

Sha River a finalist in global Riverprize

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The Sha River Restoration Project from Chengdu, China, is one of four finalists for the 2006 International Thiers Riverprize awarded for excellence in river management.

The International Thiers Riverprize of AUD \$225,000 will be awarded at the annual International Riversymposium in Brisbane, Australia. The Riversymposium highlights how science, policy and community action contribute to best practice river management. Delegates from over 45 countries will attend to discuss river and watershed management issues.

The Sha River is a part of the Minjiang Tributary system, a primary catchment for the western reaches of the Yangtze River which eventually discharges into the East China Sea. The river plays a major role in the flood management control for Chengdu City and provides 90 percent of the city's industrial and human consumption water needs.

However, years of rapid population growth and industrial development saw the river suffer from the combined impacts of city waste, raw sewage, deforestation, coal silt and rural garbage. By 1999, scientists rated the river as virtually 'dead' and a severe public health hazard, seriously affecting everyday life for people in Chengdu and for communities downstream.

The Sha River Restoration Project is a US \$411 million integrated project that has improved water quality, controlled flood flows, cleaned up pollution, landscaped parks and drainage systems, and enhanced public use and understanding of the catchment.

"It has been a huge clean up project on a scale much larger than many other rivers and the reduction of pollution to the Sha River is a substantial achievement," said Professor Paul Greenfield, chair of the Thiers Riverprize judging panel. "We encourage the Sha River Project to continue in the direction they are heading in terms of pollution abatement, sustainable water supplies, shoreline reforestation and redevelopment, amenity values, and linking the river culturally to urban populations."

The Sha River entry will vie for the prestigious International Thiers Riverprize against the Kissimmee River (USA), the Meesawin River (Canada) and Lake Macquarie (Australia). The winner will be announced at a gala award ceremony, attended by delegates from over 30 countries, in Brisbane, Australia, on 5 September 2006.

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The International Riversymposium is held from 4-7 September 2006 during Brisbane's annual Riverfestival. Website: www.riversymposium.com

Sha River Restoration Project: the facts

Sha River is a major component of the Minjiang River tributary, a primary water catchment system for the western reaches of the Yangtze River which eventually discharges into the East China Sea at Shanghai, 1,770 kilometers to the east.

Sha River is 22 kms long and begins in the mountains of Chengdu. It is known locally as the 'River of Life' and runs through Chengdu, a major city with a population of 10,597,000.

Rapid expansion of industry and population in the Chengdu region resulted in waste loads far beyond the river's natural ability to cope – and its capacity to treat sewage. In 1999, over 60 million tonnes of raw sewage and industrial waste; 38,500 tonnes of municipal and rural waste; 10,000 tonnes of coal powder; and 300,000 cubic metres of sediment entered the river.

By 1999, the river was virtually dead and had become a severe health hazard, predisposing the surrounding community to disease and illness.

A large-scale restoration project was established in 2001 with government organizations and investment agencies which including Chengdu Bureau of Layout, Chengdu Construction Committee, Chengdu Environment Protection Bureau, Chengdu Land Resources Bureau, Chengdu City Planning & Design Institute, Chengdu Survey Institute, Harvard University (USA), Turf Design (Australia), KEC (Japan), Sendes Design Institute (Singapore), Shanghai Garden Construction and Design Institute, Sichuan Construction and Design Institute, and Qinghua Tongfang, and the Bank of China.

Restoration work included reshaping sections of the river; control of potential floods; relocating buildings; construction of new roads, bridges and access areas; reforestation and bank erosion control; building new wastewater treatment systems; large-scale clean-up of waste and silt accumulation; and establishing artificial lakes and wetlands.

The project relocated many old buildings, large commercial enterprises and small businesses, involving 30,000 households and more than 100,000 residents. The cooperation and good will of the community, fostered through extensive communication of the importance of the project, made the river restoration project possible.

A large scale public education campaign was undertaken to prevent future misuse of the river. People were re-accommodated to new apartments and commercial enterprises have taken the opportunity to restructure and relocation to surrounding towns.

There has been a significant improvement in river water quality. There is a marked improvement in dissolved oxygen levels in the river, a significant reduction in contaminants such as benzene, and much lower levels of heavy metals such as cadmium and chromium.

Extensive underground sewer systems have been constructed along riparian areas to direct effluent to new wastewater treatment plants.

More people visit the river and parklands. Nine step-water gates were constructed along the river banks to raise the permanent river water level and enhance the natural bends of the river.

Theme-parks, recreational squares and cultural and artistic works have been constructed along the river banks. Three lakes, streams and wetlands have also been constructed together with boardwalks and education centres.