Keep U.S. Sugar deal

The Keynoter editorial of March 21 called for abandoning the purchase of the U.S. Sugar Corp. lands near Lake Okeechobee because the initial costs of land acquisition could, in some way, delay the restoration of Florida Bay. This view is simply not supported by the facts.

First, it’s not likely that funding will be cut from the C-111 Canal project because, unlike the past boards, the current governing board of the South Florida Water Management District is prioritizing environmental projects based on their actual ecological benefits. The C-111 project has demonstrable and significant benefits and will always rank high as an environmental priority.

Second, delaying the purchase of U.S. Sugar Corp. property will certainly delay Florida Bay restoration. The restoration of Florida Bay depends on more freshwater from the Everglades, and the only viable plan to get this freshwater to the Everglades will require the purchase of U.S. Sugar lands. With these lands, we can apply existing technologies to take water from Lake Okeechobee that we currently throw away, clean it up and send it to the Everglades and Florida Bay. We can build cost-effective projects that actually restore the environment, and do so reasonably soon.

But by foregoing this opportunity, you entrust the restoration of Florida Bay to a plan few experts think will work. It will be more expensive, requires the government to invent radical new technologies and would take sustained government action for at least the next 40 years. Abandoning the acquisition of U.S. Sugar land seems the riskiest course of action to me. Florida Bay is too important not to choose the sure thing.

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Editor’s note: The writer is a senior scientist with the Everglades Foundation.