

DISTRICT 8  
POP PROGRAM

MACKINAW RIVER BRIDGE PROJECT

LOCATION: 1-155 Prairie Road Bridge at the Mackinaw River  
Tazewell County Illinois

CONTACT NAME: Trooper Daniel Williams #4737

## **District 8**

### **Mackinaw River Bridge POP Project**

#### **PROJECT SUMMARY**

The 1-155 Prairie Road Bridge over the Mackinaw River is a gathering spot for teens that tends to attract illegal activity. Littering, destruction of land owner's property, underage drinking parties, and shooting firearms over the river have been reported in this area.

The problem has existed for several years but has become more intense over the past year. District 8 Trooper Daniel Williams #4737 and deputies from the Tazewell County Sheriffs Office noticed an increase in citizen complaints and observed young adults were frequently using this area as a secluded party spot.

Illinois State Police District 8, the Tazewell County Sheriffs Office, the Illinois Department of transportation, and local residents formulated a response to the problem. No trespassing and no parking signs were placed in the problem area. Local residents were encouraged to report suspicious activity and police patrols in the area were increased. Enforcement action was initiated on persons found in violation of the posted signs.

The project was evaluated after a six month period. Observations by law enforcement and residents indicated a decrease in illegal activity at the site. The project is continuing and more exact data is expected as the Tazewell County Sheriffs Office develops a CAD tracking system for calls specific to this location.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### **A. Scanning:**

The 1-155 Prairie Road Bridge over the Mackinaw River is a gathering spot that tends to attract illegal activity. Littering, destruction of land owner's property, underage drinking parties, and shooting firearms over the river have been reported. A meth lab was found there in 2002. The problem was identified when the number of police calls for service to this location were analyzed. The Tazewell County Sheriffs Office and Hopedale City Police were handling numerous calls to this area and many times requesting Illinois State Police assistance. The residents as well as local and state law enforcement assisted in identifying this problem. This problem was selected because of the negative impact on the citizens living in the area as well as the drain on law enforcement resources.

### **B. Analysis**

The problem has been known for several years but has become more intense over the past year. Citizen complaints increased and observation by local law enforcement officials confirmed young adults were frequently using this area for a secluded party spot. When they gather and consume alcohol their loud parties disturb residents who live in the area. The ground is left littered with trash that residents are forced to clean up. Graffiti has been painted on Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) bridge structures. The reckless discharge of firearms has created a dangerous environment for the neighbors as well as for people who canoe on the Mackinaw River.

Prior to this project being implemented police responded each time a citizen made a complaint. The crowd was requested to leave. If any obvious law violations were detected arrests would be made. Many times citizen complaints were anonymous. Responding officers were told by party goers that they had permission to be there and officers did not know who owned the land to confirm their story. An exact number of calls to this location could not be determined but local law enforcement agreed they were responding frequently. Asking participants to leave and making a few arrests when possible did not solve or slow the problem.

### **C. Response**

Meetings were held with local law enforcement, surrounding landowners, and IDOT officials to discuss possible responses to the problem. It was determined the best response would be to limit access to the area by placing no trespassing and no parking signs. This would allow officers to take action without having to wait for a citizen complaint. IDOT agreed to place no trespassing signs and no parking signs. The signs also indicated violators would be towed.

Many times trespassers would run into a wooded area when police arrived. They would stay until police left and then come back to their vehicles. With the signs in place officers could tow the vehicles immediately and the suspects would return and find they had no vehicle. It was believed that the cost of paying for the tow and inconvenience of being without a vehicle would soon reduce the number of people using this area for parties.

The problems usually occurred in the evening after dark. Hopedale Police, Tazewell County Sheriffs Police and ISP planned to check this area aggressively after dark and make arrests for trespassing as well as tow abandoned vehicles. Residents were asked to call police any time they noticed unauthorized vehicles at this location.

#### D. Assessment

Signs were put into place by IDOT by July 1, 2002, and the program was assessed through October 1, 2002. Each department checked the location aggressively. ISP towed 10 cars from the area during this time and one alcohol related arrest was made. A problem developed with the local agencies who did make the checks but did not tow vehicles. This reduced the effectiveness of the program.

There was no accurate method to determine the exact reduction in the number of calls. The calls were being made to the Tazewell County Communication Center. At this time they have not been able to retrieve data from their CAD system for this location. The observation from call takers and officers is that the number of calls are down since the project began. Residents also have noticed fewer problems in this area.

A bridge similar to this one is located several miles down the road. It is possible the illegal activities could move to this location when it becomes too difficult to gather at the present location. This has not happened as of yet but the location is being monitored.

Contact has been made with Tazewell County and there is still a possibility that data regarding calls to this area can be retrieved. The project will continue until a better assessment can be made.