

Kissimmee River Restoration Progress

Facts & Information



US Army Corps
of Engineers
Jacksonville District



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Kissimmee River Restoration dates to 1992 when the U.S. Congress authorized this joint state-federal project. When restoration is complete in 2015, more than 40 square miles of river-floodplain ecosystem will be restored, including almost 20,000 acres of wetlands and 44 miles of historic river channel.

Background

- The Kissimmee River once meandered for 103 miles through central Florida. Its floodplain, reaching up to two miles wide, was inundated for long periods by heavy seasonal rains. Wetland plants, wading birds and fish thrived there.
- Prolonged flooding caused severe impacts to humans so Florida officials asked Congress for assistance. Congress tasked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and between 1962 and 1971, the Corps cut and dredged the Kissimmee River into a 30-foot deep straightaway: the C-38 canal. The project achieved flood reduction benefits, but it also harmed the river-floodplain ecosystem.
- After extensive planning, construction for environmental restoration began in 1999. As of today, the project is more than halfway complete.
- In the lower Kissimmee River Basin, Phase one construction was completed in 2001 and Phase two was completed in 2009, restoring continuous water flow to 19 miles of the Kissimmee River. The third phase is now underway and includes backfilling the C-38, and restoring flow to eight miles of the river.
- About 98 percent of lands needed to complete Kissimmee River Restoration have been acquired — a total of 102,061 acres.

Environmental Results

The river and its floodplain have improved in remarkable ways, surpassing at times the anticipated environmental response. Comprehensive monitoring for the past five years has documented these results. Improvements are compared with conditions existing prior to restoration.

- Wetland plants are thriving in the floodplain, including pickerelweed, arrowhead, Carolina willow and buttonbush.
- Undesirable floating and mat-forming plants have been replaced by emergent plants native to the historic river.
- Organic deposits on the river bottom decreased by 71 percent, reestablishing sand bars and providing new habitat for shorebirds and invertebrates, including native clams.
- Dissolved oxygen, which is critical for the long-term survival of fish and other aquatic organisms, has increased up to six-fold.
- Largemouth bass and sunfishes now comprise 63 percent of the fish community; prior to restoration, they represented only 38 percent.
- Long-legged wading bird populations, including white ibis, great egret, snowy egret and little blue heron, have increased significantly, in some years increasing at greater than double the restoration expectation.
- Ducks have returned to the river, including American widgeon, northern pintail, northern shoveler, ring-necked duck, and black-bellied whistling duck.
- Eight shorebird species, absent before restoration, have returned to the river and floodplain, including breeding black-necked stilts.

Upper Basin Construction Features

