



For Immediate Release

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Public comment: Ask U.S. Army Corps to DENY
A Federal Permit to DEGRADE and FILL WETLANDS
Ask U.S. Army Corps to PROTECT
Everglades Restoration, Drinking Water & the UDB

MIAMI, Fla. — The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers has extended the public comment period for a Federal Permit to degrade and fill wetlands to accommodate the proposed SR-836 extension outside of Miami-Dade County's Urban Development Boundary (UDB) and into the Everglades Footprint. The deadline for comments is now until Friday, July 26.

The Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX) is seeking a Federal Permit to fill and degrade wetlands for the proposed SR-836 extension project. If granted, the impact to quality of life for humans and wildlife could be devastating. If built, a southwestern extension of SR-836 would adversely impact hundreds of acres of jurisdictional wetlands within the Bird Drive Basin, which contains [3 of 68 Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Projects](#) within its boundary.

Concerned citizens, urban planning professionals, traffic engineers, as well as environmental and transit advocates spoke up against this project for years, but on September 27, 2018, the Miami-Dade County Commission [approved a Comprehensive Development Master Plan \(CDMP\) change](#) that would allow the highway to be built anyway. The proposed extension would be built atop land taxpayers have been purchasing for aquifer recharge and flood attenuation benefits since 1989. In 2000, this area was identified as part of the East Coast Buffer and identified as a component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). Recent Modeling and analysis shows extending this highway through the area will minimize the benefits outlined in the Congressional "Yellow Book," which defines the projects approved by Congress and outlines the benefits they will deliver for the largest wetlands restoration effort in the world.

The proposed SR-836 extension has been challenged by Citizens and Environmental groups because it would develop a 6-lane, 500-foot-wide expressway corridor extending approximately 13-14 miles southwest from the SR-836 interchange on 137th Avenue and NW 12th Street, with its southern terminus reconnecting with SW 136th Street. This proposed project would directly consume approximately 1,000 acres, and have pronounced, disturbing impacts on the surrounding wetlands and agricultural land. >

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The applicant has not yet determined a final corridor for its proposed project, instead opting to seek approval for multiple potential corridors, the course of which have shifted multiple times as the project has moved through its approval process. All proposed routes, however, pass directly through the Bird Drive Basin and the North Trail Basin, and impinge upon the Pennsuco Wetlands. Additionally, all proposed routes are to pass through Miami-Dade County's Western Well-field, a drinking water source, and significant acreage of land currently used for agriculture.

Tropical Audubon Society President José Barros observes, "The approval of a Federal Permit to allow wetlands to be compromised would impede Everglades Restoration Projects, increase costs and time for implementation of restoration, compromise an important area for drinking water supply recharge and reduce the size of the Everglades footprint. The Restoration Projects currently underway are critical for CERP and for the health of Florida Bay and Biscayne Bay." Barros further asserts: "Denial of the Federal Permit is central to our conservation organization's mission. An approval would adversely affect the natural rhythm of wet and dry periods in the wetlands — a rhythm critical, for example, to the ability of the federally listed "Threatened" Wood Stork to gather food to feed their young during nesting season, along with countless other wildlife that rely upon the area for their survival."

Along these lines, the Everglades Coalition wrote a comprehensive letter opposing the road project and stated that the impacts to the Everglades footprint are unnecessary, as there are [other alternatives that](#) can avoid and/or minimize impacts to wetlands within the remaining historic Everglades.

According to Friends of the Everglades Environmental Consultant Laura Reynolds, "If we are to find real solutions to sending more water south, we must not allow conflicting projects to impede our progress," she says. Instead, she continues, "We must keep all our options on the table to deliver the Maximum benefits CERP promises, not only to our southern estuaries, but also to ensure future drinking water supply and ensure a maximum 'driving head' of freshwater at our coastal edges to keep saltwater intrusion at bay. These impacts can and must be avoided because there is no other land that could make up the important linkages now provided by the East Coast Buffer to achieve that crucial connection south."

Reynolds further states, " It is a simple fact that the closer you put the built environment to the Everglades, the lower the water table has to be, so we must keep the buffer as large as possible. We cannot simply engineer ourselves out of the water quality issues we face; we need to expand the special extent of wetlands generally to help clean water before it recharges our aquifer or reaches Biscayne and Everglades National parks." >



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Claudia Sabastiani, a member of the Miami Climate Alliance Steering Committee, observes:

“Miami Dade County continues to grow, and our seas continue to rise, while storms are increasing in intensity. Grasping at 1970s technology — which will simply perpetuate a car-centric county — is exactly the wrong move. What’s more, there are at least 19 different sections of the Climate Compact with which this proposed extension is in direct conflict, so the Miami Climate Alliance wonders how such an outdated strategy can possibly be justified?”

Landowners are also mobilizing against the proposed SR-836 extension: “I moved out to this area to enjoy peace and quiet, and this new road would change my quality of life,” **says Michelle Garcia, who is challenging Miami-Dade County’s decision to approve this project.** “While it may sound great to alleviate traffic for West Kendall residents, the science does not support it. I want real transit options that don’t cause new problems,” Garcia continues. “All this road will do for anyone who lives close to it is increase traffic near their homes! I want visionary leaders who can look 50 years into the future and make decisions based on science. Green-lighting this extension does not benefit all the residents of Miami-Dade County, rather it profits only a few landowners,” Garcia concludes.

TAKE ACTION

Statements postmarked on or before Friday, July 26, 2019 will become part of the public record. You can send your written statement on the SR-836 expansion project to Megan Clouser of US Army Corps of Engineers to 9900 SW 107 Avenue, Suite 203, Miami, FL 33176, or to Megan.L.Clouser@usace.army.mil

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Founded in 1969, **Friends of the Everglades** compels government agencies to comply with existing environmental laws, encourages politicians to recognize the long-term consequences of their actions and spreads awareness of the importance of the Everglades to the South Florida ecosystem. Learn more at www.everglades.org.

Founded in 1947, **Tropical Audubon Society** endeavors to conserve and restore natural South Florida ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitats through advocacy and education for the benefit of biological diversity and humanity itself. Learn more at www.tropicalaudubon.org.

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