



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Kissimmee River Restoration Attracts Wildlife

Ongoing restoration project dramatically improves wildlife populations while maintaining regional flood control



This flock of white pelicans (left) is among the wildlife that made its home along the Kissimmee River (below) following the first phase of restoration efforts.



A photo gallery of recent Kissimmee River Restoration images can be [viewed here](#).

Kissimmee, FL – An environmental monitoring program to measure the effectiveness of the state-federal Kissimmee River Restoration Project has revealed a promising increase in wading birds and waterfowl, thriving aquatic invertebrates and improvements in water quality.

“The abundant wildlife now seen along the Kissimmee is a powerful indicator of the benefits of long-term investments in restoration,” said South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Executive Director Melissa Meeker. “The District’s documentation of these improvements provides us and our restoration partners – as well as the public – with critical insights into the ecosystem’s ongoing recovery.”

Environmental monitoring conducted since completion of the first phase of construction in 2001 has shown improvements in aquatic life, reductions in accumulated bottom

sediments, reestablishment of floodplain wetlands and an increase in waterfowl and wading birds.

Among the observations:

- The number of wading birds observed increased by **64 percent**. Three species long-absent from the river are now documented regularly.
- Shorebird species commonly observed jumped from **2 to 11**.
- Waterfowl sightings increased dramatically – by **29 times** compared to pre-restoration sightings.

In addition, dissolved oxygen levels in the river have improved, which is critical for the long-term survival of fish and other aquatic organisms.

Wetland vegetation, which once covered only 37 percent of the Phase I restoration area prior to construction, has fully achieved the restoration target of 80 percent coverage. In addition to an increase in wading birds, shorebirds and waterfowl, the numbers of wetland-dependent marsh birds and songbirds have also increased since restoration began in 2001.

These results suggest that after construction is complete in 2014 and hydrologic conditions are fully restored in 2015, the region is on track to achieve its goal of restored ecological integrity in the Kissimmee River and its floodplain. Ecological monitoring is scheduled to continue for at least five years after project completion to guide management of the flood control system and evaluate the ultimate success of the restoration project.

The Kissimmee Basin is the headwaters of Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. The Kissimmee River Restoration Project is a partnership between the South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that has been in place for more than 20 years. The Army Corps is responsible for construction, and the District is responsible for land acquisition and restoration evaluation monitoring. Project construction is scheduled for completion in December 2014.

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About the South Florida Water Management District

Highlights of Current Construction Efforts:

- The C-37 Canal north of Lake Kissimmee is being enlarged as part of the overall flood control network.
- River Acres flood protection enhancements are nearly complete. This project protects homes and eliminates the need to acquire additional lands.
- River channel excavations are under way in Pool D where segments of the river channel are completely filled in. This work will streamline the effort for the next major back-filling effort.
- Construction began this month on a boat ramp that will replace the one located at control structure S-65C, which is scheduled for demolition in spring 2013.



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.