

Dead River comes back to life in China

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A river that went bone dry two decades ago in China is bursting back to life following successful implementation of an ambitious environmental project. Yongding River, historically the biggest to flow through Beijing, is slated to be brought back to life by filling water into Wanping Lake, one of four lakes along its course. The lake's bed has recently been reconstructed so it can hold water more efficiently and it is now being refilled.

Zhang Minqiu, an engineer with the Beijing Institute of Water and the designer of the project, said the four lakes and a circulation line connecting them are the first phase of the overall restoration.

Yongding River, which flows through five provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, spans 170 km within Beijing and runs through five districts in the west and south of the city.

The river has been almost completely dry since 1992 as its ecological systems on either side of it have been damaged, Zhang said. The municipal government has invested 1.4 billion yuan on the first phase of restoring the river and the riverside ecology.

The initial phase lasted for one year and involved 14.2 km of the river course. The entire project will last five years.

"More than 98 per cent of the water used to restore the river is reclaimed water from five sewage treatment plants in Beijing; other sources include rainwater and water from the Guanting Reservoir," said Zhang.

One of the most difficult aspects of the project has been the coordination of the many different organisations involved, including water authorities, the governments of five districts, the development and reform commission and other institutions, he said.

"All participants are under huge pressure. It's the first time we have tried to complete such a major project connected to such a big river course," he said. Cai Yong, head of the Yongding River Management Office in Fengtai district, said great attention was being paid to Wanping and Xiaoyue lakes. "Our next step will be the greening of the river banks." Wanping Lake, which covers a total area of 69 hectares, is set to get 12 hectares of new green space, China Daily reported.

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