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Environmental Groups will Continue to Fight to Protect the Everglades from a 6-lane Highway Beyond the Urban Development Boundary

Pictured at the appeal hearing earlier this year, the team from left to right: Paul Shwiep, co-council for environmental groups, Scott Polowitz a legal Intern, Richard Grosso co-council for environmental groups, Lauren Jonaitis Senior Conservation Director of Tropical Audubon Society, Laura Reynolds Hold the Line Coalition Lead, John Lukas Council for Limonar and Fransisco Pines Council for Limonar

MIAMI – Responding to a ruling Wednesday by Florida’s Third District Court of Appeal that sustained approval of the project, South Florida environmental groups are calling on Gov. Ron DeSantis and the Miami-Dade County Commission to reverse course and cease all plans for a new highway that threatens Everglades restoration and endangers Miami-Dade
County’s drinking water supply. In September 2021, the governor and Cabinet overturned a ruling by a state administrative judge that the proposed 14-mile, 6-lane toll road expansion of SR 836 violates state planning law. The county’s justification for the tollway extension – that it would improve traffic congestion – was rejected by the judge based on overwhelming evidence that the road would shave only 6 minutes off the average commute.

Richard Grosso, counsel for Tropical Audubon Society (TAS) in the appeals court, expressed disappointment with the Court’s brief opinion, and stated that TAS is considering filing motions with the Court asking it to reconsider its brief written opinion on the basis that it departs from prior rulings by the same court, or to provide an opinion that more specifically addresses the key issues raised by the parties.

Transit Alliance Miami, a proud member of the Hold the Line Coalition, has helped the coalition since 2013 on incorporating good public transit into the fight for good land use planning. Their Executive Director, Cathy Dos Santos weighed in on the loss, saying “Expanding more highways will not help us end our traffic nightmare. We must change the geometry by making it safe, affordable and effortless to leave our cars behind. West Miami-Dade residents deserve better guidance to improve transportation and traffic than MDX and the County gave them; the 836 expansion was only going to make problems worse.”

The extension of SR 836 would be built entirely outside of Miami-Dade County’s Urban Development Boundary (“UDB”) and into wetlands needed for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. The UDB is a defining feature of Miami Dade County’s Comprehensive Development Management Plan. The Miami-Dade County Commission approved the project in 2018 and opponents quickly went to court, winning a 2020 decision by state administrative judge Suzanne Van Wyck that recommended the governor and Cabinet reject the county’s application.

“Miami-Dade County is violating the law and common sense in proposing this destructive project that accomplishes virtually nothing to reduce traffic congestion and would put a six-lane highway through scarce and important Everglades wetlands,” said Eve Samples, executive director of Friends of the Everglades, which filed an amicus brief in the case. “Together with our Everglades allies, we will continue the fight to oppose this worthless and dangerous project.”

“This decision is deeply disappointing because it’s a blow to Everglades wetlands and our region’s drinking water supply and hinders Everglades restoration,” said Tropical Audubon Society President Dr. José Francisco Barros. “We intend to keep fighting
on this issue for the sake of wildlife, Miami-Dade County residents and future generations. There is simply no proven need for a 6-lane highway in the Everglades. While the proponents may have won this round in the legal fight, that doesn’t mean this billion-dollar boondoggle project is a smart decision.”

Gov. DeSantis signed an executive order that includes a proposed $3.5 billion over four years for Everglades restoration and protection of Florida’s water resources. “Allocation of funds is not enough to restore America’s Everglades, it also takes regulation and making the tough trade-off decisions” *Says Laura Reynolds, Hold the Line Lead* “We remind the Governor of the statements made during the cabinet meeting where he overturned the original decision by the administrative law judge that his state agency would probably not grant permits to fill Everglades wetlands. We call on the Governor now to uphold that promise and stop this project from moving forward.

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**About these Organizations**

**HOLD THE LINE!**

Founded in 2004, **The Hold the Line Coalition’s** aim is to stop urban sprawl in Miami-Dade County and advocate for allocating public resources toward land preservation, agriculture, public transit and connectivity, blue-green infrastructure, affordable housing, clean air and water. Learn more about the coalition at [www.holdthelinecoalition.org](http://www.holdthelinecoalition.org).

**TROPICAL AUDUBON SOCIETY**

Founded in 1947, **Tropical Audubon Society** is a science- and solutions-based nonprofit conservation organization driven by its grassroots community and principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. Tropical Audubon’s Legacy is to protect, conserve and restore South Florida ecosystems by working closely with local governments and other stakeholders, and by fostering wise stewardship of native habitats, birds and other indigenous wildlife. Learn more at [www.tropicalaudubon.org](http://www.tropicalaudubon.org).

**Friends of the Everglades**

Founded in 1969 by Marjory Stoneman Douglas, **Friends of the Everglades’** mission is to preserve, protect and restore the only Everglades in the world. Learn more at [www.everglades.org](http://www.everglades.org).

**Transit Alliance**

At **Transit Alliance**, our mission is to build a safer and more equitable Miami-Dade. We are committed to transforming our city by advocating for walkable streets, bikeable neighborhoods, and reliable public transit. Learn more at [www.transitalliance.org](http://www.transitalliance.org).
Additional Resources:
Critical Resources:
1. Hold the Line Coalition cofounders prevail in SR-836 Extension legal challenge — Judge Rules Against Miami-Dade County plans to extend SR-836 beyond the Urban Development Boundary, into the Everglades | 03.20.20
2. Better Alternatives Than Extending SR 836 Powerpoint
3. Miami Herald | UBD Opinion | 01.19.21

Legal Documents & Letters:
1. 836 Order
2. Appendix 7 | South Florida Water Management District | 08.10.18