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Governor's Conference looks at Illinois River management

PEORIA — Despite the rainy weather on Tuesday, the bus tour stopped on Grand View Drive — not to look at the scenery but to inspect storm water runoff.

It was just one of the stops for the watershed bus tour at the Biennial Governor's Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System that started Tuesday at the Peoria Marriott Pere Marquette and runs through Thursday.

At the Grand View stop, some 20 conference attendees braved the rain to hear from Mike Friberg, a planner with the Peoria Park District, who discussed erosion problems created by water running off the bluff from "the World's Most Beautiful Drive."

"Storm water has accelerated the erosion slide, so we're trying to keep as much water off the slope as possible," he said.

Managing just one of the slide areas along the scenic bluff that involves the installation of a runoff system and the stabilization of the hillside will cost about \$500,000, Friberg told the group.

During a tour of the Illinois American water treatment plant, 100 E. Lorentz Ave., river conference participants had plenty of questions for Illinois American spokeswoman Lori Horstman, who pointed out that the plant treats 10 million gallons of water from the Illinois River every day.

An additional 20 million gallons a day can be procured from wells in other parts of the city, she said.

After chemical treatment to remove impurities such as farm chemicals and insecticides, river water needs to be "polished," said Horstman, referring to carbon filters used by the water company to purify the city's drinking water.

At the corner of University and Main streets, site of a major reconstruction project in 2014, Andrea Klopfenstein, a project manager with Peoria's public works department, identified permeable brick pavers used on corners that let water in to flow through rain gardens made up of native and non-native plants.

Executed on a tight schedule, the \$2.6 million traffic project has been a controversial one for the area, noted Jane Gerdes, a civil engineer with the city's public works department.

"Traffic calming measures have slowed traffic down, (at Main and University) but it's also increased traffic through neighborhoods in the area where calming efforts have now been implemented. The days of just looking at one aspect of a project are gone. Now you have to have your eyes wide open on all aspects," said Gerdes.

The bus tour also took notice of area trees. Reinee Hildebrandt, a program administrator with the forestry division of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, explained that urban trees not only beautify an area but serve as noise barriers, as well.

Diversity is important so that when problems occur — such as the Dutch elm disease that struck elm trees in the 20th century and the emerald ash borer that now threatens area ash trees — an entire group of trees isn't lost, she said.

At Detweiller Park, Mike Miller, supervisor of environmental and interpretive services for the Peoria Park District, indicated that more oak trees need to be added to the park's forest before aging oaks — some approaching 100 years old — stop bearing acorns.

Oak trees are important to the forest ecosystem, but maple trees have crowded out oaks at the park, he said. "Maples have no problem reproducing in the shade of oak trees, but oaks have problems reproducing under maples," said Miller.

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PHOTO/ DAVID ZALAZNIK/JOURNAL STAR

Peoria Park District planner Michael Friberg explains Tuesday the process in correcting a massive erosion problem the district faced by strategic placement of rock-filled gabion baskets, in the background, along Grandview Drive near Miller Avenue. Friberg was speaking to a group on the watershed tour, part of the 15th biennial Governor's Conference on Management of the Illinois River System meeting in Peoria Tuesday through Thursday.

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