

Sen. Koehler encourages collaboration in Illinois River port development

WCBU | By [Joe Deacon](#)

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State Sen. Dave Koehler, D-Peoria, speaks Wednesday at the Illinois Waterways Ports annual meeting at the East Port Banquet Center in East Peoria.

State Sen. Dave Koehler of Peoria points to collaboration and sustainability as key factors in maximizing the full economic potential of the Illinois River.

Koehler spoke Wednesday at the Illinois Waterways Ports annual meeting at the East Port Banquet Center in East Peoria. The all-day gathering brought together stakeholders

“The river is really one of our most vital assets, and we have to protect it and we have to plan on how we're going to best use it,” said Koehler, a Democrat. “We're seeing a great effort by both those who want to make sure we protect the river environmentally and those that really want to take advantage of the fact that we have one of the busiest rivers in terms of barge travel in the United States.

“This is a big deal to how we do commerce in Illinois. This helps to move product from our No. 1 industry, which is agriculture, to really all over the world. Sometimes, we don't appreciate it for what it is, but the river makes us different and special in the world of commerce and in what goes on within how communities develop.”

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Last year, a 175-mile stretch of the river from Havana to LaSalle-Peru earned federal designation as a port statistical area. Dan Silverthorn, board chairman for the Heart of Illinois Regional Port District, said that designation opens access to significant infrastructure funding.

“From what I hear, there's like \$50-\$60 million out there that's going to be available for us to look at in the next four or five years,” said Silverthorn. “We've got to present these projects to them, but now they know who we are; we're on the map now.”