

The Kissimmee River Restoration Project

Overview for the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

March 27 – 28, 2007

History. Prior to 1962, the Kissimmee River meandered for over 100 miles from Lake Kissimmee south to Lake Okeechobee. The wide floodplain, often inundated, held a rich mosaic of wetland plant and animal communities.

Restoration Needs. The Kissimmee Flood Control project channelized the river between 1962 and 1971. The ecological effects were immediate and devastating. There was extensive loss of wetland function—two-thirds of the historical floodplain was drained—and drastic declines in wading birds and game fish. The correction of this damaged ecosystem was formally addressed by the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 with authorization of the current restoration project in 1992.



Kissimmee River, 1961. Photo courtesy of the SFMWD.

Current Project. The Kissimmee River Restoration Project stretches from Orlando to Lake Okeechobee. It will restore the historic Kissimmee River floodplain through extensive structural and operational modifications. The project will recreate approximately 40 square miles of the river/floodplain ecosystem, including 43 miles of contiguous river channel and 27,000 acres of floodplain wetlands.

South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Goals & Project-Related Ecosystem Objectives

GOAL 1:	GET THE WATER RIGHT
Subgoal 1-A:	Get the hydrology right
Objective 1-A.3:	Modify 345 miles of impediments to flow by 2020
Subgoal 1-B:	Get the water quality right
GOAL 2:	RESTORE, PRESERVE, AND PROTECT NATURAL HABITATS & SPECIES
Subgoal 2-A:	Restore, preserve, and protect natural habitats
Objective 2-A.3:	Improve habitat quality for 2.4 million acres of natural areas in south Florida
Subgoal 2-B:	Control invasive exotic plants
GOAL 3:	FOSTER COMPATIBILITY OF THE BUILT AND NATURAL SYSTEMS
Subgoal 3-A:	Use and manage land in a manner compatible with ecosystem restoration
Subgoal 3-B:	Maintain or improve flood protection in a manner compatible with ecosystem restoration
Subgoal 3-C:	Provide sufficient water resources for built and natural systems

Task Force Goals. The Kissimmee River Restoration Project will help accomplish Goal 1 (getting the water right) by removing approximately 31 miles of impediments to flow. It will also benefit Goal 2 (restoring, preserving, and protecting natural habitats and species) by restoring approximately 27,000 acres of floodplain wetlands and improving habitat quality for associated fish and wildlife resources.

Status/Success. A joint effort by the South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, this project is well underway and on the path toward success. All 102,061 acres needed for restoration have been acquired. The effects of the reestablishment of more natural flows and wetland vegetation are already being seen; reconstructed sections of the river channel are already playing host to increased numbers of wading birds.

Sources: 2006 Integrated Financial Plan (SFERTF), Coordinating Success 2006: Strategy for Restoration of the South Florida Ecosystem (SFERTF), and Kissimmee River Restoration Flyer (SFWMD).