

Building boom threat to river

Des Plaines being choked with silt

By Joe Van Zandt
Staff Writer

PLEASANT PRAIRIE — Conservationist and civic leader Phil Sander says soil erosion is choking the life out of the once pristine and beautiful Des Plaines River.

The silting-in of the Des Plaines has worsened in the past few years because of a building boom that is causing increased storm water runoff from roofs and parking lots, Sander said.

Every time another construction project is begun in the Des Plaines River drainage area, tons of soil are washed into ditches and then carried down to the river. The silt slows water flow in the river and the result is greatly increased potential for flooding.

"The river must be dredged of the years of accumulated silt and debris," he said. "The cleanup must go all the way to the headwaters."

Once such a cleanup is completed, he said, steps must be taken to prevent future silting in of the river bed, perhaps by construction of holding ponds to catch water running off the parking lots.

Sander is also concerned about gasoline, motor oil and salt being washed into the river from the many area parking lots and roadways. He said the pollution is killing off the fish and plant life along the river. He says salting of area roads should be discontinued.

Robert Wakeman, water resource manager in the DNR's Milwaukee office, acknowledged an increase in storm water problems on the Des Plaines. He attributed them to the growing number of storm sewers in the I-94 corridor and to the greatly increased



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amount of construction in the area.

To limit water quality deterioration, he said, the DNR prepared a model construction ordinance.

"We recommend adopting it," he said, "but it is up to local government to pass it."

"If there are construction site problems, we can evaluate them and work with construction companies and municipalities to prevent sediments getting into streams," he said. "But unless there is a single point source, we can't order anyone to remove the sediment."

The Kenosha County Board Land Conservation Committee is currently considering DNR's model construction site erosion control ordinance.

Pamela Wallis, land conservationist in the county Planning and Development Department, said the county already has an ordinance that addresses stormwater management and erosion control, but it applies to residential subdivisions, not commercial development sites. She said even if the county did have such an ordinance in place, it would be powerless to do any-

thing about much of the development on the west side of I-94 because that is in the Town of Bristol, which is not under the jurisdiction of the county's zoning law.

"Unfortunately," Wallis said, "the location where a (runoff) problem is caused is usually not the same area that suffers from the problem."

The Bristol Town Board takes the position that responsibility for overseeing construction sites and protecting the river is the county's, through its Shoreland Zoning Ordinance.

"Unfortunately," Sander said, "no one wants to take responsibility. It will probably take a major calamity, such as a devastating flood, before anyone takes notice."

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