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## The Illinois River: State Focus and Vision Remarks

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The state of Illinois is separated into 33 major watersheds. Fifteen of those watersheds are part of the Illinois River Basin. This is an enormous area that cradles one of the nation's largest communities and the heart of rural America, covering 30,000 square miles.

One of the key missions of Illinois EPA is to monitor and protect the water resources of Illinois, which we rely on for drinking water, fishing, transportation and recreational use and other environmental and economic benefits. One of the most dramatic improvements in river quality has taken place on the Illinois River. Twenty-five years ago, commercial fisheries were severely threatened by several different pollution sources. Now, more species and numbers of sport fish can be found as well as the "macroinvertebrates" or bugs that the fish eat. Inland lakes are a vital component of the economic and social well-being of Illinois. Some 90 million-visitor days of general lake recreation generates an estimated \$1.8 billion annually for the state's economy.

Illinois EPA has eight Ambient Water Quality Monitoring Sites on the main channel of the Illinois River. Water chemistry is collected at these sites nine times per year. The sites are located (from south to north) at Hardin, Valley City, Havana, Peoria, Lacon, Hennepin and Marseilles.

There are approximately 250 Intensive Basin Survey Sites in the Illinois River watershed. These sites are monitored "intensively" once every five years. The monitoring includes water chemistry, bugs, fish, habitat, sediment and at some sites fish tissue contaminants are collected. This information is cooperatively collected with the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, a partnership that began many years ago and continues to be strengthened annually.

The monitoring shows the Illinois River mainstream water quality has improved significantly over the last 30 years since the passage of the Federal Clean Water Act (1972). Improvements are due primarily to point source controls, such as additional treatment requirements and limits on discharges from wastewater treatment plants, with added benefit from nonpoint source management programs that reduce urban and agricultural runoff.

The federal Clean Water Act, passed in 1972 and amended in 1977, was an offshoot of escalating public awareness and concern for controlling water pollution nationwide.

Seventy-three percent of the stream miles in the Illinois River Basin are currently rated as "good," compared with 62 percent statewide and 98 percent of the lakes in the Illinois River Basin are rated "good" or "fair" compared with 97 percent statewide. In comparison, when the Clean Water Act was passed in 1972, only 35 percent of streams statewide were rated "good" and only 62 percent of the lakes were rated "good" or "fair" - showing the steady progress that has been made in restoring water quality in Illinois.

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To date, more than \$7 billion has been invested in efforts to regulate point source discharges in Illinois, utilizing a mix of federal and state dollars for 20-year low interest loans whose repayment goes back into the fund to be loaned to other applicants.

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In 2002 , Illinois also committed \$70 million to help unsewered communities (statewide) replace failing septic systems with sewer systems.

Current efforts are focusing on nonpoint source pollution issues. More than 100 citizen groups across Illinois are currently working on identifying and implementing ways to protect local rivers, streams, lakes and groundwater. Many are here today.

USEPA has approved 33 completed Total Maximum Daily Load evaluations and we are currently developing another 39 TMDLs in the Illinois River Basin. TMDLs are a tool that we use to restore impaired watersheds so that their waters will meet Water Quality Standards and Full Use Support for those uses that the water bodies are designated. A TMDL looks at the identified pollutants and develops, through water quality sampling and modeling, the amount or load reductions needed for the water body to meet its designated uses.

Illinois EPA also has a number of other programs that are helping improve the quality of our lakes and streams, particularly in the Illinois River Basin. They include:

Conservation 2000: 25 lakes in the Illinois River watershed have been improved by intensive monitoring and/or implementation projects, and more than \$5 million dollars of local, state and some federal monies have been used.

Since 1990, the IEPA has implemented nearly 200 Clean Water Act Section 319 projects within the Illinois River Watershed. The Agency receives these federal funds from USEPA to identify and administer projects to prevent nonpoint source pollution. These projects include watershed management planning, best management practices implementation and outreach efforts. Illinois EPA has dedicated over \$36 million towards these projects to help improve the health of the Illinois River, its tributaries and ultimately the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico.

Right here in Peoria County was one of IEPA's first Section 319 projects. The Agency's partner, the Peoria County Department of Land Resources, developed a multi-county (Peoria, Woodford, Tazewell, Marshall) implementation plan and ordinance using Section 319 funds. The project worked to achieve agreement among local governments relating to the nature and scope of the implementation plan and ordinance.

In the northeastern part of the watershed, our partner NIPC (Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission) developed an Urban Site Drainage Training Course and Construction Site Erosion Control Video. NIPC and its partners provide the training course and video to many municipalities within the watershed. This effort, along with our support of USDA - NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) Community Assistance Program has made a big difference in nonpoint source pollution control from urban sources.

Illinois EPA has also continued efforts with the local soil and water conservation districts to help fund staff to work with landowners for the implementation of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Funding for CREP included by Governor Blagojevich and the Legislature in the current fiscal year's budget will allow IEPA to match state and federal funds to provide technical assistance and education for this program, adding to the \$880,000 of 319 grant funds put towards CREP in prior years.

In 2004, Illinois EPA began a new program of subcontracting with several state Soil and Water Conservation Districts, with the majority of them in the Illinois River Basin, to implement a pilot Construction Site Erosion Control Project. Those partners include the DeWitt, Macon, McHenry and Winnebago SWC District Offices. District staff complete on-site NPDES Construction Stormwater Permit inspections and provide technical assistance in implementing best management practices to minimize runoff to nearby water bodies. Any construction site larger than one acre now requires a NPDES Construction Permit.

This program has been successful in identifying problem areas but more importantly in avoiding construction site erosion before it happens. The Agency is interested in expanding the participation of the District Offices and has already entered into additional subcontracts with the Kane/DuPage, Kendall and Peoria County Soil & Water Conservation Districts and hope to include more in the future.

The Section 319 program has also supported watershed-planning efforts throughout the watershed.

These projects ranged from one of the most urbanized watersheds (North Branch of the Chicago River) where IEPA's partner, the Friends of the Chicago River, involved county and city officials in the planning effort, to a significantly rural watershed (Mackinaw River) where a partnership with The Nature Conservancy involved county, village and even individual landowners in the planning process. All of these efforts have moved the local citizens and planning groups closer to their goal of clean water.

Hundreds of conservation practices have been installed in the Illinois River watershed by dozens of our partners through the Section 319 program. Traditional practices such as terraces and waterways are dotting the landscape along with porous pavement parking lots, green roofs and miles of rural and urban streambank stabilization.

Since 1990, the 319 NPS program, through on the ground implementation can show load reduction decreases of: 193,884 lbs of nitrogen, 1,483,611 pounds of phosphorus, 763,257 pounds of total suspended solids, and 64,394 TONS of sediment per year, each and every year since the Best Management Practices were implemented as a result of 319 grant projects between IEPA and our local partners, in both the private and government sectors.

Three other IEPA programs involve little or no cost but have paid off significantly in getting citizens, teachers and students involved in helping protect our waterways, particularly those in the Illinois River Basin.

The 2005 sampling season marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary for the Illinois Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program (VLMP). The program has proven to be one of the most successful and long-lived volunteer-based environmental monitoring programs in the country. This past season, nearly 300 volunteers at

over 185 Illinois lakes gathered water quality data for their lake. This information is essential in making informed lake management decisions.

The Lake Education Assistance Program (LEAP) provides small grants of up to \$500 for teachers and not-for-profit organizations to study lakes/ponds and their watersheds and celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. In the last 3 years alone over \$32,000 has been granted for LEAP projects within the Illinois watershed.

Illinois EPA has also co-sponsored four Lake Festivals in the Illinois River watershed with local governments or nonprofit groups. Lake Festivals are family oriented events meant to educate citizens about lakes and watersheds.

In conclusion, the Illinois River is a valuable resource that we are working hard to protect and restore. Illinois EPA will continue long-term monitoring of the river and its watershed and will continue to pursue funds to help implement water quality restoration and protection projects and to work with citizen groups and local government and industry to continue the progress we have made. As IEPA Director, I look forward to working with you to protect the Illinois River and the Illinois River Watershed and I know this is also a key priority of Governor Blagojevich, as it is of Lt. Gov. Quinn.

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