

Friends of the Kankakee's mission is to support the US Fish and Wildlife Service in its goals to preserve the biological and cultural diversity of the Kankakee River Basin through the establishment of the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. We work with individuals and groups, public and private, who promote our mission.

Dear SUPPORTER,

**Friends of the Kankakee has gone through leadership changes over the past couple of years, but our mission to be a significant part of a wonderful conservation project has remained steady. As Friends of the Kankakee stabilizes, we see a New Day Dawning and we need your help to continue our collective efforts.**

The 350+ acres of the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area and Friends of the Kankakee lands in the Willow Estates area are an essential link connecting over 2,600 acres owned and managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and 20,000 acres of land owned and managed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and The Nature Conservancy. Collectively the refuge, Friends of the Kankakee and partner agencies own and manage over 35 square miles of northwest Indiana and Northeast Illinois, that compose one of the greatest conservation areas in the Midwest.

Friends of the Kankakee is an all-volunteer organization, and in order for organizations such as the Friends of the Kankakee to succeed, we the board of directors that are governing the organization need your help. Luckily, there are lots of ways to lend a hand. Some help one way; others help in multiple ways.

We appreciate everyone's efforts.

Make a tax-deductible contribution to Friends of the Kankakee by sending your check made out to **Friends of the Kankakee to PO Box 13 Watseka IL 60970**. Your contribution allows the organization to purchase more land and extend our stewardship impact (read about recent stewardship work on the next page).

### **Help out on Volunteer Workdays**

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month (Nov. 2, Dec. 1, Jan. 5, Feb. 1 and March 2) Anne Hughes-Wagner of the US Fish and Wildlife will be leading workdays focused on invasive removal on the refuge (even months) or Friends of the Kankakee (odd month) lands from 11 AM – 2PM

RSVP desired by Friday prior to each email - [anne\\_hughes-wagner@fws.gov](mailto:anne_hughes-wagner@fws.gov) or phone - 773-405-7129

Third Saturday of the month (Nov. 16, Dec. 21, Jan. 18 and Feb 15) with Gus Nyberg from 8 AM – 11 AM focused on restoring oak savanna structure will meet at the corner of Deer Lane and Pike Road in Willow Estates.

RSVP or for more information contact Gus Nyberg [nybergus@gmail.com](mailto:nybergus@gmail.com) 765-427-4345

*Together, we can grow the organization and improve the natural area and people's connection to the land.*

**If you have any questions or want more information as to how you can help, or have ideas that you want to see happen please reach out to**

**Board President Craig Zandstra 219-688-1065 [czandstra05@hotmail.com](mailto:czandstra05@hotmail.com) or**

**Vice President Gus Nyberg 765-427-4345 [nybergus@gmail.com](mailto:nybergus@gmail.com)**

## Friends Preparing Land to Transfer to the Refuge

Prior to conveying land from Friends of the Kankakee ownership to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the FWS requires structures to be removed, wells filled and capped and desires surface trash to be cleaned up. Beyond the work needing to be done prior to conveying the land, trash cleanup work on the preserves is important for creating a safe place for wildlife and creating scenic viewsheds that improve people's enjoyment of their time in the natural world, and hopefully setting a tone that the area is not a place for fly by night dumpers to feel safe to operate, as they have in the past.

2024 has seen the Friends of the Kankakee and the FWS in discussion as to which lands are the best fit for conveyance and Friends of the Kankakee has been actively doing the work needed to convey some of our lands, and we expect some of the current acres that Friends of the Kankakee owns to soon be in FWS ownership.

Over the years, Friends has acquired a few dilapidated homes, and those homes are a hazard in the community when standing for people and wildlife, and were most definitely past due for demolition. In June of this year, Friends of the Kankakee hired a contractor to remove 4 houses (one of the sites after home removal pictured to the right), and capped 4 wells. The contractors did a fantastic job, and we will follow their work by seeding native plants to heal the bare earth.



Prior to the contractor's work, Friends received help from The Nature Conservancy to knock down one of the buildings.

On July 22, six Illinois based Youth Environmental Service (YES) and three Newton County Indiana based Student Conservation Interns (SCI) with the help of Anne Hughes-Wagner of the US Fish and Wildlife Service joined forces to pick up trash from a Friends of Kankakee property. YES and SCI are programs set up for local high school juniors and seniors to have hands on experience in conservation and their community. This workday was the first time that the 2 internship groups have come together and workday was a great success completing work and connecting people.

**During our time together we all made new friends and found someone just down the road and over the state line from our houses. Yesterday I made a great friend Tia. I found out we both play the same sports, are interested in the same things which is why we're doing what we're doing. Not only did I make friends but I was a part of something great. Cleaning an area that's so close to me and helping out the refuge.**

**Dakota Dyer**



Friends of the Kankakee is especially appreciative of the efforts made by local youth to bag the trash and move the property towards a state in which the land is ready for conveyance to the FWS.

## July 22 YES and SCI crew team picture



Shonti, Donovan, Tia, Shaylee, Malik, Tyler, Sam, Dakota, Anne and Jackson cleaning up old trash piles on Friends of the Kankakee property

If you want to see more work on the land and in the community, please consider lending your financial and/ or physical support to the work that FRIENDS OF THE KANKAKEE is doing now, and help us move forward and make more impact on the land and in the community.

Send your financial support to

FRIENDS OF THE KANKAKEE

PO BOX 13

WATSEKA IL 60970

Thank you,

Craig Zandstra

Friends of the Kankakee, President

Over the past 2 decades, Friends of the Kankakee and our conservation partners have worked to piece together the connective lands between the Iroquois County Conservation Area and Willow Slough FWA/ Kankakee Sands (TNC). As can be seen in the map above, there is a path for rare ornate box turtles, regal fritillaries, bull snakes and pocket gophers to move across the landscape as well as the space for native plants to thrive.

There are more opportunities for us to secure a thriving natural future in the Kankakee Sands Natural Region, and the sooner we act, the less expensive that work will be.

