



June 27, 2025

Governor Ron DeSantis  
Florida State Capitol  
400 S. Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Re: "Alligator Alcatraz" Misaligned with Everglades Restoration Priorities and Lacking in Environmental Assessment

Dear Governor DeSantis:

Everglades conservation and restoration is a unifying issue for Floridians, one that speaks to our shared love of the natural wonders of our state. The undersigned organizations have worked for decades to advance the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and related conservation and water quality initiatives that seek to improve environmental health, bolster local economies, protect wildlife, and ensure that future generations can explore and enjoy the best of what Florida has to offer.

**We write to vehemently oppose development of an immigration detention facility on the Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport site surrounded by Big Cypress National Preserve and less than eight miles from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness at Everglades National Park.** The site is also in close proximity to the Miccosukee Indian Village and the Seminole Big Cypress Reservation, among other state-managed conservation areas – all of which stand to be detrimentally impacted by the development plan outlined by the Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM).

The environmental impacts of developing in a remote area of the Everglades are likely to be significant, and have not been assessed by relevant agencies, Tribal interests, or the public. Critical concerns – including wetland and habitat impacts, water consumption, pollution, increased traffic, wildlife-vehicle collisions, and light pollution – have been ignored as construction is already well underway. Causing negative impacts such as those outlined above would be in stark contrast to the State's significant leadership and investment in CERP, and could undermine the multi-billion dollar taxpayer investment in restoration that has been a priority for the DeSantis Administration.

Potential impacts to the endangered Florida panther are particularly alarming. In 2024, 75% of panther fatalities were associated with vehicle strikes. The increased traffic associated with construction and operation of the facility poses a significant risk to this iconic Florida species. Additionally, lighting associated with construction and operation on the remote site may impact nightscapes at Big Cypress National Preserve, the only park in Florida designated by the International Dark-Sky Association, where Floridians and visitors can view the Milky Way.

The plan to develop the Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport is in direct misalignment with the economic interests and values of Floridians. A recent economic report by The Everglades Foundation and Earth Economics estimates the value of ecosystem services provided by the Everglades at over \$1 trillion over the next 50 years, with benefits to Florida's real estate and tourism economies receiving the largest boon from a healthy ecosystem. Maintaining connected and unimpacted wetland habitat across the Greater Everglades is key to the health of the ecosystem and watershed, as well as Florida's significant economic assets.

Floridians deeply understand the value – economic, cultural, and intrinsic – of our natural resources. Polling from National Parks Conservation Association and Florida Atlantic University indicates that Floridians from all political backgrounds overwhelmingly support healthy national parks and investing in restoration – 89% of Floridians value conservation in the face of overdevelopment, and 86% agree that our leaders have an obligation to protect and restore the Everglades.

Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve were designated to preserve the natural and cultural resources of these iconic landscapes for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. Development of an FDEM facility with associated resources and staff will impact park resources as well as the wildlife and water of the entire connected Greater Everglades. The State of Florida has a vested interest in the future of the Everglades, and should not undermine the health of these parks and the ecosystems they protect by bringing incompatible development to their doorstep.

The Everglades is a natural wonder, an incredible economic asset, and an ecosystem beloved by Floridians from all walks of life. FDEM must abandon efforts to develop “Alligator Alcatraz” at the Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport for the health of the Everglades and our national parks.

Signed,

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**1000 Friends of Florida**

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