

Final Report
Development of Canoer Only Access Area
Informational Activities Directed at Recreational
Users of the River

Oklahoma Conservation Commission
Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission
Cherokee County Conservation District

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INTRODUCTION

The recreational uses of the Illinois River generate a significant tourist industry; however, the intensive human contact also creates the potential for significant non-point source pollution. One of the intents of pollution control and prevention programs in the Illinois River basin is to increase the aesthetic appeal of the river. Unfortunately, this increased appeal will also increase the numbers of people who will use the river for recreational opportunities and will exacerbate pollution problems that currently exist.

Canoeing and rafting are popular activities on the Illinois River with many thousands of floaters enjoying day trips down the river each year. During peak periods approximately 2,400 commercial floatation devices are rented per weekend. The majority of use is confined to an eight-mile river section extending north from state highway 62 where the majority of commercial floatation device operations and river access points are located. There exists a need to provide information to recreational users of the river that identify the various access areas and the facilities that are located at each, and to secure one additional access area to reduce overuse placed on the other areas. The addition of another canoeer/rafter access area, along with increasing information to recreational users about access areas, will help to reduce a significant source of NPS pollution in the Illinois River.

OBJECTIVES

It was proposed that an additional canoeer/rafter access area be established on the Illinois River at the Combs Bridge. With the addition of this site, there will be adequate access areas at approximately 3-mile intervals throughout the most heavily used areas.

The water quality objective of this project is to reduce NPS pollutant loads from recreational users of the river. Success can be measured by the amount of trash collected through the trash bag distribution program, amount of streamside trash that is reduced and the amount of human waste kept from entering the river as a result of the installation of pit-toilet facilities.

DEVELOPMENT OF CANOER ACCESS AREA

Approximately 4.4 acres of land adjacent to the Combs Bridge- Cherokee County, Oklahoma was purchased at the cost of \$20,000.00 for the purpose of developing a canoe/raft access only area. Appendix A contains the supporting documentation of the land purchase. Improvements to the area include canoe/raft landing areas, pit-toilet facilities, picnic tables, trash receptacles, and a gate. Recreationists are encouraged to use this area, along with the other access areas, through available maps. The Combs Bridge site is accessible to the public only through the river, which limits use to flotation devices while prohibiting motor vehicle use.

Two pit-toilet Facilities were constructed on this site at a total cost of \$18,700.00. The OSRC 5% cost-share match amount was \$935.00. The remaining \$17,765.00 came out of the grant funds. Appendix B contains the supporting documentation for this part of the project.

Since the site opened with the pit-toilets in the spring of 1995 it has experienced moderate use by recreational river users. To date, the pit-toilet facilities have kept approximately 2,600 gallons of sewage from entering the river. The facilities have required pump-out one time since 1995.



Figure 1. Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission employees maintaining the completed access area.

PLACEMENT OF SIGNS ALONG THE ILLINOIS RIVER

Informational signs were purchased and placed at all access areas including commercial canoe landing areas. Twenty-five aluminum sheet signs were purchased at a cost of \$2,385.00. These signs are placed where river users can see them from the water. The signs identify the site and list the various conveniences at each site. The OSRC cost sharing for this project provided the labor for placement of signs. Appendix C contains all of the invoices for aluminum sheet signs and the labor costs for erecting the signs.

A new sign was placed at the entrance to the Illinois River on Highway 10, depicting Illinois Jones, with the message to all users of the Illinois River. This has helped to promote the image of Illinois Jones and the message he is giving to the recreational users of the river, "Don't Be a Trasher."



Figure 2. Completed entrance sign to the Illinois River located north of the State Highway 10 and the Highway 51 junction.



Figure 3. The above photograph is of the Round Hollow Public Access sign. This is an example of the signs that were purchased from this project.



Figure 4. Photograph of the Edmondson Access Area sign. This sign is visible from the river.

TRASHBAG DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

Funds from this grant have also been used to continue the trash bag program that was started under the FY1991-319 Illinois River program. Bags have been provided to each commercial flotation device operation and other businesses for distribution to river users for proper disposal of trash. 60,000 trash bags were purchased at a total cost of \$2,410.15. The OSRC 5% cost share match total was \$126.85. The remaining \$2,537.00 was paid out of this grant. (see Appendix D for purchasing documentation and distribution information) .

The Sixty Thousand trash bags that were purchased by the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission using U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Oklahoma Conservation Commission cost share funding have been provided to commercial flotation device operators for distribution to river users and to environmental groups for river dean-up projects. It is estimated that 85% of the trash bags that were distributed to commercial flotation device operators have been used directly on the river by river users. The other 15% have been used for various other purposes including use in the commercial business and river dean-up projects. At this time all of the bags that have been purchased from this project have been distributed.

Commercial flotation device operators estimate that 60% to 80% of the bags that are distributed are used for disposal of litter. OSRC staff estimates the average returned bag weighs approximately 5 lbs. Therefore, by distributing the bags it is calculated that approximately 118 tons of litter is collected and removed from the Illinois River Basin each year as a result of this program.



Figure 5. Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission employee, Reasha Thompson, holding one of the trash bags that were purchased from this project.

BUDGET INFORMATION

A total of \$47,000.00 was allocated for this project from grant funds provided by the U.S.E.P.A.; \$45,766.63 of those funds was used. A 5% cost share match was made by the OSRC for this project. The OSRC contribution totaled \$3,642.75. The cost share included some of the materials and labor costs. Table 1 below shows the total expended for this project.

TABLE 1 Total Expenditures for the Enhancement of Canoer Access Area and Informational Activities Directed at the Recreational Users of the Illinois River.

Output	Grant Funds used	OSRC Cost Share	Total
Land Purchase	\$20,000.00		\$20,000.00
Pit Toilet Construction	\$17,765.00	\$935.00	\$18,700.00
Aluminum Sheet Signs	\$3,091.48	\$588.00	\$3,679.48
Trash-bag purchase	\$2,410.15	\$126.85	\$2,537.00
Illinois Jones Entrance Sign*	\$2,500.00	\$612.10	\$3,112.10
Other Construction Items**		\$1,380.80	\$1,380.80
TOTAL	\$45,766.63	\$3,642.75	\$49,409.38

* Task was completed with help from the Cherokee County Conservation District.

** includes gate, fence and picnic table construction

Conclusion

The establishment of a Canoer Access Area has been instrumental in reduction of non-point source pollution to the Illinois River. The canoe only access area provides pit toilet facilities, trash barrels and picnic tables to river users. The area is closed to motor vehicle traffic to maximize use by floaters.

In the last estimate since the construction of the Canoer Access Only Area in 1994, the area has helped to keep over 3,000 gallons of raw sewage from entering the Illinois River. Approximately 400,000 people a year visit the Illinois River for recreational purposes. There are limited public toilet facilities located in the river area. In the past, river users did not have many options for waste disposal. The construction of pit toilet facilities gives river users a better option than direct use of the river for waste disposal.

The informational signage has been essential to educate river users of the available amenities. The more aware the river visitors are of the amenities available, the more likely they are used.

The trash bag distribution has helped to reduce non-point source pollution of litter in the Illinois River basin by providing trash bags to river users. The 60,000 bags that were purchased were distributed to river users and the distributed bags have been instrumental in decreasing the amount of litter to the Illinois River area. It is estimated, between 110 to 120 tons of litter have been collected and kept from entering the Illinois River by the distribution and use of the trash bags.

Therefore, the establishment of a Canoer Access Only Area and the trash bag distribution program have helped to reduce the amount of raw sewage entering the river and the amount of litter in the river basin. Since the river hosts approximately 400,000 visitors per year both sewage and litter can create significant impacts to the river area. If these problems are not addressed and viable solutions to the problems are ignored, the Illinois River will increasingly suffer. The help of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission has been essential in the fight for the protection of the Illinois River.

Continued funding for projects like these will help to provide river users with better options for waste disposal, educate the public on available amenities and environmental protection, increase awareness of impacts of non-point source pollution, and enable agencies to work together to better protect our natural resources.