



Tamiami Trail 2.6-Mile Bridge: A Key to Restoration Success

Introduction

Bridging Tamiami Trail is indisputably one of the most important elements of Everglades restoration. For nearly 25 years, Audubon has supported raising the roadway on the Trail to restore the natural flow of water and the wildlife abundance in the Everglades. Construction of a 2.6 mile bridge will build upon existing restoration progress and allow more water to move into dry areas of Everglades National Park and Florida Bay.



Historically, the Everglades delivered freshwater south from Lake Okeechobee in a slow uninterrupted pattern called

sheetflow, across the land in the Southern Everglades until it finally reached Florida Bay. In 1928, Tamiami Trail was constructed to connect Tampa and Miami by road. Its construction dissected the natural flow of water at the historic heart of flow into what is now Everglades National Park.

To protect the roadway, significant amounts of water north of the Trail are now diverted to the east coast by a series of canals instead of flowing into the Park. This diversion has resulted in parched wetlands and significant reductions in wading bird populations in the Park and Florida Bay.

Everglades National Park provides important foraging and breeding habitat for more than 400 species of birds and functions as a major corridor for migratory bird populations. More than 90% of nesting for five key indicator species, the Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Tricolored Heron, White Ibis, and Wood Stork, occurred in the Southern Everglades marshes and mangrove estuaries during the 1930s and early 1940s. Without sufficient freshwater flow into these areas, habitat conditions changed and populations of these species have declined to just a fraction of their historic numbers. Bridges will enable a path for water to flow south under Tamiami Trail and will restore the marsh and mangrove habitats.

“For nearly a century, Tamiami Trail has cut off the natural freshwater flow that makes the Everglades one of the richest ecosystems on Earth. Building a 2.6 mile bridge is a critical piece of the restoration puzzle aimed at restoring the River of Grass.”

**- Julie Hill-Gabriel, Esq.
Director of Everglades Policy**

Responding to Florida’s Coastal Water Crises

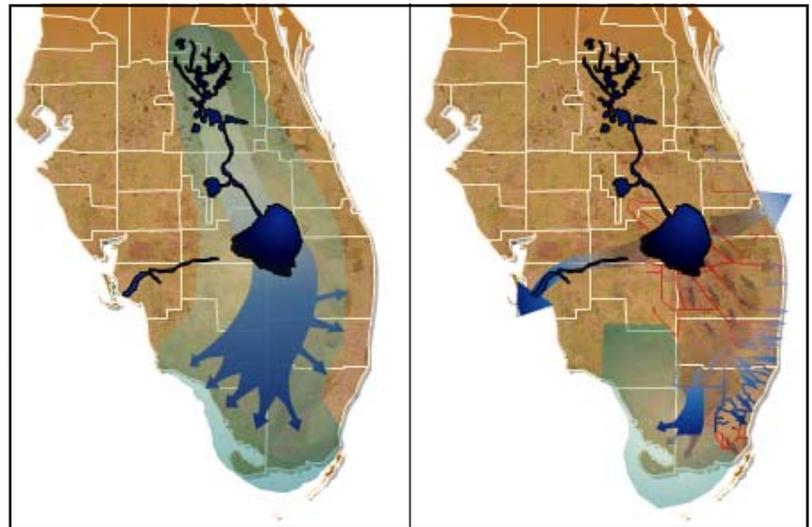
Florida Bay is experiencing a massive seagrass die-off because not enough freshwater is reaching the Bay. At the same time, billions of gallons of freshwater a day have been discharged from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries, causing algae blooms to form.

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The heart of Everglades restoration is reconnecting the natural flow of freshwater from Lake Okeechobee south to Florida Bay. This requires storing water south of Lake Okeechobee that is now discharged to tide during the wet season and other high water events and removing the barriers to sheetflow south so that this water can follow a more natural path to places where it is needed.

Bridging Tamiami Trail is an important piece of this puzzle that in conjunction with the Central Everglades Planning Project and additional storage projects, will help to move water to the right places at the right times.



Historic Flow

Current Flow

Combating the Effects of Climate Change

The threat of sea level rise and saltwater intrusion make bridging Tamiami Trail even more essential. Restoring the flow of freshwater through the Everglades will help push back against higher sea levels, reducing saltwater intrusion into the aquifer, and slowing rates of coastal land loss while maintaining vital freshwater habitats near the coast.

Removing this obstruction to the natural freshwater flow will improve and make the habitat more resilient to change. By making sure freshwater is reaching the drinking water aquifers, this will protect the water supply for more than 8 million Floridians from salt water intrusion.

A Phased Approach to Restoration

Everglades restoration managers are conducting efforts to bridge Tamiami Trail in a phased approach. Ultimately 6.5 miles within a 10.7-mile segment of the road will be replaced with bridges. A one-mile bridge was completed in 2013. This bridge enables water to move from the Water Conservation Areas north of the Trail to Everglades National Park south of the Trail. The 2.6-mile bridge in the first segment of the Tamiami Trail Next Steps project.

A Collaborative Path to Funding

Diverse sources of funding are making the 2.6 mile Tamiami Trail bridge possible. In addition to funding from the National Park Service, the Florida Department of Transportation is contributing \$90 million and the U.S. Department of Transportation funded \$20 million from its Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) V grant program. This collaborative approach should serve as a model for future projects that benefit the Everglades and South Florida's citizens and visitors.

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