



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

March 25, 2010

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Restoration Creates Recreation Access to Revived Kissimmee River
Istokpoga Canal Boat Ramp Area represents SFWMD commitment to enhancing recreational opportunities on public land



(Click on picture for a larger version.)

Okeechobee, FL – Boaters and outdoor enthusiasts have a new public recreation spot for access to the restored Kissimmee River as a result of today’s opening of the new Istokpoga Canal Boat Ramp Area. Developed in partnership by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the area northwest of Lake Okeechobee features boat and airboat ramps, picnic shelters and tables, bathrooms, grills, lights and ample parking.

“We are thrilled to see this new public recreation area come to life,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Joe Collins. “The new boat ramps provide wonderful access to the restored portion of the historic Kissimmee River and its amazing resurgence of wildlife.”

The new public recreation area is a component of the state-federal restoration partnership to return flow to 43 miles of the historic river, which was cut and dredged in the 1960s into a 30-foot deep straightaway known as the C-38 Canal. Since 2001, 24 miles of the river have been returned to their natural, meandering flow from Lake Kissimmee to Lake Okeechobee.

For boaters, it is a short 1.5-mile trip from the Istokpoga Canal Boat Ramp Area to the restored section of the Kissimmee River, where scientists recently reported a greater than five-fold increase in the number of wading birds foraging within the river's floodplain since restoration began. This past fall, record numbers of the federally endangered wood stork were observed feeding within the restored area, with some flocks containing more than 200 birds.

"Along with our work to restore the historic river, it gives us great pleasure to build features like the Istokpoga Boat Ramp and Park," said Stu Appelbaum, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville District, deputy for restoration program management. "This will provide opportunities for people to enjoy nature and the abundant wildlife that's already returning to the Kissimmee River."

Fishing enthusiasts, horseback riders, hikers, picnic goers, bird-watchers and photographers can find something appealing about the 18-acre area, which also offers trail access to the Hickory Hammock Wildlife Management Area.

Located near the border between Highlands and Okeechobee counties, the new public area is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and features:

- Two large picnic shelters and 16 picnic tables with accompanying grills
- A dual-lane boat ramp with a floating dock
- One ramp designed for airboats
- 58 parking spaces, including 30 spaces for vehicles with trailers
- Access for those with special needs
- Horseback riding and hiking trailhead for the Hickory Hammock Wildlife Management Area
- Low maintenance to reduce operating costs

The Istokpoga Canal Boat Ramp Area opening builds on the District's recent efforts to increase recreation on public land. In January, the Governing Board approved a contract to build another new area that improves public access to Lake Kissimmee and its many recreation opportunities. Scheduled to be complete in November 2010, the Lake Kissimmee area will provide boat ramp access for powerboats and airboats and includes a canoe and kayak launch.

The South Florida Water Management District is steadily increasing recreational access to public lands while continuing to manage them to support environmental restoration, water supply, water quality and flood control missions. At present, the District owns 621,000 acres of land that are open to the public. Many of these properties are in their

natural state or have enhancements such as picnic tables, informational kiosks, campsites and hiking trails. For more information on recreational opportunities throughout the District's 16-county region, visit www.sfwmd.gov/recreation.

For more information on the new facility see: [*Just the Facts: Istokpoga Canal Boat Ramp Area.*](#)

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About the South Florida Water Management District

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.