Audubon FLORIDA

Tamiami Trail One-Mile Bridge

Showing Unprecedented Progress in Everglades Restoration

Historically, the Everglades delivered freshwater south from Lake Okeechobee in a slow uninterrupted pattern called sheetflow. To enable urban development and agriculture in the area, the sheetflow was cut off while the water was drained and replaced by a complex system of controlled canals and ditches. Since 1928, Tamiami Trail has acted as a dam, blocking water at the historic heart of flow into Everglades National Park. Raising Tamiami Trail is the key to reconnecting historic sloughs that serve as prime habitat for wading birds and other wildlife.

The one-mile Tamiami Trail bridge, completed in March 2013, is part of the Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park (Mod Waters) project. The goal of Mod Waters, approved by Congress in 1989, is to re-establish the historic sheetflow from the Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) into Everglades National Park and Florida Bay. Fluctuation in project costs and debates about the best course of action resulted in numerous delays. But through perseverance to overcome these challenges, construction of the one-mile bridge serves as one of the nation's great achievements in ecosystem restoration.

More than 90% of nesting efforts 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 estuary during the 1930s and early 1940s. The South Florida Water Management District's 2012 South Florida Wading Bird Report demonstrated the third consecutive year of poor wading bird nesting across the Everglades. Audubon scientists specifically studying Roseate Spoonbill nesting in Florida Bay have witnessed the species react positively to beneficial changes in water management practices, demonstrating that when natural patterns of water flow in the Everglades are restored, the wildlife respond. Such positive changes should be realized in the near future as a result of the Tamiami Trail one-mile bridge. On the heels of the one-mile bridge completion, another 5.5 miles of bridging is planned as the Tamiami Trail Next Steps project. When the full 6.5 miles of roadway are lifted, the parched Everglades will be rehydrated and habitat connectivity will improve the chances of recreating the historic abundance of life in the Everglades.

Photo by Mac Stone

The National Research Council (NRC), in its 2008 report on Everglades restoration, noted that "Everglades restoration is at a crossroads: completion of the Mod Waters project would put in place a cornerstone for CERP, while failure to implement Mod Waters will delay critical components of the CERP and allow the Everglades ecosystem to continue to degrade."[1] **Construction of the one-mile bridge answers this NRC call to action and paves the way for further restoration progress.**

[1] *Progress Toward Restoring the Everglades: The Second Biennial Review, 2008. National Research Council of the National Academies. The National Academies Press.*

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