

“Four Large River Project” in S. Korea: Ecological Problems, Consequences and Challenges

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During the last presidential campaign in 2007, then president candidate, Lee, Myoung Park, as part of his campaign promise to increase the rate of employment, and improve the economy of Korea formulated the Korea Grand Canal Project. This project was designed to connect the country via a true canal system involving the four largest rivers. After being elected the promise came under national debate. Due to the opposition from grassroots organizations and public, he changed it from the Grand Canal Project to the Four Large Rivers Restoration project.

With respect to the Nakdong River, this involved the construction of eight weirs, construction of more irrigation reservoirs, increasing dam height, dredging the rivers, reconstructing the banks, construction of a bike trail, and construction of a second estuarine barrage in the estuary.

The project, expected to be completed by 2012 and costing approximately US\$18 billion, turns a free flowing river into a series of reservoirs to be used for water storage. Limnologists are concerned that the project will lead to the eutrophication of the river along with intensive habitat modification. The project originally emphasized hydrological regulation (water storage and flood control), ecology, culture and economic revitalization. At this point scientists are extremely concerned about the lack of effort directed towards the ecological and cultural aspects of the project.