



# Economic Development & The Illinois River Coordinating Council

A Clean Water Illinois Fact Sheet

The Illinois River Coordinating Council brings together a broad range of citizens, state and federal agencies to coordinate policies for the Illinois River, its tributaries and their watersheds. The Council operates as a consensus-driven organization and has responsibility to review programs, encourage partnerships, optimize the expenditure of funds, advise and make recommendation to the Governor, and encourage local planning to address flooding, wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, conservation and preservation, and economic efforts.

Under Lt. Governor Pat Quinn's leadership, the Council has discussed and acted on many items related to economic development, and worked to update the portion of the Illinois River Integrated Management Plan that addresses economic development.

When the Council was formed in 1997 there was great acknowledgment that one serious problem that threatened the environmental and economic health of the river and river communities. This threat was sedimentation, and it continues as a threat today.

Many areas of the Illinois River and its connected backwaters are filling in with sediment caused by erosion. Many areas that were over six to eight feet deep 100 years ago are now less than 18 inches in depth.

Some may view sedimentation as solely an environmental problem, but, in fact, it has strong economic consequences as well. **For many issues on the Illinois River, economic and environmental issues are inextricably linked together.** This was true when the Council and its Integrated Management Plan were created, and it is true today.

For example, sedimentation impacts commercial navigation, recreation opportunities, development of tourism opportunities, and decreases wildlife habitat. Consider that:

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commits a great deal of resources to removing sediment from the navigation channel, which is necessary for commercial barge traffic;
- Sedimentation reduces storage capacity in the river, backwater lakes and floodplain, impacting drinking water supplies and flood storage capacity; and,
- Wildlife-based recreation – including hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing – contributed \$4 billion to Illinois' economy in 2001, according to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey.

These considerations provide economic bases for many of the conservation programs, which address more than just sedimentation, but the Illinois River Coordinating Council has kept an economic focus throughout the Lieutenant Governor's tenure as Chairman.

Lt. Governor Quinn appointed an Economic Development Task Force to review and suggest revisions to the economic development section of the Illinois River Integrated Management Plan. After several months of a thoughtful and deliberate consensus-building effort by representatives of agriculture, conservation, tourism, engineers, and economists, the Task Force submitted their suggestions to the Illinois River Coordinating Council. The Council adopted these revisions in April 2005.



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The Council also supported the designation of Illinois River highways as National Scenic Byway. This designation was achieved in September 2005, assisted in part with a grant from Lt. Gov. Quinn. Spearheaded by the Peoria Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, this effort will help Illinois tap into a growing sector of the tourism industry – nature and historically based tourism – and improve economic conditions within an eight-county area of central Illinois.

The Lt. Governor also co-sponsored a nature-based symposium with the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center, opening up opportunities for communities around the state to grow their tourism trade, as well as promoted bald eagle viewing opportunities around the state.

Illinois is the winter home to at least 3,100 bald eagles, more than any state in the continental U.S., and can be seen in over 27 counties. In LaSalle County alone, winter eagle viewing along the Illinois River creates a local economic input of over \$1 million each year.

The Council has also been kept up to date on issues involving the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers navigation plan, the operation and maintenance of the inland waterway navigation system, and funding issues at the federal level.

Meetings are held quarterly in different areas within the Illinois River watershed to allow for local participation and to hear about local efforts. In January 2006, when meeting in the Calumet River watershed for the first time, the Illinois River Coordinating Council learned about the Calumet River Corridor Planning efforts, which include transportation, economic development, recreation, and other uses.

As the Council proceeds in the future, there will be consideration and action on economic development items, and there will always be an economic element to the conservation programs supported by the Council. Council members recognize that economic and environmental problems, as well as their solutions, are inextricably linked together.

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