

# Riches of the Kankakee River Watershed

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Each year, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources promotes Illinois rivers, while promoting the recreational use of streams for activities such as fishing and canoeing. We try to maintain interest in and build support for the protection of the state's flowing waters.

The residents of Kankakee River watershed — the area of land where rainfall drains into the Kankakee and her tributaries — live near one of the finest rivers in the State of Illinois. The rivers and streams offer phenomenal recreational opportunities, and provide Kankakee, Bradley, Bourbonnais, and Wilmington with their drinking water.

Many local businesses provide canoe rental, bait and tackle, and other outdoor recreation necessities. The Kankakee and Iroquois rivers are considered by DNR to be "highly valued aquatic resources." Five areas within the watershed, totaling almost 75 stream miles, are also considered biologically significant for their high number of species and diversity of habitats important to aquatic life — sand and gravel

bars, riffles and pools. The first biologically significant stream is a large section of the Kankakee from Momence to the Des Plaines Wildlife Area. Other streams include Little Beaver Creek, Beaver Creek, Baker and Trim Creeks.

Biological studies of the river's wildlife found that overall aquatic life is in better shape than any other river in the state. If you visit the Kankakee River, you will find 84 different species of fish, 37 species of freshwater mussels, many diverse species of aquatic insects, depending on water for part of their lifecycle and important in the food web, and five species of crayfish.

The last two categories I like to

refer as "fish food," but scientists have found that aquatic insects are excellent indicators of ecological health and water quality. Insects such as mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies, indicate good to excellent conditions, and can be abundantly found in Kankakee streams.

Many species of mussels and fishes are rare or cannot be found outside of this area, and depend on the high quality of these rivers to survive. Among the fishes are the Pallid, weed, and ironcolor

shiners, river redhorse, and western sand darter. The weed shiner is one of the rarest fish species in Illinois, and the only large population is found in the Kankakee River watershed.

Some of the rare mussels have even more colorful names: sheepnose, black sandshell and elktoe. These mussels depend on healthy populations of fish in order to reproduce, good water quality, as well as healthy aquatic habitat, and it is a positive statement that they still can be found in the Kankakee River watershed.

Because of the healthy natural resources in the watershed, many from around the state travel to these rivers to fish, canoe, camp, and enjoy the outdoors. The draw from the state and county parks, including 33 natural area inventory sites and eight nature preserve sites, is very strong. Economically, wildlife-related activities, such as fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing, create \$4 billion in economic inputs each year in Illinois, and provide 42,000 jobs.

Prairie Rivers Network hopes that you will be able to take your family to re-discover the treasures of the Kankakee River watershed throughout the year to take advantage of the great rivers and streams close to home.