In 2009, the Miami River Commission (MRC) turned its attention to making South Florida’s mixed-use river into a place where the community can live, work and play.

The work ahead is considerable: Completing the remaining two-thirds of the river’s greenways; dredging and cleaning the Wagner Creek and Seybold Canal tributary, the most polluted body of water in Florida; and finishing an environmentally
The challenges are clear

responsible stormwater system are just the most prominent challenges.

Fortunately, community spirit remains alive. That spirit, fortified by hard work, led to the successful completion of the river's Maintenance Dredging and Environmental Cleanup against long odds. We believe that people and entities will continue to step forward on behalf of our working river.

Gradually, the community is beginning to take ownership of its river. Along the Miami River Greenway, schools, volunteers and environmental groups spent weekends planting vegetable and fruit gardens, painting murals, pulling weeds, cleaning debris and making the area more livable for businesses and the people moving into the 7,000 new homes near the river.

The priorities and challenges of 2009 and 2010 are clear:

- Complete the publicly-accessible Miami River Greenway;
- Dredge and clean all Miami River tributaries, starting with Wagner Creek and the Seybold Canal followed by Tamiami Canal, North Fork, South Fork and the Lawrence Canal;
- Maintain the mixed-use river including marine-industrial businesses, historic neighborhoods, parks, and other uses.

While there is no question that economic times are challenging, there is no better time to prepare a bright future for the Miami River. We thank all those who have brought us this far and those who will help us get to the next stage.

Testimonials

“As the newly elected Mayor of the City of Miami, I'm pleased to serve as a volunteer board member per the Miami River Commission’s enabling legislation. For the past decade, the Miami River Commission has been a successful advocate for a mixed-use river, including but not limited to: marine-industrial businesses, historic low-density neighborhoods, the Miami River Greenway and downtown riverfront developments. I look forward to continuing my strong support of the Miami River Commission’s noble initiatives, which improve South Florida’s quality of life.”

– Tomás P. Regalado, Mayor of the City of Miami

“Florida International University (FIU) sincerely appreciates the Miami River Commission’s significant efforts and sponsorship to provide landscaping, paint, tools and supplies for FIU’s annual volunteer day of service. This year, the FIU volunteers enjoyed painting the artistic mural on the First Street Bridge, and planting landscaping along the adjacent Miami River Greenway.”

– Patricia Lopez-Guerrero, Florida International University

“The Miami River Commission has been generous and effective in coordinating, preparing and sponsoring numerous Miami River Greenway beautification events for University of Miami volunteers. We are extremely grateful for the excellent volunteer opportunities provided by the Miami River Commission’s dependable and professional staff, including the community vegetable and fruit garden, planting trees, painting murals, and much more.”

– Franklin McCune, University of Miami
A

lthough the river is a far better place than it was a decade ago, much work lies ahead. Dioxins and other contaminants still infest the river’s tributaries. The stormwater system that drains into the river from the 69-square-mile river basin, while vastly improved, remains a source of pollution. And too many people still use the river as a dumping ground.

More people are coming to the river, and more surely will come. Amid the deepest recession in 70 years, the new homes along the river are slowly filling with renters, many of them younger. This is creating a vibrant nightlife around downtown Miami and particularly the Brickell area just south of the river.

Community involvement in the river’s welfare is one bright spot. It is worth emphasizing the MRC’s new Voluntary Improvement Program (VIP) and singling out the dedication of new commission member Jay Carmichael, an attorney and retired Coast Guard Rear Admiral. He has met with members of the river community who have voluntarily removed derelict vessels and other eyesores and repaired seawalls, earning the MRC’s public praise every time.

As 2009 ends, where we stand on realizing our three priorities:

A “PEOPLE-FRIENDLY” RIVER. With 3.25 miles of the 10-mile Greenway project completed, we remain a long way from realizing the river’s full potential as a destination to live, work and play. The project altogether costs $67.6 million, with $28.7 million allocated and almost $38.9 million needed. What many people do not know is that much of that work and expense lies under the walkways, in stormwater system retrofitting and seawalls, building a final line of defense against pollution into our working river.

SMART GROWTH. We are excited that the American Institute of Architects has chosen the Miami River corridor as its “Catalyst Plan” for creating a long-term vision at its upcoming annual convention in Miami in June 2010. The Florida Legislature in 2000 tasked the MRC with creating an Urban Infill Plan for the Miami River corridor, and it is good to find in 2009 that the MRC and the City of Miami are joining together as “One Voice For the River.”

STORMWATER AND DREDGING: Wagner Creek and Seybold Canal, the most polluted bodies of water in Florida, are in urgent need of dredging. This is a $20 million job as of late 2009. The City of Miami has $2 million in place and dredging permits should be ready in early 2010. The city is seeking $1 million from the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND), $1 million from the South Florida Water Management District and the balance from Federal Economic Stimulus funding, in addition to the city’s stormwater utility fees, rather than ad valorem taxes.

The sooner these and other tributaries are dredged and cleaned, the better. Any comprehensive cleanup of the river and Biscayne Bay requires it. Big thanks are due to a charter member of the MRC, Sallye Jude, our Storm Water Subcommittee Chair, and Task Force Chair Horacio Stuart Aguirre. Together, they are shepherding the MRC’s tributary dredging efforts with hard work and dedication.

So much has been done, and a great deal remains. Everyone knows we all still face sharp economic headwinds that require our perseverance.

Our “Thank you” list has grown so much that it is impossible to list the individual names here. But we can start by thanking our Congress and federal agencies; the State of Florida; Miami-Dade County; the City of Miami; the South Florida Water Management District; the Florida Inland Navigation District; and helpful representatives from the private sector. Special thanks go to Vice Chair Phil Everingham and the remaining subcommittee chairs, Dr. Ernest Martin, County Commissioner Bruno Barreiro and Jim Murley, all of whom have been dedicated to the river as volunteers since the MRC’s formation in 1998.

We have depended on them to get us this far and they have never let us down. Thanks are in order, finally, to the people from so many walks of life who volunteered, made their voices heard and contributed time, talent and treasure on behalf of the community’s working river. This is the only way to build a great river, a great city and a great community.

– Eric Buermann
Chair, Miami River Commission
MIA RIVER GREENWAY

Dr. Ernest Martin, Chair

GREENWAYS CAME TO THE FOREFRONT as never before in 2009. In September, the City of Miami submitted an application – with the MRC’s technical assistance – for a $38.9 million transportation grant from federal economic stimulus funds to complete the 10-mile publicly-accessible pathway featuring trees, parks, benches, decorative lighting, historic markers, way-finding signage and art in public places.

The City and MRC expect to hear the outcome of the application in February 2010. That outcome could determine if the greenways are substantially completed in two or 20 years. The TIGER grant (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, with the objectives of preserving and creating jobs, promoting economic recovery and investing in transportation.

Competition is stiff. Roughly 1,400 applicants from all 50 states have requested a total of $57 billion, and only $1.5 billion is available. Failing that, the MRC can work with the City of Miami in seeking $2 million in grants a year.

Completion of the greenways construction will only be the beginning. Once completed, they will require maintenance, security and special events for residents and visitors.

As of late 2009, 3.25 miles of the Greenways – or roughly a third – have either been completed or are under construction, some through the help of local government, some through private developers. The Miami River Greenway has fully funded and nearly completed construction documents for 0.87 miles of new Greenway sections scheduled for construction in 2010, and an additional 1.01 miles slated for 2011. That will leave an estimated 4.87 miles of Greenway needing funding, design and construction.

HERE IS AN UPDATE OF THE GREENWAY WORK IN 2009:

PUBLIC SECTOR:
• North shore under the 12th Avenue Bridge, constructed by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)
• North and south shore under construction by the new NW Fifth Street Bridge (FDOT)

In 2009, Miami-Dade County began design of the fully-funded, publicly-accessible riverwalk at the following sites:
• North and south shore beneath MetroRail
• North shore beneath South Miami Avenue Bridge
• South shore beneath MetroMover
• South shore beneath SW Second Avenue Bridge
• North shore between NW Third and NW Fourth Streets

The City of Miami has full funding and is designing the publicly-accessible riverwalk at the following sites:
• North River Drive from NW 7th to 12th Avenues will be constructed in 2010
• South River Drive from NW 1st Street to the NW 5th Street Bridge will be constructed in 2010
• South River Drive from the NW 5th Street Bridge to the NW 12th Avenue Bridge will be constructed in 2011

PRIVATE SECTOR:
• “Epic” (old Dupont Plaza site) Phase I riverwalk completed
• “Mint” riverwalk under construction
• “Terrazas Riverpark Village” riverwalk under construction
• “River Oaks Marina and Condominium” riverwalk under construction

The collapsed seawall adjacent to the ancient Miami Circle site was replaced in 2009, and funding was appropriated for the publicly-accessible riverwalk, with cost shares from the State of Florida, Florida Inland Navigation District, South Florida Water Management District, City of Miami and the Miami Downtown Development Authority. Construction documents have been completed and the riverwalk is scheduled for construction in 2010, providing public access to this site purchased by the taxpayers in 1998 for $26 million. The Miami Circle was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2009. The MRC thanks State Rep. Luis Garcia, City Commissioner Marc Sarnoff and Spencer Crowley, FIND, for their strong support in bringing the long-awaited and widely-supported Miami Circle improvements to fruition.

In keeping with its commitment to Greenways and alternative means of transportation, the MRC has embraced the City of Miami’s Bicycle Master Plan, which includes completing the Miami River Greenway.

The MRC continues to coordinate and cosponsor volunteer cleanup and beautification of the river. For a partial list of participants and to learn how you can participate, see the “Get Involved!” section elsewhere in this report.
THE SUBCOMMITTEE’S most urgent task remains the dredging and environmental cleanup of Wagner Creek and Seybold Canal, deemed the most polluted bodies of water in the State of Florida. Permits should be completed in 2010, as design was finished in 2009. The City of Miami has $2 million available and is seeking an additional $18 million from federal economic stimulus funds, FIND and the South Florida Water Management District. Work can only begin when full funding is secured.

This project is a component of the new Miami River Tributary and Canal Maintenance Dredging and Environmental Cleanup Action Plan, under the leadership of Horacio Stuart Aguirre’s task force.

Retrofitting the storm water system that serves the 69-square-mile Miami River Basin remains a major priority. The City of Miami has already retrofitted and repaired several of the old storm water systems and installed new solid waste interceptor baskets to prevent debris from entering the Miami River and Wagner Creek. New Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) water quality goals were established for Wagner Creek in 2007. Yet the water quality, while vastly improved, remains in need of further help. Responsible agencies include the City of Miami, Miami-Dade Department of Environmental Resources Management and the Water and Sewer Department, South Florida Water Management District and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

These water-quality renovations are recommended in the MRC’s Miami River Basin Water Quality Improvement Plan, available at www.miamirivercommission.org, along with quarterly agency implementation progress reports.
THE MIAMI RIVER COMMISSION is excited to work with the American Institute of Architects to create the Miami River Catalyst Plan, during their national convention in June 2010.

The MRC is working with Miami-Dade County to prepare their Evaluation Appraisal Report (EAR). Upon its completion, the EAR will lead to amending the Miami-Dade County Neighborhood Comprehensive Plan.

The working river is critical to the river’s planning. The upper river zone, mostly in unincorporated Miami-Dade County west of NW 27th Avenue, is the source of most of the working river’s trade with the Caribbean, and the freight passes through the 5.5-mile-long river corridor to Biscayne Bay.

The MRC is implementing the award-winning Miami River Corridor Multimodal Transportation Plan, which in part includes short-sea shipping, which would load seaport freight on a barge for offloading in the industrial district, thus removing cargo traffic from downtown streets. In addition, the plan recommends a centralized freight forwarding center connecting to the existing rail lines and Miami International Airport.

Construction has been completed on 7,078 units, the last of them finished in 2009. As of December 2009, 9,688 residential units have preliminary approval, but none are under construction. The recession and tightened credit make construction unlikely in 2010. In the meantime, renters and some owners are starting to fill vacant units, and the residential population in the downtown corridor is growing quickly, particularly among younger people who work in or near Miami’s center.
the east, Tamiami Canal on the south, NW 36th Street on the north and 42nd Avenue on the west. The Miami River Commission serves on the steering committee, where the public and area business owners are encouraged to participate.

The Miami River Corridor Multimodal Transportation Plan includes a major recommendation to alleviate downtown truck traffic by implementing “short-sea shipping” operations linking the Port of Miami with the Upper River. There, they would link with other modes of transportation: rail, road and air, thereby reducing downtown truck traffic.

Near the river corridor’s western terminus next to the Miami International Airport (MIA), the Miami Intermodal Center is moving toward completion in three stages, with a rental car facility scheduled for an opening in April 2010, the MIA Mover in September 2011 and the Miami Central Station in spring 2012.

Dredging
Eric Buermann, Chair

The Miami River Commission serves on the steering committee, where the public and area business owners are encouraged to participate. The MRC hopes that the federal government will provide the $21 million of dredging funding non-guaranteed reimbursements from the federal government for $21 million of dredging funding advanced in 2007-2008 by the Florida Legislature ($15 million), South Florida Water Management District ($3 million) and the Florida Inland Navigation District ($3 million).

That money was predicated on dredging the river to 17 feet rather than its authorized depth of 15 feet. The dredging was limited to that depth when crews hit rock at 15 feet, precluding deeper dredging. The MRC hopes that the federal government will reimburse the money soon.

THE MAINTENANCE DREDGING and Environmental Cleanup of the Miami River, successfully completed in November 2008, took 36 years of vision, 10 years of hard work and $89 million.

Just as it did a year ago, the MRC is still seeking non-guaranteed reimbursements from the federal government for $21 million of dredging funding advanced in 2007-2008 by the Florida Legislature ($15 million), South Florida Water Management District ($3 million) and the Florida Inland Navigation District ($3 million).

That money was predicated on dredging the river to 17 feet rather than its authorized depth of 15 feet. The dredging was limited to that depth when crews hit rock at 15 feet, precluding deeper dredging. The MRC hopes that the federal government will reimburse the money soon.

REPLACEMENT OF THE NW FIFTH Street Bridge, once a hazard to navigation since it was first built in 1929, is nearing completion in spring 2010 at an estimated cost of $54 million.

THE NW 12TH AVENUE BRIDGE was completed on schedule in spring 2009, with an expansion from four to six lanes at a cost of $64 million.

THE TAMiami BRIDGE, over the Tamiami Canal just west of 27th Avenue, still awaits full funding, though the Project Development and Engineering (PD&E) study was completed in 2009. Miami-Dade County is seeking an additional $23 million to start building the $41 million bridge, supplementing $18 million from an existing county bond. Once funding falls into place, the new bridge would open in five years. The existing, historic 1921 bridge would move more than six blocks to the east and reopen as a pedestrian-only bridge connecting the City of Miami’s Fern Isle Park on the south shore with a newly-acquired park expansion area on the north shore of the river’s South Fork tributary.

THE SW FIRST STREET BRIDGE is slated for replacement in 2017 and is commencing a PD&E study in 2010.

Get Involved!

The Miami River Commission invites groups and individuals from the community to get involved in improving our river. To learn more about what you can do, check out our website at www.miamirivercommission.org for updates. You can also call us at 305-644-0544, or email us at miamiriver@bellsouth.net. We’re at 1407 NW 7th Street, Suite D.

Throughout 2009, the Miami River Commission coordinated volunteers of all ages and walks of life to create parks and greenways along the river through a series of events. The MRC is thankful to our growing list of sponsors, partially listed below, who contributed volunteers, supplies and funding for the “greening” of the river.

The 14th annual free Miami Riverday Festival is scheduled for an opening in April 2010, at Lummus Park at 250 NW North River Drive, from 11 am-4 pm. The 13th annual festival on April 4, 2009, featured river boat tours, live music, environmental education, marine expo, historic re-enactors, children’s activities and much more.

All MRC and subcommittee meetings are publicly noticed. Public participation is encouraged. The full MRC meets on the first Monday of every month at noon, usually at the meeting room to the right of the MRC headquarters.

MRC thanks volunteer event sponsors:

- Miami-Dade County
- City of Miami
- City Year Miami
- Florida Drawbridge
- Florida Department of Transportation
- Community Image Advisory Board
- EDAW/AECOM
- Budget Rent-A-Car
- Disney
- TREA mendous Miami, Inc.

- South Florida Water Management District
- Hands On Miami
- Vila and Son Landscaping Corp.
- University of Miami Butler Service Center
- University of Miami School of Law
- U M H.O.P.E. (Helping Others Through Pro Bono Efforts)
- Florida International University
- Babson College
- Florida Wood Recycling

Bridges

The Miami River Commission thanks the Florida Department of Transportation for its recent work on improving the roads and bridges along the Miami River. The current, five-year phase of bridge construction is winding down as traffic patterns return to normal.
To paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill, the Miami River maintenance dredging and environmental cleanup completed in 2009 was not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end, but it is the end of the beginning.

In 2009, the Miami River Commission (MRC) turned its attention to making South Florida’s river systems into places where the community can live, work, and play. The MRC’s work included improving water quality, cleaning up polluted sites, and restoring the natural environment of the river. The MRC worked with local communities, businesses, and other stakeholders to ensure that the river was not only clean but also became a place where people could enjoy themselves.

The challenges are clear, and the Miami River Commission is working to address them. The river systems are complex, and the issues facing them are multifaceted. But with the support of its partners, the MRC is making progress towards a cleaner, healthier river.

Testimonials

"As the entity charged with the responsibility of maintaining and improving the Miami River, the Miami River Commission has made significant strides in recent years. The Commission’s efforts have resulted in improved water quality, reduced pollution, and increased recreational opportunities for residents of the region. The Commission’s dedication to the protection and enhancement of the Miami River is commendable, and it is an honor to be a part of such a forward-thinking organization." - Mayor Robert Menendez, City of Miami Beach

"The Miami River Commission has been an essential partner in our efforts to improve the environment and promote economic development in South Florida. The Commission’s commitment to the Miami River is unwavering, and its work has helped to bring about positive changes that have benefited the entire community." - Senator Bill Nelson

"The Miami River Commission has been a driving force in the revitalization of the Miami River. Through its dedicated efforts, the Commission has made significant progress towards improving water quality and enhancing the natural environment of the river. The Commission’s work is an inspiration to all who care about the future of our region." - Governor Rick Scott

"The Miami River Commission has played a crucial role in the preservation and enhancement of the Miami River. The Commission’s commitment to the river is evident in its ongoing efforts to improve water quality, reduce pollution, and restore the natural environment. The Commission’s dedication to the Miami River is a testament to its commitment to the community and the environment." - Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart