimentation has increased "15-

to-16 percent over the past 19 years."

Restoration hopes for now rest with the state's C-2000 program, continued action by its Kankakee River Basin Partnership and on presidential approval of a 20-year, \$100 million plan to improve the entire Illinois River watershed.

The ambitious plan, Illinois River 2020, holds the promise of funding more conservation projects on the Kankakee and Iroquois rivers, according to Lt. Gov. Corrine Wood.

Local support and public pressure will determine the success or failure of all these projects as well as the future of the Kankakee River.

Year 2001, the first of the new millennium, will determine what action will address the problems and promises of Y2K.