



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
Jacksonville District

News Release

Release No. 05-107
For Release: December 1, 2005
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. Senator Mel Martinez, Assistant Secretary of the Army John Paul Woodley tour Kissimmee River restoration project

Phase II of massive river restoration to begin

Orlando, Fla. – U.S. Senator Mel Martinez, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works John Paul Woodley and Col. Robert M. Carpenter, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District toured the Kissimmee River restoration project today and discussed plans for the second phase of the project, to begin construction in January 2006.

The project, managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is sponsored by the State of Florida for the purpose of restoring the historic Kissimmee River floodplain ecosystem and reestablishing wetland conditions in central Florida between Orlando and Lake Okeechobee. The total cost of the project, which will be completed in 2010, is over \$571 million, shared equally by the federal and state governments.

“I am impressed with the progress I’ve seen today. As a result of the Corps’ work, we are seeing the restoration of an environmental legacy of which we can all be proud,” said Martinez. “The Corps calls it Phase I, I call it real progress.”

“The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is proud to be a partner in restoring this key element of the central and south Florida ecosystem,” said Woodley. “This project will not only return the Kissimmee to its natural state, it will also reclaim 26,000 acres of valuable wetlands, enhance habitat and provide flood protection.”

Components of the project include the modification of operations of lakes and existing spillway structures, backfilling 22 miles of the C-38 canal, removing two water control structures and locks, and enlarging the C-36 and C-37 canals.

Phase I of the restoration project was completed in 2001 and has realized a number of benefits. To date, 15 miles of the Kissimmee River has been restored and 12,000 acres of wetlands reclaimed. Continuous flow in the reconnected channel has been maintained for over three years. Natural wetland vegetation and invertebrates have increased and dissolved oxygen levels in the river channel have been improved. Communities of aquatic wading birds, waterfowl and fish have flourished, and a new bald eagle nesting territory has been established.

Phases II and III of the project will restore an additional 27 miles of the river and reclaim 14,000 acres of wetlands, increase colonization of plant and animal species and improve sport fishing.

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