

Miccosukee Tribe Secures Temporary Halt on Florida Detention Center Construction

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When news broke Thursday that a federal judge had temporarily blocked further construction at the migrant detention facility dubbed “Alligator Alcatraz,” members of the Miccosukee Tribe were midway through a tense community meeting.

Curtis Esteban Osceola, a Miccosukee attorney and tribe member, delivered the unexpected news. “It was a roar of applause,” Osceola told ABC News. “Everyone was very, very pleased

that the judge granted the temporary restraining order.”

Main Picture Idea: A photo of the Miccosukee tribal meeting or a landscape shot of the Everglades near the tribe’s reservation.

The ruling marks a temporary victory for the Miccosukee Tribe, which numbers fewer than a thousand members and has long endured broken promises from the federal government. The case represents one of the highest-profile uses of environmental law to challenge a federal immigration enforcement initiative.

Less than two months ago, rumors began circulating that the mostly dormant airport near the Miccosukee reservation would be repurposed into a large detention facility. Initially, some tribe members dismissed the reports as unlikely. Kendal Osceola, 26, a tribal member, recalled how concern quickly grew as government vehicles and construction equipment appeared on U.S. Route 41 near their homeland.

“When all this happened, we felt isolated, like our homelands were being trampled on,” Curtis Osceola, a senior policy adviser to the tribe’s chairman, said.

The detention center’s planned expansion would more than double local residential density. Industrial light towers introduced to the site raised concerns about light pollution affecting the tribe’s traditional ability to observe stars, critical to their cultural calendar.

Joining forces with environmental groups, the Miccosukee Tribe challenged the project under the National Environmental Policy Act, arguing it threatened the Everglades ecosystem and endangered species.

On Thursday, U.S. District Judge Kathleen Mary Williams ordered a two-week pause on construction while the case proceeds. The court focused its ruling strictly on environmental impacts rather than conditions inside the detention center.

The plaintiffs aim to secure a preliminary injunction that would halt operations permanently. Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier pledged to oppose the order, emphasizing the state’s intent to continue detaining and deporting undocumented immigrants.

“We’re cautiously optimistic,” Curtis Osceola said after the ruling. “This is a win, but we understand the process ahead. This isn’t the end.”

For Kendal Osceola, a Miccosukee Embassy Fellow and reservation native, the decision represents a meaningful step forward.

“I want my son to grow up with the same connection to this land that I had,” she said. “It’s a small step, but often those lead to bigger victories.”