

## WORLD FAMOUS MARSHLANDS ON A JOURNEY TO LIFE

*What Saddam Drained and Tried to Annihilate is Now Slowly Coming Back to Life*

(Marshlands, Iraq) -- From 1991 until 2003, Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist Regime nearly destroyed the Mesopotamian Marshlands, one of the largest wetlands systems in the world.

Massive drainage structures were used to divert water away from the 8,000 square miles of marshes. The 5,000-year old Marsh Arab society was exiled and nearly annihilated. Thousands and thousands of residents were brutally murdered.



"These people lived an existence on top of mounds, surrounded by water, for literally thousands of years," said U.S. Navy Captain Hank Domeracki. "They were fish farmers and grew large amounts of rice. They traveled from village to village by wooden boats."

With help from USAID, the American military and coalition partners, the new Iraqi government has been working to restore the wetlands at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates in southern Iraq. Reflooding has now covered 25- to 30-percent of the original marshlands.



Contractors for USAID have already released more than two million fingerlings back into the marshes. Marsh residents prefer grass carp over other fish species as they grow larger in a shorter time frame. As biological controllers, grass carp feed on aquatic vegetation and help keep the marshes and canals clean.



The carp – which have rounded scales, soft fins and toothless jaws – are very popular with Iraqis which translates into higher incomes for the marshland farmers.

Additionally, Iraq's Ministry of Agriculture has established 30 alfalfa farms in the marshes to provide livestock feed. A veterinary service has been built to supply medicine and treat livestock diseases for the areas 14,000 animals.



Further, 72 demonstration farms have been established in the marshlands to introduce new crops and improved management practices for sorghum, wheat, barley and broad beans.

*Story by Paul McKellips, U.S. Department of State, Public Affairs GO Team, on assignment in Iraq.*

Report# 002-07-pmck

