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## Construction Begins on Bridge for Everglades Water Restoration

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12/09/2009

Eco Factory

An \$81 million project to restore fresh water flows to the Everglades - the largest construction project in the history of the National Park Service - a project that has been 20 years in the making - was started Friday on the Tamiami Trail.

To break ground on a one-mile bridge on the Tamiami Trail, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Tom Strickland joined officials from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the State of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District.

The Tamiami Trail is a filled roadbed that cuts across the core of the Everglades and obstructs water movement and wildlife. The bridge will raise the roadway to allow more fresh water to flow through Everglades National Park and into Florida Bay while maintaining vehicle traffic flow between Naples and Miami.

Groundbreaking for the Tamiami Trail bridge (Photo courtesy DOI)

"The Everglades are one of America's most treasured places, but for more than 90 years, the Tamiami Trail has effectively served as a dike, interrupting natural water flows that are vital to the natural ecosystem," said Secretary Salazar.

"Thanks to the hard work of many stakeholders in South Florida, we are building a bridge that will help to restore those water flows while still allowing the Trail to serve its important transportation function for the people of this state." he said.

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," said Kirk Fordham, CEO of the Everglades Foundation. "Many attendees at today's groundbreaking ceremony have battle scars that were inflicted over a 20-year struggle to get this project off the ground. The groundbreaking of the first phase of bridging the Tamiami Trail is long overdue."

He called the bridge "a critical first step" in providing benefits to Everglades National Park, from restoration of natural water flow and re-establishment of a wildlife travel corridor to improving conditions for fish reproduction and wading-bird nesting.

"This project launches us on an exciting voyage to improve habitat in Everglades National Park, provide much-needed jobs to Floridians and enhance recreational opportunities for those who appreciate our way of life in South Florida," Fordham said.

The Tamiami Trail was constructed in the 1920s with the intention of linking Tampa and Miami. The bridge project, which is expected to be completed in May 2013, is located in Miami-Dade County, adjacent to the northern boundary of Everglades National Park.

The process to reach agreement on the bridge was at times complex and time-consuming, involving many stakeholders and subject to rigorous environmental review.

In November, the Army Corps of Engineers awarded an \$81 million contract that includes constructing the bridge, and raising and reinforcing an additional 9.7 miles of the trail.

As a major component of the Modified Water Deliveries Project, also known as Mod Waters, the bridge will restore a more natural water flow to Northeast Shark River Slough, a portion of Everglades National Park which Congress added in 1989.

Once completed, Mod Waters will provide a foundation for future restoration projects to increase the quantity, quality, timing and distribution of fresh water to the Everglades. Planning has already begun on the next series of projects that will raise the roadway.

"Other projects to improve the Southern Everglades ecosystem will soon follow including the Picayune Strand Restoration Project in Southwest Florida and the C-111 N. Spreader Canal Project to benefit Florida Bay," said Fordham. "These initiatives will complement land acquired for water storage and filter marshes by the pending U.S. Sugar Corp. land acquisition."

Project designers with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have written that the Tamiami Trail bridge project could increase the flow of fresh water into Taylor Slough and eastern Everglades National Park by 70 percent or more. Yet even that flow is far below historic flow levels that originally created the Everglades.

Salazar said that the Obama administration has made Everglades restoration a high priority. The President's economic recovery plan included \$117 million for the Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of the Interior to restore habitat and to provide additional fresh water for the South Florida ecosystem.

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12/08/2009

Environment News Service

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## Legislators hold hearing on Everglades restoration

12/08/2009

News Press - Online

Republican Representative Julio Robaina of Miami.

The Associated Press December 2, 2009

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6:43 A.M. — HOMESTEAD A hearing has been scheduled to discuss Everglades restoration efforts in Homestead.

Florida lawmakers are set to meet this afternoon.

The Florida House Joint Legislative Committee on Everglades Oversight is seeing public opinions. Some Everglades issues include the controversial \$536 million U.S. Sugar land deal; concerns about the C-111 canal overhaul increasing flood risks to South Miami-Dade farms; even efforts to push Miami-Dade's urban development closer to Everglades National Park.

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## Bring flow of fresh water back to the Everglades

12/06/2009

Ocala.com

Joseph Z. Duke

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PALMETTO BAY - My family connection to South Florida and the Everglades began with my grandparents, so when Nathaniel Reed asked me to join the Everglades Foundation to help with restoration, I was honored to say yes.

Albert Gammage, my grandfather, was a circuit preacher in South Florida. In 1921, soon after my mother, Alice, was born in Tarpon Springs, he moved his wife and eight children to Miami to start a permanent church there.

The Everglades were, for the most part, in a natural state when they arrived and created a wilderness boundary to the west of Miami. But change was coming quickly to the Everglades. The drainage project that would transform the "River of Grass" into productive agricultural land was under way, along with construction of the Tamiami Trail, which would cross it. Soon, the shallow and slow-flowing, 100-mile-wide river from Lake Okeechobee to Florida Bay would be strangled.

The Glades weren't widely regarded as beautiful or wondrous then. They were "God-forsaken," "hellish" and "mosquito-infested," in the common sentiment of the time.

When I was a young boy, in the 1950s, my father and uncles would take me fishing in the mangrove creeks and backwater sloughs of the Ten Thousand Islands. We launched our wooden skiffs from Chokoloskee, Everglades City and Marco Island. We fished for snook and spent at least part of the day lost in a confusing but beautiful natural maze.

To get there, we crossed the Everglades on the Tamiami Trail west from Miami. I didn't know at the time that the road we traveled was blocking the water flow and backing it up to the north, drowning ancient tree islands and wildlife. The trail, along with miles of dikes and canals, was choking off the life-giving flow of fresh water supplying Florida Bay to the south.

By then, Lake Okeechobee was firmly under man's control and no longer flooded its banks to the south as it had forever; most of its waters were diverted through canals east and west to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

As a child, nature seemed to me immense and indestructible. As an adult, I've come to know how vulnerable it is.

I've learned that, without a flow of fresh water, Florida Bay, the sprawling estuary at the southern tip of the state, has become too salty. The bay historically had a mix of fresh water from the Everglades and salt water from the Gulf of Mexico and was the perfect nursery for the shrimp, lobsters and reef fish of the Florida Keys. The entire ecosystem now teeters on collapse.

I've joined with my fellow board members of the Everglades Foundation who share my commitment to restore the flow of fresh water.

The engineering to do it is not technically difficult: Build water-storage facilities to amass enough water to replenish the ecosystem and construct filtering marshes into which the floodwaters of Lake Okeechobee would be directed and cleansed. At the same time, build a bridge over part of the Tamiami Trail to let that water flow south.

The actual work is simple. The hard part is convincing some of our policy makers that it must be done.

You may have heard a lot lately about the plan for the South Florida Water Management District to buy U.S. Sugar Corp. land. If you fly over the land south of Lake Okeechobee, you'll understand why Gov. Charlie Crist so strongly favors the plan. Where once were only Everglades, today is mostly sugar-cane fields.

The plan would take some 73,000 acres of agricultural lands out of sugar-cane production and convert them into water storage and filtering marshes. The marshes would be flooded, allowing the natural process by which plants take up nutrients to remove the high levels of pollutants. The clean water would then flow south out of the marshes, eventually ending up mixing with the salt water of Florida Bay, as it did for eons before man interfered.

To realize this goal, we have to cross a political minefield. Opposition to the plan comes from a handful of powerful interest groups. The role of the Everglades Foundation is to counter the opposition with science-based advocacy. Our mission is to engage and motivate people to restore the Everglades, the only natural system of its kind in the world and America's only subtropical national park.

We have a briefly opened door to acquire the land we need and should do so. If we miss the opportunity, we risk losing one of the last great places on Earth.

Joseph Z. Duke, a member of the board of the Everglades

Foundation and president of Jacksonville-based Off Road Holdings, is an industrial designer and entrepreneur.

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## Work Starts on \$81 Million Bridge as Part of Florida Everglades Restoration

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12/05/2009

News-Press

Daily News Staff and Wire

A frequent wonder observed in Florida's Everglades. Healthy coastal ecosystems benefit the economy and so it's imperative that these systems be protected.

A contentious Everglades restoration project that a judge once called an "environmental bridge to nowhere" kicked off Friday, two decades after Congress authorized it.

"Today we have reached an historic milestone in the restoration of the Everglades," U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said at the project's ceremonial start.

The government plans to build a one-mile bridge along a stretch of U.S. 41 in Miami-Dade County, removing a virtual dam to the once free-flowing waters of the Everglades. The road, known as Tamiami Trail, turns from north-south to east-west in downtown Naples as it runs between Miami and Tampa.

State and federal officials, along with environmentalists, have lauded the \$81 million project as a crucial step toward restoring more natural water flow into Everglades National Park.

"This is a major step forward for Everglades restoration," Stuart Appelbaum, of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said Friday.

Appelbaum said the bridge wouldn't rise high into the air, like a bridge over a river, but would be similar to the low-slung bridges over wetlands where Interstate 10 runs between New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

The Miccosukee Tribe of Indians, however, claim the U.S. 41 project could lead to "irreparable destruction" in the region where they live and have been fighting it in federal court.

Last year, U.S. District Judge Ursula Ungaro in Miami issued an injunction stopping the corps from proceeding. Ungaro agreed with the tribe that the corps didn't fully analyze environmental impacts and alternatives and that further work could be a waste of taxpayer dollars.

The judge called it an "environmental bridge to nowhere."

But in June, Ungaro lifted the injunction, citing the 2009 Omnibus Act, in which Congress funded and ordered construction of the bridge. The judge said she no longer had jurisdiction.

The Miccosukee Tribe claims Congress hijacked their case from federal court, and that the bridge will lead to flooding of their land and further complicate Everglades restoration.

"They're going to damage the rest of the Everglades because of it," tribe attorney Dexter Lehtinen said.

"They're going to back up water on Miccosukee land," he added, calling Congress's involvement "potentially unconstitutional."

The project is part of an overall multibillion-dollar effort to, in effect, re-engineer nature to work more naturally. The entire Everglades ecosystem has suffered from years of dikes, dams and diversions to make way for homes and farms across crowded South Florida. Development and farming also have polluted the water.

Members of Florida's congressional delegation lauded the start of the bridge work as a sign of gathering momentum for Everglades restoration.

"This is not only a substantive start of a project of enormous proportions but it's symbolic as well," said Florida's U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Tallahassee.

A groundbreaking ceremony is planned for Jan. 7 at an Everglades restoration project in the Picayune Strand State Forest in rural Collier County.

U.S. Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart of Miami said the nation faces a "difficult fiscal environment" but that more money for Everglades restoration is "about as high a priority as there is out there."

"I feel relatively good about it," said Diaz-Balart, a Republican whose district includes inland Collier County.

The state and federal governments have been entrenched in a decades-long effort to clean the pollutants and restore some natural water movement that used to flow in a shallow sheet from the Kissimmee River basin near Orlando down through Everglades National Park and into Florida Bay.

The entire process, however, has been mired by lawsuits, funding shortfalls and political bickering.

Florida also is working to buy 73,000 acres of farmland from U.S. Sugar Corp. in the Everglades in a \$536 million deal. Officials hope to use that land to construct reservoirs and marshes to clean the water before it heads south into the remainder of the ecosystem.

(Staff writer Eric Staats contributed to this report.)

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## Construction to begin on major Everglades project

12/05/2009

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News Chief - Online, The

t 4:38 p.m. WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. - A contentious Everglades restoration project that a judge once called an "environmental bridge to nowhere" kicked off Friday with a visit from the interior secretary, two decades after Congress authorized it. "Today we have reached an historic milestone in the restoration of the Everglades," U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said at the project's ceremonial start.

The government plans to build a one-mile bridge along a South Florida roadway that has acted as a virtual dam to the once free-flowing waters of the Everglades. The Tamiami Trail runs from Miami to Tampa, and federal officials, along with environmentalists, have lauded the \$81 million project as a crucial step toward restoring more natural water flow into Everglades National Park.

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Appelbaum, of the Army Corps, said the Tamiami Trail bridge will be completed by 2013 and serves as one "piece of the puzzle" in attempts to restore the ecosystem by allowing more water to flow under the road and into the park, mimicking its more natural state.

"The fact that this bridge is finally being built is nothing short of a miracle," said Kirk Fordham, CEO of the Everglades Foundation. "It's a huge symbol. This will probably be one of those great moments in the history of the Everglades, one of the most significant first steps in restoring the resource." All rights reserved. This copyrighted material may not be re-published without permission. Links are encouraged. Add a Comment ( ' on this topic. Featured Listings Events Sponsored by: Most ed briefs Archive More AP es Photo s Copyright © 2009 Chief.com All rights reserved. Restricted use only.

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## Construction to begin on major Everglades project

12/04/2009

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Sarasota Herald-Tribune - Online

BRIAN SKOLOFF

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. - A contentious Everglades restoration project that a judge once called an "environmental bridge to nowhere" kicked off Friday with a visit from the interior secretary, two decades after Congress authorized it.

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WSVN-TV - Online

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12/04/2009

Naples Daily News - Online

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"I feel relatively good about it," said Diaz-Balart, a Republican whose district includes inland Collier County.

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(Staff writer Eric Staats contributed to this report.)

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## **Construction to begin on major Everglades project**

12/04/2009

Associated Press (AP) - Tallahassee Bureau

Skoloff, Brian

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Palm Beach Post - Online

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Commentary: At PGA Tour Q School, Esteban Toledo knows peace where most only know stress 7:00 p.m.

Saturday's 5K race kicks Palm Beaches Marathon Festival into stride 6:51 p.m.

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Ocala.com

BRIAN SKOLOFF

AP metro

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12/04/2009

Gainesville Sun - Online, The

BRIAN SKOLOFF

AP metro

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