

# the OUTDOORS

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## \$5 million earmarked for CREP

Journal staff and wire reports  
**SPRINGFIELD** — Lawmakers on Tuesday sent a bill to Gov. George Ryan that would pump an extra \$5 million this fiscal year into a program meant to improve the health of the Illinois River.

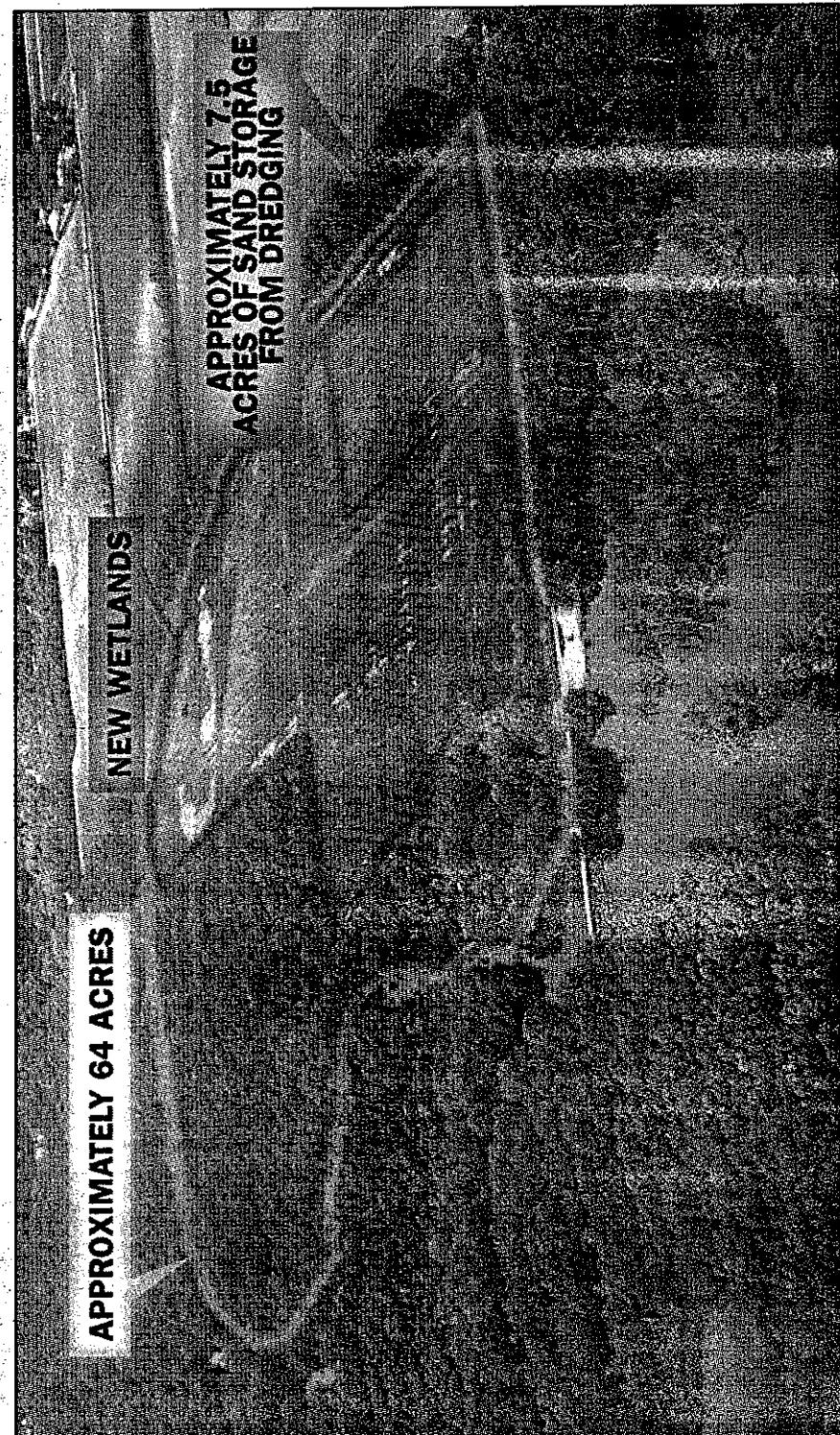
During his budget address in February, Ryan called upon legislators to authorize additional funds for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

CREP, a partnership between the state and federal governments, pays farmers not to use land in the Illinois River watershed for at least 15 years. The idea is to stem siltation and erosion.

Federal funds provide \$4 for every \$1 the state contributes to the program.

Illinois lead the nation in CREP sign-ups at the federal level with 872 landowners enrolling 15,690 acres in the 15 year contracts as of April 23. Another 4,459 acres are pending. Iroquois County ranks third in the state for CREP sign-ons at the federal level. Over 2,420 acres have been enrolled by 166 landowners. Knox County leads the state with a total of 2,595 acres in easements.

The program has proven to be so popular that all of the money allocated to it during this fiscal year has been spoken for, and 49 landowners interested in the program have had to be placed on a waiting list, said spokesman Tim Schweizer.



**BIRD'S EYE VIEW** of the Kankakee River at the state line mussels to the new wetland. Mussels that once lived in this area have been gone for decades due to the increasing sand load in the river. (Photo courtesy of IL. Dept. of Natural Resources)

# Restoring the Kankakee

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Sand removal seen as key to state line project

By Bill Byrns

Journal writer

**T**he first real effort to remove sand and create new aquatic habitat in the Kankakee River near the Indiana state line is being offered by a landmark partnership of federal, state and local agencies.

The plan calls for removing sand and sediment near the State Line Bridge and relocating it to a temporary storage area some 3,000 feet north of the river. The sediment removal will use a dredging device that can vacuum sand and with minimal disturbance to

"This is the first step in the restoration of the Kankakee River," Congressman Jerry Weller said in describing the project last December after the Corps of Engineers, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Kankakee River Conservancy District of Mornence agreed to join

For decades sand has been moving into Illinois from the north, a colonization of over 40 million cubic yards.

channelization of over 40 miles of river upstream in Indiana. Recent studies by the U.S. Geological Survey show the sand deposition near the state line is increasing. Other studies by the DNR document the conversion of almost 93 percent of all wetlands within the Kankakee River basin to



**SINGLETON DITCH**, at left, is also being eyed as a future site for restoration efforts. The ditch drains a 270 square mile area in northwestern Indiana and carries a huge volume of

"This project seeks to remove sand and restore wetlands and aquatic habitat," says Jim Mick, a DNR streams biologist serving as liaison to the Kankakee River Basin Partnership.

A public meeting to detail the Sand into the Kankakee River just east of Muncie.

Muncie conservancy district for 67 acres owned by Jack Nelson west of the state line and north of the river. The title easements are being funded by Conservation 2000 grants. Aiding the effort is the Kankakee River Basin Partner-

Sand from the river will be used in the construction of the new bridge. The project will be held at 5 p.m. Tuesday, June 1, at the Anchor Inn.

The quick pace is also something unusual, especially for a Corps restoration project. Unlike other COE programs, this project has a fixed cost — under \$5 million. Club in Mommence.

stored on 7.5 acres at the north corner of the Nelson property. A dirt road paralleling Williams Ditch would be used to haul sand onto and away from the storage site. The remaining cropland will

The project also envisions cutting an access channel to connect the wetland area to the river. Land easements are now being negotiated by DNR and the landowners.

According to a preliminary project report, the channel will include a low weir and stop log structure. The channel walls will be lined with riprap to control erosion as will the river side of the channel.

Some trees may be removed to cut the access channel according to the report. The report notes that cut trees would be used where possible as fish structures in the wetland

The work area in the Momence Wetlands adjoining the LaSalle State Fish and Wildlife Area in Indiana is home to a federally endangered species known as the Indiana bat.

**Lumana Wet.** While acknowledging that cutting trees to build the wetland channel may marginally impact breeding or roosting habitat for the rare bat, the report argues that converting croplands to open marsh will actually provide

Criticism of the project has already been voiced by river advocate Ed Mullady, publisher of *The Sportsman's Letter*. He suggests the plan to dredge a section of river at the state line is "being thrown in with the wetland restoration to 'sugar coat' the expanded forage habitat."

taste and smell, or the bitter dredging cure."

In a recent letter, Mullady noted, "to dredge out this area of the river, using millions of dollars of taxpayers money, only to have it fill back up in a short time, is a financial waste and the severe changes in the ecosystem could be

said that a variety of  
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# SAND

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gamefish thrive in the backwaters of the state line area and suggested the project might be better suited for Singleton Ditch, east of Momence, that also carries a huge volume into the river.

Project planners disagree. "We need to see if this type of work is economically feasible and environmentally sensitive," said Jim Mick, a DNR stream biologist serving as liaison to the Kankakee River Partnership. "Before we proceed with construction, there is a feasi-

bility stage just like in any Corps project. After six months, we review the plans before making a final construction decision."

Mick added that "Singleton Ditch is on our radar screen but first we must secure the property. Right now we don't control any of the land along Singleton Ditch although we are working with land owners to be able to do this type of work."

Both the state line area and Singleton Ditch have been identified as problem areas by the Corps in its basin-wide river study.

"We are looking at a second aquatic ecosystem project on Singleton Ditch," Mick said.

Such projects are merely precursors to the work that will complete the basin wide study.

Ken Derickson, project manager for the basin study, says the only thing holding up the project now is getting final sign-ons from both Illinois and Indiana. Each state must pledge matching funds — cash and in-kind services — before the Corps project can continue.

Derickson says he remains confident that both states will agree to fund the project.

The basin project will seek solutions to flood control, sedimentation and water quality issues affecting both states.

"We're committed to getting this

project done within the next 30 months." Many of the recent Conservation 2000 projects along the Kankakee and Iroquois rivers is laying the groundwork for Illinois' cost share in the basin project.

Derickson said ecosystem restoration methods are the key to flood control and sedimentation within the basin.

Such methods may involve re-opening some of the old river meanders in Indiana that were cut off from the river during channelization. Those old ox-bow areas would serve as water retention areas during high flows and help reduce flood and sedimentation transport downstream.