

RURAL HORIZONS

NEWSPAPER OF THE GOVERNOR'S RURAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Lieutenant Governor Bob Kustra, Chairman

October/November 1997

CHAIRMAN'S VIEW

Preserving Illinois' Rivers by Lt. Governor Bob Kustra

The time has come to take action to preserve Illinois' natural waterways. As a leader of our state's efforts to restore the Illinois River, I recently toured the Kankakee River at Momence near the Illinois-Indiana border.

The tour was hosted by State Representative Phil Novak and the Kankakee River Basin Partnership, a group working to unite people and to provide sound management of the river. Also along for the river tour were members of the Illinois General Assembly, delegates from the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Geological Survey.

For half a century the wetlands along the Kankakee River have been legendary for their fisheries and wildlife. As a famous commercial and sport hunting area, the Kankakee is also one of the finest rivers in the Midwest. It supplies drinking water to several towns, including Kankakee. But as with many rivers, the Kankakee is jeopardized by sediment problems. At the same time, this region supports a diversity of endangered and threatened plants and animals.

The goal of recent studies by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Geological Survey is to keep the river moving along, not the sediment. I believe the next step is to prioritize the list of needs and to develop a budget to accomplish them.

The Kankakee River Basin Partnership has the type of grassroots, state, bi-state and

federal cooperation necessary for watershed planning, environmental improvement and recreational opportunities that we have proposed in our integrated Management Plan for the Illinois River Watershed.

As part of the headwaters to the Illinois River, the Kankakee River Basin must receive the resources essential to preserve it. After years' worth of work on the Illinois River and its 55-county watershed, I am currently seeking the American Heritage

Rivers designation for the entire Illinois River Watershed. Designation under this voluntary, non-regulatory program would provide enhanced competitiveness for federal funds in the future. This would help us gain further support for the historic, cultural, environmental and economic resources of the Kankakee and Illinois rivers.

For more information call Patrick Fucik, executive director, Rural Affairs Council, 217-782-7514 or access the Illinois River Home Page at <http://www.state.il.us/ltgov/ilriver>.



Lt. Gov. Bob Kustra (center right) gets an overview of problem areas of the Kankakee River with (l-r) Rep. Phil Novak; Steve Engelking, Kankakee River Conservancy; and Lt. Col. Roger Gerber, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.