

MEDIA ADVISORY FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DEEP IN THE EVERGLADES, INDIGENOUS PEOPLE & ALLIES PROTEST PAVED 76-MILE BIKE HIGHWAY

NAPLES, FL—Sunday, March 29, indigenous peoples and allies will lead a five day walk following the proposed route of the River of Grass Greenway (ROGG) to oppose the project, to educate the public about the destruction it will bring, and to urge stakeholders to defend Everglades water, wetlands, wildlife and critical habitat, sacred indigenous lands, and heritage sites by shutting down ROGG. Opposition has surfaced among indigenous peoples and a state-wide coalition of allies, who say that a 76-mile bike highway across the Everglades would destroy invaluable wetlands, disrupt vital watersheds, fragment critical habitat, encroach on sacred indigenous lands, desecrate indigenous burial grounds, disturb historic battlefields, commercialize the Everglades, potentially open the floodgate to new Everglades oil drilling and fracking, and seriously undermine Everglades Restoration.

The proposed River of Grass Greenway would be a hard surface road 76 miles long and 12 to 16 feet wide, running from Naples to Miami. It would cut through six national and state parks—including protected wetlands and critical habitat as well as a World Heritage Site. It would also run through indigenous burial grounds, the Turner River and Collier-Seminole Battlefields, and other cultural and historic landmarks. Project plans include bull-doing, dredging, filling in, redirecting water flow, building bridges, installing boardwalks as well as constructing rest areas every 10 to 12 miles to provide parking, restrooms, water, air for tires, picnic shelters, and vending machines. Night-time lighting is being discussed as are shuttles from Miami and Naples. Even more disturbing are plans to extend electricity to the oil and gas industry at “active extraction facilities” like Raccoon Point; some fear electricity to remote areas will increase new irresponsible Everglades oil drilling and fracking—just as in nearby Naples where illegal fracking hazarded the water supply and led to state fines, shutdown, revocation, and even a lawsuit for cleanup.

Project maps show the bike highway cutting across some of the most ecologically sensitive lands in the nation: the Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, Collier-Seminole State Park, and Picayune Strand State Forest. As participants point out, this is not vacant land, but aboriginal indigenous territorial land and public in the heart of the Everglades, in the midst of the massive 30-year Everglades Restoration Project, a joint federal and state effort that will protect some 2.4 million acres of interconnected wetlands. These areas are critical habitat for more than 60 threatened and endangered species—such as: the indigo snake, red-cockaded woodpecker, gopher turtle, burrowing owl, woodstork, Florida panther, and are vital watersheds that replenish levels in the Big Cypress National Preserve and the Greater Everglades and fill the freshwater aquifers millions depend on for drinking water.

Indigenous peoples are spear-heading this coalition-building effort to shutdown the ROGG because the Everglades is their homeland and because Nature must have undisturbed time to repair itself. All three indigenous communities—the Independents, Seminoles, and Miccosukees—have lost their traditional way of life to irresponsible development: first, when the Everglades was drained, and second, decades ago, when toxic levels of mercury in the water, plants, fish, birds, and animals forced them off their tree islands deep in the Everglades. Bobby C. Billie, Spiritual Leader and one of the clan leaders, Council of the Original Miccosukee Seminole Nation Aboriginal Peoples; and Betty Osceola of the Panther Clan and Houston Cypress of the

Otter Clan (both Miccosukee members) say that Nature must be allowed to live a life undisturbed so that it can regenerate itself. They see themselves, in part, as defenders of the Natural World.

Citing the Rights of Nature, Bobby C. Billie says, “**Nature has the Right to exist, maintain, and regenerate its vital cycles, and that we have the responsibility to protect and defend those rights on behalf of ecosystems like the Greater Everglades. The most important concern with this project, he says, is the destruction of the Natural World that sustains us all: the Water, the Air, the Trees, the Plants, the Grasses, and all the Insects living in the Grasses, and all the other Creator’s Creations such as the Four Legged, the Two Legged with the Wings, the Ones with Fins, and the Crawling Ones. The Aboriginal Indigenous Peoples know that these Creations must survive in order that we may all survive.**” We must respect the Natural World’s right and the Indigenous peoples’ right to live a life undisturbed by further development and commercialization. Recognizing the Rights of Nature is consistent with the indigenous tradition of living in harmony with Nature.

Everyone is invited to walk with participants for an hour, a day, a few days or the entire time; those who can’t walk are welcome to meet-up at base camp for nightly fireside talks. Since art and music has traditionally animated and articulated indigenous struggles: signs, banners, flags, and armbands will spell out problems and solutions while music, ceremonies, and fireside chats will illumine and inspire.

The walk itself will be an immersion experience where participants reconnect with Nature and learn to respect the Rights of Nature and Indigenous peoples. The walk will also be a living testament that the Everglades is readily accessible and already has more than enough highways, trails, bike paths, paddle outs, swamp walks, observation towers, and vast array of existing recreational opportunities. “Moccasins on the Ground NOT pavement,” reads one of the signs and “Shutdown ROGG: Defend Nature by Leaving it Undisturbed” sums up the goal of the walk.

- WHAT:** Walk to Defend & Protect Nature and Oppose River of Grass Bike Highway
WHO: Indigenous peoples, concerned citizens, groups, and allies
WHERE: Base camp: Trail Lakes Campgrounds,
Begin walk: intersection of US 41 and SR 92 in Naples
End walk: intersection of US 41 and Krome Avenue in Miami
WHEN: March 28, Gathering Day at Base camp; check-in at 1:00pm
March 29, Begin Walk
April 2, End Walk

Facebook Event Page: <https://www.facebook.com/events/659009204209947/>

Website: <http://www.lovetheeverglades.org/walk-for-mother-earth.html>

