In the fall of 2004, the long-awaited maintenance dredging of the Miami River began.

Dredging has been the signature mission of the Miami River Commission since the Florida Legislature created it in 1998. Yet the real roots go back to 1972, when the late Sen. Claude Pepper sponsored the resolution that launched the process to maintenance dredge the Miami River.

By removing nearly 1 million tons of contaminated sediment, this maintenance dredging – the river’s first – will restore the navigable channel to its federally designated 15-foot depth. Restoring the channel and the additional “bank-to-bank” dredging will allow vessels to move at full capacity regardless of tide, resulting in more efficient shipping terminals, thereby promoting trade and employment.

Of equal importance, dredging will make the river vastly cleaner. Vessels and rainfall cause the contaminated river sediments to stir into the water column and flow into Biscayne Bay. Over the past decade, over 40,000 tons of contaminated sediments have migrated from the river into the bay, and dredging is the only way to remove them.

This $74 million project was made financially feasible largely because of the commission’s work in partnership with Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Senators Bob Graham and Bill Nelson, and the entire Dade congressional delegation, who worked together in 1999-2000 to increase the federal cost share from 20 to 80 percent.

We thank them and the following indispensable partners in this venture: the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gov. Jeb Bush and the Florida Legislature, Miami-Dade County, the City of Miami, the Florida Inland Navigation District, the South Florida Water Management District and the Miami River Marine Group.

We have sought to make the commission a model public body. This year, the Miami River Commission was recognized by Miami Today newspaper as Miami’s best nonprofit organization.
For years, the Miami River was greatly studied, but little understood. Its neighborhoods were neglected, its pollution a continuing problem, and public awareness was generally either non-existent or negative.

Two grand jury reports in 1991 and 1998 issued scathing reports on the river's neglect, and urged dredging and a comprehensive approach to improving the river. A 1997-98 study commissioned by the Florida Legislature and chaired by Robert L. Parks issued a blunt “call to action” urging the community to forge the political will to save the river.

In early 1998, the Florida Legislature answered the study's call and created the Miami River Commission to improve the 5.5-mile Miami River and its surroundings, including the 69-square-mile water basin that includes much of the City of Miami and a portion of Miami-Dade County.

**THE LAW - SPONSORED BY** current Miami-Dade County Commissioner and MRC Board member Bruno Barreiro - created an 18-member board of Miami River stakeholders, including elected officials, neighborhood representatives, marine industrial business owners, environmentalists and members-at-large.

Today, two legislative acts govern the commission:
- The 1998 act (F.S. Chapter 163.06) established the commission as “the official coordinating clearinghouse for all public policy and projects related to the Miami River.” The act charges the commission with uniting government agencies, businesses and residents to “speak with one voice” on river issues.
- The 2000 Miami River Improvement Act (Chapter F.S.163.065) authorized the commission, Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami to develop a comprehensive plan for the river with “a range of varied components essential to a health urban environment, including cultural, recreational, economic and transportation components.”

Since its inception, the full commission and executive committee have held public meetings every month, as have subcommittees dedicated to dredging, greenways, stormwater, public safety and economic development. You can read their minutes and reports at the commission’s website, [www.miamirivercommission.org](http://www.miamirivercommission.org)

The MRC’s immediate priorities remain completing the maintenance dredging of the Miami River and implementing its strategic plan. Once formed, the commission immediately went to work to create, maintain and harness the political will to improve the river, and coordinate efforts among the more than 30 local, state and federal agencies that share responsibility for the river and its surroundings.

**PAYING FOR THE DREDGING** was the greatest challenge. The local cost share was 80 percent of the $74 million project, thus unfeasible. In 1999-2000, the commission was instrumental in changing that by working with elected and appointed officials to reduce the local cost share for dredging to 20 percent – finally making it financially feasible.

Under a joint planning agreement, the city, county and MRC conducted a two-year planning process and hosted 42 public hearings to create the award-winning Miami River Corridor Urban Infill Plan in 2002. The private sector has used this blueprint in planning more than 8,000 mixed-income residential units along the Miami River’s multicultural corridor. Most of these are near downtown, creating a 24-hour neighborhood.

**ONLY TWO YEARS AFTER THE COMMISSION** adopted the plan, nearly half (31) of its “implementation steps” have been brought to fruition, including dredging of the river; development of sections of the Miami River Greenway - in partnership with the Trust for Public Land - decontamination vessel services, storm water system retrofits, redevelopment, creation of six new waterfront parks, increased tree canopy, removal of derelict vessels, environmental education programs, volunteer clean-ups, extending the hours of Metromover stations near the river, and expansion of the Enterprise Zone economic incentives.

**We are excited that our efforts to revitalize the Miami River over the past six years are paying off. Once again, the Miami River is a source of jobs and an engine of growth for the South Florida community, ensuring that trade and the flow of goods between the Sunshine State and our partners in the Caribbean Basin continues to grow in a more secure and cleaner environment.**

- Governor Jeb Bush, State of Florida

Dredging of the Miami River is critical to water quality and the business environment of the marine industries in my district. A Miami River free of the current constraints to boat traffic is expected to have a significant economic impact on employment, cargo volumes and new business investment, which is why I have long championed dredging of the Miami River.

- Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

The Miami River Commission has helped us see the Miami River as a major artery for urban infill development, a key location for marine-related industry and a great place for riverwalks and greenways.”

- Chairman Joe Sanchez, Miami City Commission

My research indicates there will be an emerging ‘niche’ opportunity for Miami River shippers to increase Caribbean cargo trade dominated by short sea routes and shallow draft ports. The Marine Industries Symposium is a good platform to present what I see – as the trade trends best capitalized on by a newly-dredged port of Miami River.

Kevin Horn, Port Economics Expert
The commission’s departing – and founding – chair Bob Parks did South Florida a great service by forging common cause among the river’s stakeholders, implementing a long-term plan for the river and surrounding neighborhoods, and – above all – getting the river dredged. We thank Bob for his work. He is as responsible as any one person among the many who have contributed to the river’s renaissance.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO maintaining the balance of uses on the Miami River among the marine industrial, residential and public interests. We want to make the river a great place to trade, work, visit, live and play.

The Miami River Corridor Urban Infill Plan – mandated by the Florida Legislature - divides the river into three distinct zones so all of the river’s vital stakeholders not only coexist, but thrive together. We believe that a shallow-draft port for the Caribbean is as critical to Miami’s economic benefit as parks, greenways, water taxis and residential development. The Urban Infill Plan is our commonly accepted foundation for planning and action.

Farewell from Bob Parks

After more than six years as chair, Robert Parks stepped down from the Miami River Commission. Here are some parting words...

As the Miami River Commission’s chair, I have been blessed with a great team of volunteers, staff, public servants and river stakeholders who have made so many good things happen. I have long believed that a chair of any organization should provide the opportunity for new leadership, with fresh ideas and approaches to ever-changing needs.

In six years, the Miami River Commission has:

- Made dredging possible by working with elected representatives and federal officials in making it affordable for the city, county and state;
- Launched the dredging to clean the river and make navigation easier, aiding trade, commerce and employment;
- Worked with the Legislature to create the Miami River Improvement Act;
- Created the award-winning Miami River Corridor Urban Infill Plan after two years and 42 public hearings with a host of river improvement initiatives and a master plan for the river’s future;
- Changed the river landscape into a necklace of greenways, new and enhanced public parks and mixed-use residential projects with riverwalks to make the river a vibrant home for city dwellers of all levels of income and a source of jobs and trade for thousands.

The Miami River’s current renaissance was made possible through the public-private partnership forged by the MRC board members and stakeholders. I extend my utmost appreciation to the South Florida Water Management District for providing the MRC with its future operational budget. I wish my sincerest congratulations to Ms. Irela Bagué, the new chair. I wish her and the entire MRC continued success. Finally, I extend my thanks to Governor Jeb Bush for his support and for allowing me the privilege to serve as his Member-at-Large appointee to the Miami River Commission, as well as the MRC staff and the entire MRC board for making our long-awaited vision of the Miami River Corridor a reality.

Sincerely,
ROBERT L. PARKS

Key Dates:

1998: Florida Legislature establishes Miami River Commission
1999: Commission works with the federal government to reduce local government’s share of dredging the river from 80 percent to 20 percent.
2000: Florida Legislature passes Miami River Improvement Act to establish a strategic plan for the Miami River Corridor.
2002: MRC adopts Miami River Corridor Urban Infill Plan and since then nearly half of its recommendations have been implemented.
2004: Miami River dredging begins.

As chair, I will work to build stronger relationships with our stakeholders and with our partners in city, county and state government. We will continue to put the Urban Infill Plan to work, while adapting to the river’s evolving requirements.

IN THE COMING MONTHS, your Miami River Commission will conduct a goal-setting session with the full commission to address questions such as: What’s next for the MRC post-dredging? Who will manage greenways and riverwalks once constructed? How can we deal most effectively with mixed uses on the river? We will revisit successful river revitalization efforts elsewhere and learn from them.

Balancing development with water-dependent commercial uses is not only desirable, but necessary. Even if the Urban Infill Plan is not followed exactly as proposed, it is critical and accepted guide for making decisions. In openly discussing our differences, we will seek and find common ground to develop a plan that will help the river’s different communities flourish. Then we can all truly serve as “One Voice for the River.”

Sincerely,
Irela Bagué, Chair
DREDGING IS THE MIAMI RIVER COMMISSION’S BIGGEST JOB.

On April 9, 2004, the Army Corps of Engineers signed a contract with Weston Solutions and Bean Environmental to maintenance dredge the Miami River. The project commenced Sept. 25, and the official launching ceremony followed Oct. 27.

Planning for the Miami River’s dredging took far longer than the dredging itself. Funding, planning, permitting and contracting for the $74 million project took 32 years and involved cooperation in Washington, Tallahassee, Jacksonville and local government. The dredging is expected to take two to four years.

In fact, the river had not been dredged since the first channel was dug more than 70 years ago. In ports large and small, maintenance dredging is routine.

The Miami River can lay claim to rivaling Tampa as Florida’s fourth largest port – with an estimated $4.1 billion in goods moving through the river each year.

The contractors are coordinating with P&L Towing to allow for continued navigation as the dredging proceeds from west to east. To minimize traffic disruption, the dredging company will restrict dredging near bridges to night hours, and limit temporary closures to one bridge per night. More information on the dredging schedule is available at the contractor’s website at www.ourmiamiriver.com.

Dredging has begun on the upper river, where the shipping industry is centered, and will proceed toward the river’s mouth. The Barredor Del Rio (River Sweeper), a dredger built especially for this project, scoops the sediments from the river’s bottom and swings them onto the barge.

From there, the sediments go first to an upland staging area on NW North River Drive near the salinity dam at the end of the river’s federally navigable channel. There, major debris is separated from sediments, which are processed into a “filter cake” and placed into 100 sealed trucks a day for transport to two existing Class 3 landfills.

In response to the concerns of the community, the Army Corps is prohibiting open-air drying of the sediments, which environmental agencies have determined as contaminated but not toxic, and therefore not presenting a public health hazard.

In addition to the website updates, the dredging subcommittee will continue to host monthly public meetings. The Corps, the county, the city, contractors and the MRC will make joint presentations before a variety of local community-based organizations.

NW Fifth Street Bridge:

River traffic is captive to its weakest link. Immediately after it was built in 1929, the NW Fifth Street Bridge was deemed a hazard to navigation, as it was built into a navigational channel, is askew to the river, and has no spillways – thereby creating a strong current. The piers also overhang the fenders. All this has resulted in the bridge being struck 12 times in 10 years, twice knocking out service for eight months.

We commend the Florida Department of Transportation for appropriating more than $44 million to replace the bridge. We encourage FDOT to remove the existing bridge, so dredging can take place right before the new bridge is built.

Working in proper sequence is best for the surrounding neighborhoods and provides the opportunity to remove contaminated sediments, which would otherwise be left behind.
At the heart of the plan is a vision of the river in three distinct sections, described in greater detail on the map at the bottom of Page 6.

Near the western end of the river, the $1.3 billion Miami Intermodal Center (MIC) project promises to transform the neighborhood and to serve as a transit point for rail, bus, taxi, rental car, private auto, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic. The Florida Department of Transportation is designing the MIC to serve the same sort of function as New York City’s Grand Central Station and other multimodal facilities in major cities around the world.


The meeting emphasized the economic importance of the marine industry on the river (see the testimonials on Page 2) and its importance to the local economy. The key presentations were on shipping and recreational boatyards. The Miami River holds a critical niche market in Caribbean trade. It is Florida’s only shallow-draft port, serving more than 50 Caribbean ports which require Miami River’s shallow-draft vessels for trade and humanitarian goods.

The recreational boat industry is equally important for Miami River’s future. Every time a megayacht pulls into a recreational boatyard for servicing, the direct and indirect economic benefit is estimated at $385,000, according to a report by Thomas J. Murray and Associates.

The river’s industry includes commercial fishing businesses, which provide fresh stone crab, lobster, shrimp and other seafood to local restaurants and markets. The multiple components of the Miami River’s Marine Industry generates 8,000 local direct and indirect jobs, according to a Beacon Council study.

At the Miami River Marine Industries Symposium, participants identified a series of action steps. The Economic Development and Commerce Working Group plans to implement these steps, which include

- Develop a designated boat slip bank to protect against further net loss of existing slips;
- Continue to advocate for federal Homeland Security dollars for security initiatives in the Miami River;
- Market currently available business incentive programs to attract marine-industrial businesses to the appropriate sections of the Miami River Corridor.

The Greenway Will Unite Miami’s Multicultural Neighborhoods, provide direct access to the riverfront and create a destination landscape for residents and visitors alike.

The Miami River Greenway Action Plan, prepared by the Trust for Public Land, was unanimously adopted by the Miami River Commission, the Miami City Commission and the Miami-Dade County Commission in 2001. The plan is being put to work, as some greenway sections are under construction, with others about to break ground.

On Nov. 2, 2004, Miami-Dade voters passed the general obligation bond, with $7.5 million for the Miami River Greenway. The City of Miami has been awarded $6.16 million from the Florida Department of Transportation, and has another $2 million in the city’s bond issue for the Miami River Greenway. Additional sections will break ground in early 2005. The Trust for Public Land has been awarded $2.5 million from the Knight Foundation, which will be used for engineering documents for future greenway sections.

The private sector has been an invaluable partner in creating the Miami River Greenway. Public riverwalks are included in every private development along the Miami River, including Brickell on the River, Neo Vertika, Latitude on the River, One Miami, Dupont, Riverfront East and West, Royal Atlantic, Riverhouse Lofts, Terrazas River Park Village, Hurricane Cove, One Riverview Square, Agua Clara, River Run South, Brisas Del Rio and Reflections on the River.

Sixteen new restaurants adjoining the riverwalk are in permitting stages.

In the next year, visitors will see historical signage along the greenways,
The river consists of three distinct, coexisting zones:

**UPPER RIVER:** West of NW 22nd Ave. This is the center of the river’s trade and maritime industry. By 2008, it will also include the Miami Intermodal Center to link rail, pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

**MIDDLE RIVER:** Fifth Street Bridge to NW 22 Ave. The river travels through historic neighborhoods, parks, and the Civic Center area, and includes marine-industrial businesses.

**LOWER RIVER:** Biscayne Bay to Fifth Street Bridge: High-density mixed uses, including residential, offices, condos, hotels and river-oriented commercial businesses. Riverwalks link parks, historical landmarks and businesses on each side of the river.

**STORM WATER WORKING GROUP**

Sallye Jude and Arsenio Milian, Co-Chairs

The subgroup is implementing the Miami River Basin Water Quality Improvement Report, which was expressly designed to address this problem.

The suburb includes representatives of the Environmental Protection Agency, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental Resource Management, the Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department, City of Miami and the South Florida Water Management District. The report (available at www.miamirivercommission.org) contains 32 recommendations at an estimated cost of $18.4 million; $7 million of those items have been completed, including stormwater retrofitting projects in East Little Havana, downtown and Allapattah.

Further funding has become available as residents approved on Nov. 2 additional money for stormwater improvement projects. The Miami River Commission, in partnership with Florida International University, installed environmental messages adjacent to storm drains throughout the river, warning against polluting near drains which flow into the river.

THE MAIN SOURCE OF POLLUTION INTO THE MIAMI RIVER and Biscayne Bay is an antiquated stormwater drainage and sanitary sewer system serving the 69-square-mile Miami River Basin.

The stormwater project is funded by Villagers Inc. The Miami River Greenway Action Plan is available on our website at www.miamirivercommission.org.

THE OLD DUPONT PLAZA WAS TORN DOWN to make way for twin residential towers and a riverwalk connecting the Miami River with Biscayne Bay. The Brickell on the River project is under construction in the background, just west of the Brickell Avenue Bridge.

IN 2004, 75 OF THESE ADVISORY SIGNS were placed by storm drains along the Miami River as part of a public information program to discourage polluters.

IN 2004, 75 OF THESE ADVISORY SIGNS were placed by storm drains along the Miami River as part of a public information program to discourage polluters.
The Miami River Marine Group – A Consortium of private shipping-related industries on the river – was awarded more than $2 million in Department of Homeland Security grants in 2003-2004 to help bring the river’s private terminals into compliance with the nation’s new Homeland Security laws.

The Federal Maritime Security Act required all international ports to adopt a security plan by Dec. 31, 2003, and implement it by July 1, 2004. The river’s businesses and terminals not only met but exceeded the requirements, and the U.S. Coast Guard cited the Port of Miami River’s security plan as a national model.

The $2 million in grants were spread among 22 terminals, with cameras strategically located up and down the river and in terminals. All agencies can tap into these cameras at any moment from any number of remote locations. Those agencies include the Department of Homeland Security, Drug Enforcement Administration, City of Miami Police Department, Miami-Dade Police Department, Coast Guard, Customs, Border Patrol, and the Florida Department of Fish and Wildlife, among other agencies.

The terminal security improvements include fencing, lighting, ID systems, 24/7 security guards and a search of all boats. Three days before a boat’s arrival, all law enforcement agencies are informed of which vessels are arriving, what and who will be on the boat, and the destination terminal of each vessel. If a serious question arises on any background check, law enforcement officers board the vessel at sea before it enters the Miami River. The river’s businesses were commended by the Coast Guard for their diligence in attending to the community’s and nation’s security.