

Kissimmee River listed for \$225,000 global Riverprize

The Kissimmee River Restoration Project in Florida has drawn accolades as one of four finalists in the 2006 International Thiess *Riverprize* for excellence in river restoration and management.

The AUD \$225,000 International *Riverprize* will be awarded at the annual International *Riversymposium* in Brisbane, Australia, on 5 September 2006. The symposium attracts hundreds of delegates from more than 30 countries to discuss how science, policy and community action can improve the health of the world's rivers and watersheds.

Past winners of the International *Riverprize* include the Drome River (France, 2005) Siuslaw River (2004); Alexander River (Israel, 2003); Mekong River (Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic, 2002); Blackwood River (Australia, 2001); and Grand River (Canada, 2000).

In the 1960s, a large channel was constructed through the center of the floodplain to control flooding and the 167 kilometre-long Kissimmee River was converted into a series of stagnant reservoirs. Channelization led to dramatic declines in wintering waterfowl, wading birds, and game fish populations, as well as loss of ecosystem functions.

The goal of the restoration project is to restore ecological integrity to the river-floodplain ecosystem. It involves a series of partnerships between the South Florida Water Management District, several Federal and local organizations, and stakeholder groups, and entails acquiring 37,000 hectares of historic floodplain, filling in 35 kilometres of drainage canal, removing dams and navigation lock structures, and reconnecting 74 kilometres of historic river channel. Initial results following Phase I construction indicate dramatic positive changes in biological, chemical, and physical attributes of the system.

"This is the largest and most comprehensive river-floodplain restoration project in the world," says Joseph Koebel, senior environmental scientist at the South Florida Water Management District. "The massive US\$683 million project is one of the most publicly discussed and debated restoration initiatives ever undertaken in Florida, with extensive community participation."

The Kissimmee River entry will vie for the prestigious International Thiess *Riverprize* against the Meesawin River (Canada), Sha River (China) and Lake Macquarie (Australia). The winner will be announced on 5 September 2006 at a gala award ceremony in Brisbane, Australia.

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