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Protests Grow Against 'Alligator Alcatraz' Detention Center on Sacred Everglades Land

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FLORIDA EVERGLADES – A major new detention center in the Florida Everglades has sparked strong opposition from Indigenous leaders, environmental groups, and civil rights advocates.

Nicknamed “Alligator Alcatraz” because of its remote location and heavy security, the facility is meant to ease overcrowding in coastal jails. But many say it comes at too high a cost to culture and the environment.

“This is not empty land,” said Miccosukee Councilwoman Lena Billie at a protest near the site. “This is where our ancestors are buried and where our traditions survive. Turning it into a prison dishonors everything we stand for.”

Over the weekend, hundreds of people gathered at the main entrance, holding signs that read “No Prisons on Sacred Land” and “Respect Indigenous Rights.” Some protesters chained themselves to construction equipment to block work. Police later removed and arrested several demonstrators.

State officials have defended the decision to build the facility here, saying it was chosen for its higher elevation, which reduces hurricane risk, and its ability to house modern medical and mental health services.

Governor Ethan Harris released a statement calling the project “necessary to improve public safety.” He also said he was open to further discussions with tribal leaders but made clear that construction would continue.

Critics argue that the prison’s remote location will isolate detainees from their families and make it harder to monitor conditions inside.

“A detention center out here means less transparency and less accountability,” said Nadine Cruz from the Florida Justice Coalition. “It will be harder for families to visit and harder for watchdog groups to see what goes on behind these fences.”

Environmental groups have also raised alarms about possible damage to the Everglades’ delicate ecosystem. They warn the facility could harm endangered wildlife and disrupt the flow of water through the wetlands. The Sierra Preservation Network announced plans to file a lawsuit to try to stop construction.

For Indigenous communities, the issue goes beyond a single building.

“They call it Alligator Alcatraz,” Billie said. “But for us, this is still our homeland. We will not let it be turned into a place of suffering without a fight.”

Protests and legal challenges are expected to continue in the coming weeks.