



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Kissimmee Headwaters Restoration Project Underway
Restoring historic Lake Hatchineha marsh to benefit overall river restoration



(Click on the picture for a larger version.)

West Palm Beach, FL — An abandoned sod farm amid the headwaters of the Kissimmee River has begun its transformation back to historic Lake Hatchineha floodplain in a restoration project by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD).

“Re-establishing the historic Kissimmee River Valley continues to be a success story for Everglades restoration,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Daniel O’Keefe. “Vast areas of restored marsh and floodplain are providing significant environmental benefits while increasing our water management flexibility.”

Located in a spot where Lake Hatchineha once naturally overflowed its banks during wet times, the 6,000 acres at the river’s headwaters in Polk County was a sod farm in the 1960s. The lake floodplain there, known as Rolling Meadows, was then dried out for flood control.

Following SFWMD approval of a construction contract in November, crews have begun the initial work to install new water control structures and update existing infrastructure so that water can once again flow onto Rolling Meadows, just south of Lake Hatchineha. The \$3.7 million investment will create an area where the lake can

overflow its banks as it did before being altered, helping to restore wildlife habitat and also proving about 1,300 acre-feet of water storage.

When finished, the project will also increase water management flexibility to move and store water after restoration of the Kissimmee River is complete. Recreational access to the site for nature-based activities such as hiking, biking, hunting, fishing and bird watching is also envisioned for the project.

Funding for the project has been provided through a mitigation agreement between the SFWMD and the five utilities in the upper Kissimmee basin known as the STOPR Group: City of St. Cloud, TOHO Water Authority, Orange County, Polk County and Reedy Creek Improvement District.

“This is an example of a successful partnership between local governments and the District,” said Brian Wheeler, Executive Director of the TOHO Water Authority. “The agreement provides for environmental restoration and preservation to offset some of the impacts of growth and urbanization.”

In 2007, the utilities agreed to provide approximately \$4.67 million to restore 873 acres of wetlands and enhance 105 acres of wetlands as part of the Rolling Meadows restoration, in association with the issuance of the utilities’ water use permits.

Background: Kissimmee River Restoration

The Kissimmee River once meandered for 103 miles through central Florida. Its floodplain, reaching up to 3 miles wide, was inundated for long periods by heavy seasonal rains.

In the 1960s, the river was channelized by cutting and dredging a 30-foot-deep straightaway through the river’s meanders: the C-38 canal. While the project delivered on the promise of flood protection, it also destroyed much of a floodplain-dependent ecosystem that nurtured threatened and endangered species.



(Click map for a larger version)

After extensive planning, construction for the Kissimmee River Restoration Project began in 1999 with backfilling of 8 miles of the C-38 canal. Three construction phases are now complete, and continuous water flow has been re-established to 24 miles of the meandering Kissimmee River. Seasonal rains and flows now regularly inundate the floodplain in the restored area, as they did before channelization.

The comprehensive restoration project will return flow to 40 miles of the river’s historic channel and restore about 40 square miles of river/floodplain ecosystem.

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***The South Florida Water Management District** is a regional governmental agency that manages the water resources in the southern part of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts.*

Our mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving flood control, water supply, water quality and natural systems.