



# **Dredging, structures and building islands: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hoping to improve side channel near Piasa and Eagle's Nest Islands**

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ALTON – What is the Eagles Nest Islands Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project?

On May 23, 2018, from 5-7 p.m., a delegation from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be available at the Alton Motorboat Club for a public forum addressing this project, which is a part of its restoration of the upper half of the Mississippi River. Scott Bryant, the President of the Illinois Federation of Outdoor Resources, said avid sports enthusiasts and environmentalists are in agreement regarding the benefits of the project, which would include dredging, erosion protection and even island creation in the region of Piasa Harbor and Eagles Nest Island.

“It would go from above Piasa Harbor to Clifton Terrace,” Bryant said. “Now, you see trash, logs and stumps. It's an overall failure of that side channel system. This project would fix that. The logs would all be cleaned up, they would dredge 10 feet deep, and create rock structures by Eagles Nest and Piasa Islands. It would create habitats for fish and wildlife, and even rebuild the formerly-lost Sunflower Island with all the dredged material. They would dredge the mouth of Piasa Island to make it a better habitat for fish. It would be an overall project of cleaning up and fixing the problems in that area.”

A feasibility study was released last week regarding the project. The entirety of the 121-page document can be found [here](#). This document will be up for public comment during the presentation at the Alton Motorboat club.

In the document the habitat destruction of the Piasa Chute is extremely detailed, adding its current rate of habitat destruction will result in a depth of 1.6 feet in the next 50 years. It also adds erosion and a lack of “structural diversity” in the area are causing habitat destruction for many species of wildlife in the region, including fish, mussels and birds. As many as eight of those species are listed as threatened or endangered by the federal government. The backwater channels would also decrease by as much as 37 percent by the 50<sup>th</sup> year of not doing anything, which would be detrimental for wildlife as well.

This project would actively dredge the channel by as much as an additional 10 feet and build structures, even possibly restoring formerly inundated islands inside the area. This work would improve animal habitats as well as safety for recreational boaters in the area.

If this project was done, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stated in its feasibility study new opportunities would come for recreational boating, fishing and hunting, photography, environmental interpretation and education and even yield potential navigation benefits due to increased flows.

The improvement measures proposed in the study include dredging, island restoration and a variety of structures, including dike notches, traditional dikes, trail dikes, side channel enhancement dikes, hard points, chevrons, low elevation weirs, sediment diversion structures and a rock structure between Piasa and Eagle's Nest Islands.

If put into action, phase one of dredging and island building would last around 360 days, starting in Dec. 2019 and finishing in July 2020. Phase two would last around 240 days and go from Feb. 2020 to Jan. 2021. Phase three of structures would last around 210 days, starting in Feb. 2021 and ending in Nov. 2021.

Cost for the project is estimated at \$26.7 million, which would be covered under federal dollars. Following the work, however, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources would be responsible for its upkeep, something Bryant said would not occur under current statewide conditions. Their cost per year for upkeep has been estimated at \$5,850 by the feasibility study.

“They've been working on it for 18 years, and it looks like the Department of Natural Resources will throw it to the wind,” Bryant said. “It's the biggest joke I've ever seen – to get this governor or legislature to do anything. If we don't take this, this project will go to Missouri or Iowa or one of the other states.”

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources did send a statement to Riverbender.com through spokesperson Ed Cross regarding the project saying the following:

"Regarding the Corps of Engineers' Piasa Harbor issue, Corps officials brought the project proposal to IDNR for discussion this week. IDNR will evaluate the project and make a determination in the coming weeks what the Department's course of action will be."