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Group gathers over river concerns

Fri, 03/29/2013 - 8:00am | [Tracy Moss](#) ^[1]

OAKWOOD - Glen Martin lives near the Salt Fork River and often canoes streams of the entire Vermilion River system.

He has concerns about potential impacts of a proposed Sunrise coal mine on that river system, and that's why he was one of about 50 people who gathered Thursday night at Kickapoo Landing in Kickapoo State Park to hear presentations about a handful of issues facing the Vermilion River system that includes the Salt Fork, North Fork and Middle Fork rivers in Vermilion and Champaign counties.

Besides the proposed Bulldog coal mine that could possibly use the Salt Fork River as a raw water source, discussion also focused on proposed removal of the Danville dam on the Vermilion River in Danville and the Ellsworth Park dam on the North Fork, also in Danville. They also discussed coal ash impoundments adjacent to the Middle Fork River at the former Dynegy Vermilion Power Station that was idled more than a year ago.

The meeting was organized by the grass-roots group Stand Up To Coal.

Four speakers, two from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and two from Prairie Rivers, gave presentations summarizing the high quality habitat of the Vermilion River system and the issues facing it. Petitions were available for signatures on various issues, and the speakers were followed up with a question and answer session.

Trent Thomas, a biologist with IDNR, said the river system boasts 97 species of fish, about half of the 200 species that exist in the waterways of the state. There are also 46 species of mussels, 16 species of large crustaceans and others. Thomas said 27 species of the 97 fish species are considered in the greatest need of conservation and some are state threatened and endangered species. He said the flow of the river system is the lifeblood of those fish species, and if you lose the flow, you lose the quality of the river habitat.

Jeremy Tiemann with the Illinois Natural History Survey summarized the relocation of the federally endangered clubshell and northern riffleshell mussels to spots in the Vermilion River system. Tiemann said monitoring of the mussels shows a 79 percent survivor rate. He said mussels are an indicator of good stream health, but problems facing the river system are three dams, including the two in Danville proposed for removal. He said the dams essentially block movement of the fish and mussels.

Elliot Brinkman, a habitat conservation specialist with Prairie Rivers, said the dams are a major obstacle to fish, preventing them from accessing 175 miles of streams in the Vermilion River

system upstream of the two dams.

Brinkman said multiple sources of research strongly suggests that these dams are impairing the ability of fish populations to thrive. The habitat below the dams is better, he said, and the dams are fragmenting the high-quality habitat of the Vermilion River system. Also, he said, removal of the dams will improve safety and recreational opportunities on the river.

Brinkman encouraged everyone to attend a public hearing on the proposed dam removal at 6 p.m. April 30 at the Danville municipal building, 17 W. Main St., Danville. The city of Danville is holding the hearing, because it owns the two dams and will make the decision on whether they will be removed.

Brian Perbix, also with Prairie Rivers, said the fly ash impoundments left at the former Dynegy power plant also threatens the Middlefork River. He said two are not lined and the ash ponds are seeping into the river. He said the IEPA has asked Dynegy to address the issues, but Dynegy wants to maintain the fly ash ponds there indefinitely, and Prairie Rivers is proposing that the fly ash be relocated, which has been done in other places.

Perbix also summarized possible threats to the Salt Fork River from the proposed Bulldog mine. Speaking in Kickapoo State Park, a former strip mining area that was reclaimed many years ago, Perbix said Kickapoo is a good example of coal mine reclamation, but for every good story, there's a bad example of reclamation.

"We got lucky with Kickapoo," he said.

#1 ^[2]

ilpatriot ^[3] wrote on March 30, 2013 at 1:03 am

Dear Mr. Martin, you are most likely breaking the law. You cannot just jump in the the river and paddle away. You need the permission of every landowner along the way.

<http://www.news-gazette.com/news/agriculture-and-environment/2010-04-27/...> ^[4]

#2 ^[5]

Keith Hays ^[6] wrote on March 30, 2013 at 9:03 am

One should not proclaim the law unless one knows the law. The rights of riparian landowners do not include the right to exclude travelers from navigable streams flowing through their property.

One does not need to seek permission to use the river. One does need permission from the owner to cross the land to get to the river.

#3 ^[7]

ilpatriot ^[3] wrote 2 days 13 hours ago

Dear Mr. Hays, I agree with you about navigable waters. The Salt Fork is not a navigable water. Here is the link to the IDNR list and maps of navigable waters.

<http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/waterresources/pages/publicwaters.aspx> ^[8]