

# Benefits of river revitalization plan questioned

CRI, June 29, 2010

A water issue expert has raised doubts about the ecological benefits of a project in Beijing to make a long dried-up water course flow again at a cost of roughly 100 million yuan per kilometer, the *Beijing Times* reports.

The municipal government project entails the creation of six manmade lakes connected to streams and wetlands along the 170-kilometer-long Beijing section of the Yongdinghe River which has been dry for at least 30 years.

But to create the so-called ecological corridor, the river will require about 130 million cubic meters of water. The water will consist of 80 percent reclaimed water and 20 percent rain and floodwater, according to the Beijing Water Authority.

The project also calls for artificial trees and turf to be planted along riverbanks as well as anti-seepage material to be laid in the riverbed. Much work also needs to be done to clean the river's course of industrial waste runoff and other garbage that has collected in it over the years.

The Yongding River, referred to as Beijing's mother river, was once the city's largest reservoir. But because of Beijing's rapid development and droughts, it has been dry since the 1970s.

The river is one of the main tributaries of the Haihe River system and was the largest river flowing through the capital before it effectively dried up. Its course ran through Mentougou, Shijingshan, Fengtai, Fangshan and Daxing districts.

Wang Jian, a Beijing-based water specialist, traced the Yongdinghe River to its source in Ningwu County of northern China's Shanxi Province in mid-2007, where he discovered the groundwater system had been destroyed by coal mining and soil erosion from over-farming and the felling of forest trees.

Worse still, more than 260 reservoirs had been built upstream of the Yongdinghe River in a totally random and deregulated fashion, contributing to the river's demise.

To further complicate the situation, at least 14 golf courses have been built along the river course within Beijing. Developers argue that their projects have helped the government to address the problem of desertification that plagues the dry river course. But environmentalists warn that the hugely water-consuming golf courses will only further damage the city's already seriously depleted groundwater system.

According to the plan, the ecological development zone will extend 170 kilometers and cover 1,500 square kilometers by 2014. It will add 1,000 hectares of water surface space and 9,000 hectares of vegetation to the city.

But Wang Jian questions the project's ecological ambitions, noting that urban development has irreversibly changed water circulation patterns. He also said the diversity and habitats of waterborne species could only be fostered if the river was as pristine as before.

The projected 17-billion-yuan (US\$2.5-billion) investment is expected to succeed in creating artificial water scenery and a flow recycled by hauling the water daily from downstream to upstream, according to the plan.

[http://www.china.org.cn/environment/2010-06/29/content\\_20379268.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/environment/2010-06/29/content_20379268.htm)