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## EDITORIAL: A bridge to the Everglades

Palm Beach Post Editorial

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Though most attention has been focused on the deal to buy U.S. Sugar's land, Everglades restoration just got another big boost.

It's the ruling by U.S. District Judge Ursula Ungaro in Miami that the 20-year-old plan to build a bridge near the eastern end of Tamiami Trail can proceed. However successful the U.S. Sugar deal, the Everglades can't recover if water can't get there. The Tampa-to-Miami road, which opened in 1928 and also is known as U.S. 41, effectively acts as a dam blocking the flow of water into Everglades National Park. Culverts under the road don't let enough water pass through.



In 1989, Congress approved construction of the bridge, which would allow water into Northeast Shark River Slough, the Everglades' headwaters. Then bureaucratic and legal disputes stalled the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project. Last fall, Judge Ungaro issued an injunction, because the Miccosukee Tribe claimed that releases of water from the bridge would damage tribal lands. But on June 19, she lifted the injunction.

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"The U.S. Sugar sale and the Tamiami Trail bridge work hand in hand," said Everglades Foundation President Kirk Fordham. "Everglades National Park has been starved for water. This thing has been studied to death, but it looks as if the planets finally are starting to align." The Corps of Engineers now can take bids, and Mr. Fordham and a spokesman for the Corps of Engineers predict that if the tribe doesn't appeal, groundbreaking could take place in October. Cost of the bridge, which will be roughly 9 feet above the existing roadway, is an estimated \$212 million. The work will take roughly 3 1/2 years.

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Though building the bridge would be a long-delayed victory, it would be a partial victory. The original plan was for an 11-mile skyway in that section of the trail. Mr. Fordham and a spokesman for the National Parks Conservation Association correctly note that more bridges would be necessary to maximize the water going to Everglades National Park and on to Florida Bay, at the southern end of the system that begins at the source of the Kissimmee River south of Orlando. The Interior Department, which oversees national parks, is pushing for those added bridges.

With luck, the tribe won't appeal. Ken Ammon of the South Florida Water Management District says that

government agencies have reduced seepage of water to the east that might harm those tribal lands. The corps spokesman added that pumps in the area also can direct water.

Mr. Ammon points out that as water levels rise in Everglades National Park, they would drop in the district's conservation areas north of the trail. That would help alligators and the endangered snail kite. Lower water levels also would benefit tree islands, a distinctive Everglades feature.

The water district is buying U.S. Sugar's land for \$533 million to restore the natural flow of water from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades. Unless water can get past Tamiami Trail, the water district won't get much of a return on that investment.

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