

# MONDAY, JULY 14, 2008

Compiled by: South Florida Water Management District  
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## Tribe Keep up work on Glades

07/12/2008

Miami Herald - Online

CURTIS MORGAN

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Curtis Morgan-Miami Herald

In a legal step that could complicate the state's bid to buy U.S. Sugar Corp., the Miccosukee Tribe on Friday said it will ask a federal judge to block water managers' plans to delay a massive Everglades reservoir.

On Thursday, the South Florida Water Management District's governing board gave preliminary approval to financing the \$1.75 billion sugar deal. The 300 square miles of land are key to a plan intended to improve water storage and pollution treatment for Everglades restoration.

But the proposal also calls for delaying other projects, including a reservoir the size of Boca Raton in western Palm Beach County -- at least until planners decide what to do with sugar tracts.

Tribe attorney Dexter Lehtinen said there was "no justification for abandoning Everglades restoration."

Lehtinen filed a motion asking U.S. District Judge Federico Moreno to "compel" the water management district to keep building the reservoir. Moreno oversees a 1992 state-federal settlement agreement that required the state to clean up farm and suburban pollution flowing into the Glades.

Lehtinen said the buyout proposal, which would allow U.S. Sugar to continue farming for six years or more, puts both cleanup and restoration in indefinite limbo.

"They're always promising something 10 years from now and they're never doing it now," he said. "The Everglades is dying now and we need restoration now."

Gabe Margasak, a spokesman for the water district, said the agency had not yet had time to review the motion, but he noted the board had not yet formally approved the deal.

"While we haven't seen the motion, we definitely remain committed to restoring the Everglades using all the resources we can," he said.

The district board first halted construction on the reservoir in June, citing a lawsuit by environmental groups. Stopping the work meant paying a \$1.9 million monthly suspension fee to the contractor for up to six months.

On Thursday, the board voted to keep the project on hold, approving a resolution that called the land deal an "unanticipated and extraordinary opportunity" that could force substantial modifications to Everglades projects.

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## Miccosukee Tribe wants reservoir completed in Palm Beach County

07/12/2008

South Florida Sun-Sentinel - Online

Andy Reid

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Andy Reid-South Florida Sun-Sentinel

The Miccosukee Tribe on Friday called for a federal judge to force South Florida water managers to finish building a massive reservoir intended for Everglades restoration.

The tribe contends that the state's \$1.75 billion bid to buy out U.S. Sugar derailed the long-promised reservoir in western , violating an agreement to corral and clean up polluted water headed to the Everglades.

Water managers suspended construction of the 16,700-acre reservoir last month, just before Gov. Charlie Crist announced a deal to buy U.S. Sugar's vast holdings in a move expected to redefine Everglades restoration.

That leaves taxpayers paying reservoir contractors \$1.9 million a month to stand by while water managers decide whether the structure fits into new plans to recreate the link between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. The reservoir is needed with or without the U.S. Sugar deal and delaying it causes more harm to what remains of the River of Grass, Miccosukee attorney Dexter Lehtinen said.

Lehtinen called the state's U.S. Sugar proposal a 'bait and switch' that threatens to set back Everglades restoration another decade. 'It's stopping restoration,' Lehtinen said. 'These guys make promises and it's always about what they are doing 10 years from now. It's not what they are doing now. 'They move on and the Everglades keep dying.' The South Florida Water Management District contends that if construction does not resume on the reservoir, the work done so far will fit into plans to create more filter marshes that clean water headed to the Everglades.

District spokesman Randy Smith released a statement Friday saying that the agency had not seen the motion the Miccosukee filed in federal court. He said the agency, charged with leading Everglades restoration, 'remains committed to restoring the Everglades using all the resources available to the District.' Audubon of Florida, the National Parks Conservation Association and other environmental groups have hailed the proposed U.S. Sugar deal as an historic opportunity to craft a better rehab plan that more naturally restores flows of water to the Everglades.

The Miccosukee legal challenge is 'premature,' said John Marshall, chairman of the Arthur R. Marshall Foundation, an environmental advocacy group. 'It's a whole new ballgame,' Marshall said about the implications of the U.S. Sugar deal. 'We're finally are getting around to doing it right.' The district plans to take on more debt to pay for the U.S. Sugar deal without raising taxes. The agency also proposes delaying and possibly dropping some Everglades restoration construction projects.

A district proposal discussed Thursday called for using money once envisioned for the reservoir for other Everglades projects.

Taxpayers already have invested about \$250 million in the reservoir along U.S. 27 that has a price tag expected to hit \$800 million.

The district in June stopped construction on it, citing concerns about spending more taxpayer dollars amid a lingering legal challenge over how the water would be used. The Natural Resources Defense Council filed the legal challenge over on the reservoir the previous year, not to stop construction but to seek guarantees that the water would be used for Everglades restoration. 'The Tribe is concerned that this 'suspension' due to litigation is merely a pretext to indefinitely suspend completion of the [reservoir] because of a proposed land buy that was reportedly in the works for months before it was announced,' according to the motion filed Friday.

The reservoir is needed to hold water that otherwise overwhelms stormwater treatment areas designed to clean water headed to the Everglades. The state has yet to meet the cleanup standards set in 1992, stemming from legal challenges filed by Lehtinen and the Miccosukee. 'Time, and delay, are the enemies of the Everglades,' according to the tribe's motion.

The district board on June 30 authorized moving ahead with negotiations with U.S. Sugar. In addition to agreeing on a final sales price, land appraisals and environmental assessments of the land must be completed. The U.S. Sugar deal calls for closing on the purchase by Nov. 30.

Andy Reid can be reached at [abreid@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:abreid@sun-sentinel.com) or 561-228-5504.

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## Miccosukees sue to restart construction of reservoir

07/12/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online

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Jason Schultz-Palm Beach Post

The Miccosukee Indian tribe on Friday moved to force water managers to restart a \$700 million reservoir construction project south of Lake Okeechobee - a long-promised environmental project they fear the district is foregoing to pay for a monumental purchase of sugar land also meant to restore the Everglades.

In a motion filed in U.S. District Court in Miami, the tribe asked judge Federico Moreno to make the South Florida Water Management District complete the 26-square-mile reservoir in western Palm Beach County.

'Why did they stop? They have a plan, so just build it,' said Dexter Lehtinen, attorney for the Miccosukees.

Lehtinen accused the district of abandoning the reservoir project because it needs money for the state's proposed \$1.75 billion purchase of U.S. Sugar Corp., which the water managers announced last month as a major step toward restoration.

The tribe's legal papers questioned how quickly the Everglades will

benefit from the purchase.

The water district hired a contractor to build the reservoir in 2006. The district agreed, in settling an earlier lawsuit with the federal government, that the project was crucial to fulfilling its promises to clean up Everglades pollution.

But in May the district's governing board voted to halt construction, saying it had no choice because environmentalists filed suit challenging the project's construction permits in 2007. The board agreed to pay construction crews \$1.9 million per month to wait until the district decides if it wants to finish the project.

Eric Buermann, chairman of the district governing board, said water managers wanted to build the reservoir, but the district can't finish it until the lawsuit is settled without risking wasting hundreds of millions of dollars.

'One group is suing us saying we are going too fast and another group is suing us saying we're not going fast enough. What's a water manager to do?' Buermann asked. 'The Miccosukees don't have to care about that because they don't have to sign that check.'

The U.S. Sugar deal may indeed change the district's priorities for the reservoir land, he added. 'I think we'll ultimately build something out there,' he said. 'It will be built for a different purpose, for (filter marshes) instead of a reservoir.'

The reservoir project is designed to hold water from Lake Okeechobee so that nearby filter marshes can reduce pollution from farm and urban runoff flowing toward the Everglades. 'They need to clean it up now,' Lehtinen said. 'We're filing to force them to keep that commitment.'

The tribe, whose reservation is in Everglades National Park, has pursued numerous environmental lawsuits against the state and federal governments.

The district's governing board on Thursday passed a resolution that committed to 'continue to coordinate' with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the reservoir project. But Lehtinen said the resolution doesn't appease the tribe's concerns.

'That resolution is the opposite of voting to build it,' he said. 'That resolution is an excuse.'

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## **SFWMD Halts Work on Everglades Reservoir**

07/13/2008

Southeast Construction

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## SFWMD Halts Work on Everglades Reservoir

Mediation was scheduled on a year-old lawsuit that has led to the suspension of construction on the flagship project of the comprehensive program to restore Floridas Everglades. Faced with a go/no-go choice, the West Palm Beach-based South Florida Water Management District decided to halt further work on the 25-sq-mile Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir A-1 pending resolution of the suit.

The water district began construction in June 2006 on the reservoir to retain water that now is discharged from Lake Okeechobee into the ocean via the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers. Under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, a joint state and federal program, the water would be released gradually through manmade wetlands to re-create sheetflow southward through the historic Everglades.

In May 2007, the Natural Resources Defense Council, National Wildlife Federation and Sierra Club sued the Army Corps of Engineers in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida on the grounds that the reservoirs construction violated CERP because the Corps had not completed the reports and agreements required under federal law. When Congress authorized the project it was concerned that the reservoir, as well as other CERP projects, would be subverted into simply providing more water supply for Floridas burgeoning population or its agri-businesses, says the complaint. The reports and agreements were required to guarantee that the water would mostly benefit the Everglades, it asserts.

But the Corps is not doing the work; the state is constructing the reservoir under its Acceler8 program. It came down to funding, says Tommy Strowd, the water districts assistant deputy executive director. Congress was not appropriating funds, but the work needed to be done and costs were rising. The state is trying to provide those assurances that the people complaining claim are only provided through the federal process, he says. When the project reached the stage where embankment construction had to be started, the board decided it would be less risky to suspend work and pay \$1.9 million per month for no more than six months, he says.

Source: Engineering News-Record

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## **Sugar buyout to delay other Everglades projects**

07/11/2008

Los Banos Enterprise

Curtis Morgan

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Curtis Morgan-Los Banos Enterprise

Water managers vowed Thursday to close the \$1.75 billion deal for the U. S. Sugar Corp without hiking taxes on South Florida homeowners, but the big buyout will come at the cost of delay for other Everglades projects.

The South Florida Water Management District's proposed budget would scale down, postpone or shift construction work to the federal government -- diverting the savings to buy a swath of sugar fields long coveted by environmentalists.

District board member Charles Duaray sounded skeptical that the district, which only two months ago had been worried about the impact of statewide budget cuts, could easily take on the largest conservation land buy in state history.

Read the full story at [miamiherald.com](http://miamiherald.com).

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## **Sugar deal might mire other efforts at restoration**

07/13/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online

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The South Florida Water Management District is in the midst of a monumental land deal. But what that means for the 16 counties' taxpayers who bankroll the district - well, that's about as clear as the water in the C-51 canal. 'That's going to be the critical factor,' Palm Beach County Administrator Bob Weisman said. 'That's the number one thing on people's minds right now.' Buying U.S. Sugar Corp. and its 187,000-acre empire for \$1.75 billion, which could cost as much as \$3.5 billion when all is said and done, means making sacrifices, local and state officials say.

Those sacrifices could include scaling back a planned 3,400-acre reservoir near Indiantown that's meant to protect the St. Lucie River from runoff. Water managers also might have to postpone or shrink other reservoir and cleanup projects around Lake Okeechobee - projects they once called essential for the Everglades' future. Those potential cuts resulted in a furious legal challenge Friday from the Miccosukee Indian tribe, which accused the water managers of abandoning their promises to clean the Everglades.

The district also has vowed to complete the deal without raising the property taxes it collects in its 16-county territory. Instead of a tax increase, the district plans to borrow \$1.7 billion, almost all of the purchase price.

Experts in government finance disagree on whether the additional debt load might be too much.

The final authority on the district's tax rate is Gov. Charlie Crist, who appointed all but one of the agency's board members and has the power to veto their budget. Crist is also the sugar deal's biggest cheerleader, calling it crucial to securing a 'true restoration' for the Everglades.

To handle the borrowing, district board members have endorsed the idea of increasing the agency's debt limit. Payments could stretch out for the next 30 years, with next year's installment estimated at \$117.6 million.

Until now, district policies have restricted the agency's debt to 20 percent of its annual property tax revenue, permit fees and related income. The district proposes increasing the limit to 27 percent.

Even the higher limit is still 'healthy,' said West Palm Beach City Commissioner Kimberly Mitchell, senior vice president of the investment bank and brokerage firm Loop Capital Markets. The firm's clients include local governments, and Mitchell is on the district's underwriting team.

The district has had a history of living within its means, Mitchell said. 'As an observer, citizen and taxpayer, I am impressed,' she said. By way of comparison, Palm Beach County's debt ratio hovers around 25 percent.

But critics said they fear the deal would financially strap the district, which is responsible for protecting the region's water supply and providing flood control for 6 million people. 'To what extent does (this deal) impair or enable the district's ability to meet its growing or changing demands over the next 30 years?' said Dominic Calabro, president and CEO of Florida TaxWatch.

John Dufresne, Central Florida chapter president of the Florida Government Finance Officers Association, said a debt ratio of 27 percent is 'real high.' He said he would never let his city of Apopka, where he is finance director, take on that much. 'You'd be in a precarious situation,' he said. 'Is it doable? Sure,' said Allison DeFoor, former Everglades czar for Gov. Jeb Bush and now state coordinator for Earth Balance, an environmental consulting company. 'Is it automatic? No. Is it easy? Hell no.' Robin Prunty, senior director in public finance at Standard & Poor's, said the district's financial performance has been strong. She said she hasn't seen a financial plan for the U.S. Sugar purchase, but taking on more debt to restore the Everglades shouldn't hurt the district's AAA bond rating. 'Obviously, there are costs associated with Everglades restoration,' Prunty said. 'But that's the point of it, to restore the Everglades. That's the primary mission of that program.' Weisman said the problem is that the district is spending a lot of money, but taxpayers won't see immediate gains. 'I think if people believe there is a worthwhile environmental benefit, they are more willing to pay,' he said. But in this case, 'benefits might not be visible for decades, if not a century.' The Miccosukees echoed that complaint, writing in federal court papers last week that the deal 'will not conceivably protect the Everglades for at least another 10 years.' The tribe didn't seek to block the purchase, but it is demanding that the district resume building a \$700 million, 16,700-acre reservoir south of the lake that has been stalled since May. District leaders have said they might change their plans for that site in light of the vast amount of land they are buying from U.S. Sugar.

That is another example of the water managers' 'delaying restoration,' tribal attorney Dexter Lehtinen said. 'They're always promising something 10 years from now - they're never doing it now.' He also called it 'intellectually dishonest' to take on such a costly purchase while pledging not to raise taxes.

The district plans to borrow the \$1.7 billion by issuing certificates of participation, which are similar to bonds and commonly used to finance school construction.

The district has issued those kinds of certificates to borrow more than \$540 million for Everglades projects. But until now, it never contemplated taking on so much debt all at once.

TaxWatch said the district should look to the federal government to pay a portion of the bill. Weisman agreed, saying the Everglades is called a national treasure, but only 16 counties in Florida are paying for this purchase.

The state and federal governments are supposed to be equal partners in a \$10.9 billion Everglades restoration that Congress OK'd eight years ago, but state leaders complain that the feds haven't paid their share. Mitchell said the purchase will have its biggest impact in South Florida. 'Personally, as a citizen, I think it's fantastic,' she said of the deal. 'It's fair.'

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## State purchase of sugar acreage could benefit island environment

07/13/2008

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State purchase of sugar acreage could benefit island environment

By JANE BRICKLEY, [jbrickley@breezenewspapers.com](mailto:jbrickley@breezenewspapers.com)

Island residents attending a Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation presentation Monday got a look at how the state purchase of U.S. Sugar lands could positively impact the local environment.

This was the foundation's second installment of its monthly series, "First Mondays: Policy at SCCF."

This month's topic, "The Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) on One Quarter Less Sugar and Its Impact on the Caloosahatchee," examined the state's plan to purchase EAA land from the U.S. Sugar Corporation.

The presentation, given by Rae Ann Wessel, SCCF's Natural Resource policy director, focused on the details of Gov. Charlie Crist's June 24 announcement of the purchase 187,000 acres of land from the U.S. Sugar Corporation and how this acquisition will enable Florida to recreate some kind of historic flow from Lake Okeechobee into the Everglades.

The 187,000 acres (or about 300 square miles) consists predominantly of sugar crops, some citrus, a refinery and mill, railroad and a processing plant. At this time, the land could cost the state up to \$1.75 billion dollars.

Wessel listed the possible benefits of purchasing such a large piece of land. Primarily, the purchase would remove one of the many obstacles preventing restoration of the Everglades, Wessel said.

"We need a conveyance for water from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades. We need that flowway south," explained Wessel.

It also would provide an additional outlet for water and eliminate 85

percent of excess water passing through the Caloosahatchee and the St. Lucie rivers. The purchase also would achieve what the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan could not, by allowing the people involved to take a fresh look at projects and alternatives for restoration.

"We might be able to reevaluate some options that have been off the table," said Wessel, adding that some alternatives that were being considered now seem obsolete in light of the recent developments.

Wessel mentioned one example of a now impractical solution — Aquifer Storage and Recovery, or ASR, wells. The ASRs, essentially designed as water resource conservation tools, would hold treated water pumped underground and then release it as needed. But once it's brought back above ground, Wessel said, there are trace amounts of arsenic in the water, creating the need for the water to be treated again.

But while some options have been exhausted entirely, new solutions and ideas are still being developed.

Wessel described one idea by Forest Gray Michael of Transystems. Michael's multi-use, preliminary Caloosahatchee Riverway plan would focus on natural lake restoration, ecosystem and wildlife restoration and water retention, elements that are crucial to restoring of the Everglades.

One of the presentation's main themes was that this purchase, the biggest in the state's history, would inspire people to generate new ideas and solutions.

"It gives us options we've never had. It's possible this might have developments we can't even imagine yet," said Wessel.

Wessel closed the presentation with a quote from "The Everglades: River of Grass" author Marjory Stoneman Douglas- "The Everglades is a test. If we pass, we may get to keep the planet."

Robin Humphrey of the VIP Realty Group and the National Association of Realtors also spoke briefly at the end of the presentation to update islanders on both local and national efforts to improve surface water quality.

Wessel encourages people to come to these meetings and be interactive in the presentation, especially "If there are issues you're interested in, something you don't understand or a topic you'd like to see covered."

The First Mondays program occurs every first monday of the month at 10 a.m. at the SCCF Nature Center, located at 3333 Sanibel-Captiva Drive. If you have questions, you can reach the foundation at 472-2329.

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## **Sugar Land Purchase Could Have Local Benefit**

07/11/2008

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Sugar land purchase could have local benefit; Removes obstacles for Everglades restoration, creates outlet for water

By JANE BRICKLEY, news@breezenewspapers.com

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"We might be able to re-evaluate some options that have been off the table," said Wessel, adding that some alternatives that were being considered now seem obsolete in light of the recent developments.

Wessel mentioned one example of a now impractical solution — aquifer storage and recovery, or ASR, wells. The ASRs, essentially designed as water resource conservation tools, would hold treated water pumped underground and then release it as needed. But once it is brought back above ground, Wessel said, there are trace amounts of arsenic in the water, creating the need for the water to be treated again.

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## **Negotiations for Historic Everglades Land Acquisition Move Forward**

07/11/2008

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Negotiations for historic Everglades land acquisition move forward  
SFWMD Governing Board ratifies "Statement of Principles" for landmark purchase to protect famed River of Grass, coastal estuaries West Palm Beach, FL — The Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) took the next step for bringing about one of the largest environmental land acquisitions in Florida's history. The Governing Board unanimously ratified the "Statement of Principles" that was signed with United States Sugar Corporation and witnessed by Governor Charlie Crist last week to bring vast tracts of land in the Everglades Agricultural Area into public ownership.

The formal action authorizes District staff to now initiate detailed negotiations and due diligence to purchase the assets of United States Sugar Corporation, including 187,000 acres of land, for Everglades restoration. Acquisition of the property will provide the "missing link" needed to protect Florida's coastal estuaries and better revive, restore and preserve one of America's greatest national treasures—the Everglades.

"Governor Crist's bold vision has brought us to a new day for Everglades restoration," said Eric Buermann, SFWMD Governing Board Chair. "This is a significant moment for our state, our nation and our environment. Today's ratification confirms the District's commitment to this remarkable opportunity for protecting and restoring America's Everglades and Florida's coastal estuaries."

In accordance with the framework and parameters outlined in the Statement of Principles, detailed and confidential purchase agreement negotiations will now begin, and could last for up to 75 days. At the same time, independent real estate appraisals and assessments of the identified lands and assets will be conducted by highly-qualified specialists. The ultimate purchase price and agreement will depend upon the appraisals and assessments and will require approval by the Dis-

trict's Governing Board.

The proposed agreement between the South Florida Water Management District and the United States Sugar Corporation involves the public purchase of nearly 300 square miles spanning four counties in South Florida. The land would be used to reestablish a part of the historic connection between Lake Okeechobee and America's Everglades through a managed system of storage and treatment.

"The District and our partners have made excellent progress in environmental restoration during the past decade, but this acquisition creates possibilities we never thought possible," said SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. "We look forward to working closely with the local communities and our stakeholders as we turn this landmark concept into a working reality."

Benefits from the Everglades land acquisition include:

- Increases in water storage to reduce harmful freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee to Florida's coastal rivers and estuaries.

- Improvements in the delivery of cleaner water to the Everglades.

- Preventing thousands of tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades.

- Eliminating the need for "back-pumping" water into Lake Okeechobee.

- Relieving some pressures on the Herbert Hoover Dike while the federal government carries out repairs.

- Sustainable agriculture and green energy production. As part of the proposed acquisition, United States Sugar Corporation, over the next six years, will retain the right to farm and manage the land consistent with its previous business practices and fulfill remaining business obligations. The District, together with the Governor's Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development, will work closely with communities surrounding the Everglades Agricultural Area on an economic transition as the negotiations move forward.

"As we work through these negotiations, it is imperative that we keep the communities most affected by this purchase engaged and involved," said the SFWMD Governing Board Chair. "This Governing Board is committed to working with its state and local partners to realize not only the environmental benefits of this potential purchase but also the new economic opportunities associated with sustained agriculture, green energy production and restoration."

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## **Mahoney U.S. Sugar Buyout Must Include Economic Help For The Glades Communities**

07/12/2008

Wellington Town Crier

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Carol Porter -Wellington Town Crier

With the South Florida Water Management District planning to buy a huge swath of sugarcane land south of Lake Okeechobee for Everglades restoration, Congressman Tim Mahoney pledged Monday to work with environmental groups while looking out for the interests of people living around the lake.

While environmentalists have cheered the states \$1.75 billion plan to buy 187,000 acres from U.S. Sugar in order to eventually restore the natural flow of water in the Everglades, farmers and others in the Clewiston area have expressed fears about their livelihoods once the sugar producer closes up shop in six years.

Mahoney (D-District 16) met with representatives from a coalition of environmental groups called the Everglades Advisory Council on Monday to discuss his offices involvement in plans for the land, and later told members of the press at Palms West Hospital that he would strive to take a teamwork approach in order to serve all interests.

The purpose of todays meeting is to make sure that my office and the environmental groups here today are working together as a team to make sure that this dream becomes a reality, Mahoney said. Some people say the devil is in the details, and as we all know since we made the initial announcement, there has been a lot of questions asked. How are we going to finance it? Is there going to be an increase in taxes to our businesses? Is it going to affect the agricultural communities around the lake, and if so, how?

Mahoney said residents of communities around the lake such as Pahokee, Belle Glade, Clewiston and Moore Haven who depend on the sugar industry are justifiably alarmed at the plan.

People are very concerned, and they should be, he said. These are tough times. The state is in a recession. We also recognize that this will be the most expensive year in the history of American agriculture.

Mahoney affirmed his commitment to moving forward with the plan and teaming with the environmental groups, and also to ensure that people of the area do not suffer as a result.

We, as a team, recognize we have a responsibility to our neighbors in these communities in making sure that they do not suffer as a result of taking this great step forward, he said. We are committed to the communities around the lake. We are committed to making sure we have an economic plan to mitigate any damages that result from this plan. We are committed to working together with the governor to make this dream a reality.

Everglades Foundation CEO Kirk Fordham commended Mahoney for trying to balance environmental concerns with the interests of communities around the lake, and also stressed a big picture approach to the situation.

Those of us in the environmental community are committed to the economic viability of those communities, but we are also concerned about the long-term supply of clean water in the area. We are concerned about wildfires threatening the urban communities up the coast, Fordham said. We are also concerned about jobs that are dependent on fishing and boating, and the tourism industry that will go away if our Everglades ecosystem collapses. I think its commendable of our

congressman to try to pull us together. Not enough people in Washington and in Florida are thinking about the overall picture of what happens when you make a big decision like were making here today with the land acquisition. I think its important that we sit down together and hammer out the overall vision for the lake region together.

Mahoney: U.S. Sugar Buyout Must Include Economic Help For The Glades Communities

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## Everglades Dream coming true

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## Deal: Shock Waves Set In

07/11/2008

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Deal: Shock waves set in

By Patty Brant

Caloosa Belle The announcement of United States Sugar Corporation's sale of all its facilities and 187,000 acres of agricultural land to South Florida Water Management has sent shock waves through the community from east to west.

Environmentalists are, by and large, hailing the deal as the last piece of the puzzle re-establishing the direct flow of water from the central part of the state into the Everglades.

At the same time, folks just trying to make a living and local governments trying to meet demands on them are scurrying to find out just what the deal will mean for them. Hit hard by an already lagging economy, the deal looms large in local governments' budget concerns. Hendry County Administrator Wayne O'Neal said no one is sure how the deal will affect the county's budget. However, he said USSC will continue to pay property taxes as long as it owns the land. After that, the state will pay Hendry County Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) in perpetuity or until the population reaches 150,000. Currently, Hendry County's population is around 40,000.

At a special joint meeting July 1, commissioners from Hendry County and the cities of LaBelle and Clewiston met with representatives of the South

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Florida Water Management District to begin clarification of just what the sale will mean to local governments.

That process continued with a morning meeting at LaBelle City Hall July 8 in which Hendry County Tourism Council, Economic Development Council and other stakeholders and those with expertise in community development were to have a brain-storming session and "look for positives," as Mr. O'Neal stated.

Their purpose was to "garner information to decode the future," he added.

The City of Clewiston is planning a meeting for July 14 to gather public input into the situation.

Florida's Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative, Inc., Board of Directors and Florida's Freshwater Frontier Board have announced a special meeting for Monday, July 21, at the John Boy Auditorium, 1200 South W.C. Owen Ave. in Clewiston.

It is to begin at 10 a.m.

Mr. O'Neal said the county is following up on leads for economic and community development, searching for ways to create jobs and increase property values. He noted that the sale will have a ripple effect in agriculture and the real estate community as well as service-related jobs.

County representatives will be meeting with SFWMD representatives and Mr. O'Neal expects to be learning more about job training programs and possible land swaps. He said the county is hiring a consultant to do a fiscal impact study and, along with both cities, will be procuring legal services to maintain "fresh eyes and ears" at all angles of the situation. During this 75-day meeting period after the announcement there will be closed door negotiations with the Governor's Office, USSC and SFWMD. Executive Director of the Hendry County Economic Development Janice Groves has been in touch with Mary Helen Blakeslee of the Governor's Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development (OTTED). Their conversation, while containing no hard and fast information, presents some interesting possibilities.

One possibility is that lands and buildings in the City of Clewiston may be sold to a third party in the agricultural business, including Southern Gardens and the refinery. Most of the land to be used in the restoration is located in a stretch of land south-east of Clewiston overlapping into Palm Beach County.

There are concerns from the general public that SFWMD had pumped money into training programs to build up a work-force for Everglades Restoration reservoir construction projects which have been put on hold, but SFWMD personnel say the reservoirs are still on the radar.

Other possibilities include: 1. A large impact analysis funded by water management that will cover local governments, schools and businesses. It will more than likely be on a larger scale than the study the county will do.

2. Rural Economic Development Initiative agencies are already in the process of identifying programs that will be able to help.

3. Water Management has a workforce training plan to create jobs in the restoration process and will target locals to go through the program.

4. A committee may work on issues ensuring job opportunities through workforce development and the colleges.

5. Meetings, probably starting in August, are to be held to inform the public on progress.

6. A visioning process should be started. While the county did one two years ago, much of that vision will not apply now. However, it may be used as a beginning point.

7. The Tourism Development Council could look at its long term planning

and see what can be done to implement pro-grams.

8. The Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI) is going to make sure programs are imple-mented to save workers and to keep people from leaving Clewis-ton. They have survey projects that can be accelerated to pro-duce job opportunities.

9. OTTED has every intention of being involved from now on.

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## Considering Life After Sugar

07/11/2008

Caloosa Belle

Brant, Patty

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Considering life after sugar

By Patty Brant

Caloosa Belle The unexpected sale of 187,000 acres of agricultural land owned by United States Sugar Corporation to South Florida Wa-ter Management District (SFW-MD) has caught Hendry County citizens by surprise. County and city lawmakers, administrators, business people and residents of all walks of life are struggling to understand the huge sale and what it will mean for individuals and for the county as a whole. Tuesday morning a group of "stakeholders" came together at LaBelle City Hall to discuss just what the ramifications may be.

As the initial shock begins to wear off, people are seeking information and brainstorming about building the future.

Southern Gardens executive Tris Chapman told the audience that some 25 million citrus trees grow in the county - one million of these in the purchase area. Add to that the fact that Southern Gardens is the most efficient cit-rus processing plant in the world, and the logical conclusion is that citrus will remain an important part of this county's economy.

He did say this "revolution-ary development" will mean an ownership change for Southern Gardens, adding that the impact of the sale is still "way down the road." He considered the Talis-man sale in Palm Beach County in the late '90s. That property is still producing sugar cane.

The key to the county's future has always been development, but the sale of USSC to the state has produced a new urgency into the mix that was refl ected at the meeting.

County Administrator Wayne O'Neal said the area needs "real time" information not rumors to base its plans on. He said the county will receive PILT pay-ments from the state in perpetu-ity or until the population reaches 150,000. Payment-in-Lieu- of-Tax-es helps take some of the sting out of losing tax revenues from land taken off the tax roll.

The City of Clewiston has been landlocked by USSC agri-cultural lands, but this sale could mean that the city will be able to expand.

Paul Pass of the Bonita Bay Group said the sale has brought up some questions concerning his company's plans for putting in developments in Clewiston, but that those plans will still move forward. He characterized this as a "once in a lifetime op-portunity" for Clewiston to trans-form itself outside of the corpo-rate town mold.

Clewiston City Manager Wen-

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dell Johnson said that the "fear factor" is the biggest issue at hand. He said all interested par-ties need to come together and plan for the next

six years - the amount of time USSC is expect-ed to continue harvesting sugar cane.

Mr. Johnson also said people need a "sense of security" that their interests are being heard.

Airglades Industrial Park is one economic engine the county is setting its hopes on. Mr. O'Neal said the county is pushing hard to diversify its economic base.

County Planner Vince Cautero said some fi ve percent of the land adjacent to the City of Clewiston is zoned for mixed use, so it is open for development at this time.

He also said that in Hendry County agricultural zoning in-cludes some types of industrial uses, so zoning already exists in many places for economic devel-opment to begin.

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## **A 'River of Grass' could run through the state's new land**

07/13/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online

Karl Wickstrom

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By KARL WICKSTROM-Palm Beach Post

An elephant named Flowway is in the room, but is difficult for some people to see. They'd like to give the 187,000-acre beast - also known as the U.S. Sugar land the state plans to buy - some other name. That would save face after so many years of pooh-poohing, with specious claims, the idea that a flowway to carry water from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades wouldn't work. The director of the South Florida Water Management District, Carol Wehle, clings to the negativity. '(The land) is not a flowway,' Ms. Wehle said, adding, 'If you flowed water into that land, it would just sit there like a lake.' Her comment echoes the water district's longstanding claim that the loss of farm soil has created a 'bowl effect' that would not let water flow south from the lake. Thus, the story goes, a flowway is out of the question.

Of course, a flowway is exactly what Everglades restoration forces want and are suing in federal court to cause. In 1993, scientists unanimously supported a flowway, which was the sixth option for Everglades restoration before the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and thus got the name Plan Six. The corps praised it the next year. Sadly, the flowway was then dropped under heavy political pressure because it required sugar cane land. (See RiversCoalition.org for a report on Plan Six.)

The new plan, calling for the water district to buy U.S. Sugar, appears to put Plan Six on the drafting board. On a map at the buyout announcement, the flowway path was labeled the 'Missing Link.' So, what about the bowl-effect claim? It's really the great bowl hoax. The district's opposition is based on the assumption that water would need to move into and over conservation areas to the east. It's true that those areas are higher. But Plan Six actually envisions water moving south by gravity, as water did naturally in the Everglades.

The reality of a downward slope is confirmed by Joe Schweigert, an engineering guru who has known the Everglades for three decades and in 2000 was named the water district's head man for Everglades

restoration. 'You still have the hydraulic gradient that's ultimately going to flow water from north to south,' Mr. Schweigert said in support of the flowway.

Understanding the potential of a flowway to move water from the lake, save the estuaries and restore much of the 'River of Grass' is crucial to getting benefits from the Great Sugar Land Deal.

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## **Bittersweet Closure For An Everglades Town**

07/13/2008

Tampa Tribune - Online

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BAIRD HELGESON-Tampa Tribune

CLEWISTON - Jim Withers sat in the back room of his small barbershop smoking a cigarette and studying his computer screen.

From the office, he could see Michael Smith sitting on a chair against the wall.

Withers' old friend didn't come for a haircut. He wanted to talk. Not about politics, or even gas prices. He wanted to talk about U.S. Sugar Corp.'s decision to close. 'If the plant closes, this town will become a ghost town,' said Smith, who worked at U.S. Sugar for five years.

Withers has cut the hair of company executives, refinery workers, their relatives and their children. His customers are sugar people.

So it is little surprise these days that nearly every conversation steers back to U.S. Sugar.

The company's decision to close is the latest rift in the sometimes bitter marriage between the agricultural giant and its workers, who simply call it 'Sugar.' The company gave the town's residents so much, but also left them wondering what they've had to do without. Now the 77-year union is drawing to an uncertain and at times maddening end, leaving residents scared, angry and frustrated.

Residents are left wondering: Can a one-industry town survive without its industry?

U.S. Sugar, which has been under siege from environmentalists for polluting the Everglades and has been facing pressure from lower-cost producers, has agreed to sell the state its 187,000 acres for an Everglades restoration project and close in six years. The largest conservation-land deal in Florida history would result in \$1.75 billion for the company and the loss of about 1,700 jobs.

It's a heart-stopping blow to a town of 6,500, an area along Lake Okeechobee that the Seminole Indians once used as a fishing camp.

Today, Clewiston is among Florida's last true company towns. From the sugar cane fields that surround the town, the only sign of Clewiston is the billowing smokestacks that fill the air with the scent of burning sugar, an odor that some find nauseating and others find comforting.

Unlike many other parts of Florida, it's easy to find locals with long ties to the area, whose mothers and fathers arrived on ox-drawn carts to pick beans and sugar cane. Some of the earliest settlers were lured by the challenge of draining the Everglades, a feat some experts considered impossible.

In the late 1800s, South Florida's cycle of hurricanes, then drought, then more flooding prompted Florida officials to seek federal aid to tame Mother Nature.

In about 1905, water managers and engineers began to drain the Everglades to make the land suitable for farming and development. The vast tapestry of swamp, forest and prairie was transformed into fertile farmland, ideal for beans, sugar cane and citrus. At the same time, the calming of volatile flood cycles allowed cities such as Miami and Fort Lauderdale to thrive.

Clewiston never flourished that way.

Tampa banker Alonzo Clewis is largely responsible for the town's first development in 1920.

Clewis, the town's namesake, partnered with Philadelphia investors John and Marion O'Brien to establish a picturesque lakeside town.

The town has changed little from their blueprints. The street grids and development pattern haven't deviated much from their plans, nor has the town burst from its boundaries, the way many coastal communities have.

Clewiston's median household income in 2005 was \$39,100, compared with \$42,433 for the state. The median home value in the town was \$88,100, compared with \$189,500 for Florida.

U.S. Sugar has pumped billions into the local economy. It helped pay for a library, community swimming pools and one of the town's most beloved amenities, an 18-hole golf course. The company even offered college scholarships to area students.

The community is an homage to all things sugar.

Visitors driving on the town's main drag, called Sugarland Highway, are greeted by signs that say: 'Clewiston. America's Sweetest Town.' High school athletes hold their games in Cane Field Stadium and kids play at Candy Cane Park.

Future Without 'Sugar'

Residents are trying to be hopeful, but discouragement is everywhere.

Early one morning after the announcement, Sonny's Bar-B-Q, which several residents deemed Clewiston's best restaurant, burned down. Authorities have determined the fire was not intentional.

Residents took it as a bad sign.

The town's only movie theater is for sale. A hastily spray-painted 'X' shows the price slashed from \$495,000 to \$395,000. The for-sale sign rests near a marquee advertising the Disney robot movie 'WALL-E' and 'Hancock,' about a drunken superhero played by Will Smith.

Another bad sign.

Withers isn't convinced the refinery will close, but he won't be around if it does.

He has an agreement to sell the barbershop to someone in New York.

He can decide when to complete the deal. It could be this year. It could be the next.

For now, he spends downtime in the back office on the Internet trying to meet available women in the Philippines, where he plans to move. 'It's nice there, simple,' said Withers, 62. 'And it's a long way from the trouble here.' The demise of U.S. Sugar has given hope to those who say it will finally spark a renaissance for Clewiston.

They say the company used its muscle to prevent new businesses from coming to town that might have driven up wages or competed for workers. In Hendry County, where Clewiston is, job growth is less than 30 percent of the Florida average.

Residents also complained that the company has refused to sell land near town that could have spurred development. 'The company has been a blessing and a curse,' said the Rev. Angel Ramos, pastor of First Community Presbyterian Church. 'It's fueled the economy, but it's also had a stranglehold on the economy.' Others think the refinery will keep running under a different name.

Florida Crystals and Okeelanta Corp., South Bay companies started by Cuban exiles in the late 1950s, own land crucial to the Everglades restoration project. Cuban sugar mogul Alfonso Fanjul Sr. and other exiles started the companies after leaving the country when Fidel Castro seized power and their assets.

Some think state leaders will use U.S. Sugar's refinery with millions of dollars in recent upgrades as part of a trade with Florida Crystals and Okeelanta.

Even the most optimistic residents think any meaningful resurgence will take time, especially one that hinges on a complex land swap and the whim of shifting political winds in Tallahassee.

Others have floated the idea that perhaps a food producer would buy the refinery, the largest of its kind in the world. Or maybe the plant could be remade into a biofuel production facility.

A few people think tourism could become the community's salvation as more anglers discover the trophy bass, catfish and other game fish in Lake Okeechobee.

That, too, could take decades. 'They spent 100 years to make it this way, and now they'll spend 100 years trying to put it back,' said Chuck Roseboom, who just moved back from Fort Myers.

#### A Company's Grip

News of the closure has emboldened some critics who might have otherwise kept quiet. 'Sugar is the only game in town, and they kept it that way,' said Audie Hooks, 86.

Hooks owned several used-car lots over the years. 'I stayed out of the way of Sugar, and they didn't bother me,' he said. 'As a general rule, you either get along with Sugar, or you leave.' Now Hooks helps out at Clewiston Pawn.

The shop buys and sells guns, baseball cards, generators, lawn equipment, tools, fishing rods and jewelry.

A few years back, a customer wanted a boom-box stereo on sale for \$40.

The customer didn't have money, but he did have a potbellied pig. 'I said, 'Give me \$5 and the pig, and you can have the stereo,'" said owner David Angell, whom everybody knows as Frog. 'Next thing you know, I had a pig,' he said. Angell tried to find the pig a home, calling at least six potential buyers.

No one was interested. 'So we ate it,' he said, somewhat apologetically. 'Best damn pig I ever ate.' Angell considers his business a good barometer for how things are going in the community.

Guns have become Angell's hottest seller lately as U.S. Sugar has axed hundreds of workers. 'There have been a lot more home invasions and burglaries,' Angell said. 'People want protection.' Said Angell: 'People are living on the edge.' Harlem's Plight

The closure of U.S. Sugar will be particularly hard on Harlem, a black community on the southwestern corner of Clewiston, just west of the refinery.

Of the 2,700 people who live in Harlem, 95.4 percent are black, according to U.S. Census data. The median income is \$22,400, about half the statewide median.

Blacks make up a large percentage of refinery workers and have suffered an equal share of the layoffs.

Moses Wilson, 40, has mixed feelings about the company and the town's future.

He worked at the refinery for five years crushing cane before being laid off in 2005.

People frequently didn't show up for work, so those who did were forced to work double shifts. 'It was crazy,' he said while washing his Nissan Maxima. 'Nobody wanted to come to work.' But the pay was good, generally \$900 a week during harvest.

He now works for Goodwill Industries International, through a contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He spends his days mowing the dike around Lake Okeechobee.

It can be steamy work, but at \$14 an hour, the pay is good and steady.

These days, dozens of people who got the ax from U.S. Sugar are applying for mowing jobs. Wilson doesn't want to lose his.

The company has cut its work force nearly in half from its peak, including roughly 750 jobs since 2000. 'Without Sugar, this is going to be a hard place to live,' he said. Fate Of Farmers

Terry Jackman is a cattle rancher who rents about 1,500 acres to U.S. Sugar for sugar cane and citrus crops. 'One more farmer down the drain,' said Jackman, 58. 'I am worried to death.' Jackman's blame falls squarely to Gov. Charlie Crist, who orchestrated the deal. 'Farmers are going to become extinct when this is all over,' he said. About 10 days ago, the head of the South Florida Water Management District came to a standing-room-only meeting at the John B. Boy Auditorium in Clewiston to try to alleviate concerns from local officials who felt excluded from the

negotiations.

Carol Wehle, the agency's executive director, told the crowd that the state wants to ensure the deal won't hurt the community, and that many jobs could be created by the environmental restoration. 'A lot of this is lip service,' former Clewiston Mayor John Perry said in an interview after the meeting. 'It's going to be a death blow to a lot of people. I think U.S. Sugar was broke, and this is the state's way of bailing them out.' Carl Berner is a third-generation resident of Clewiston.

His grandfather came to the area to dredge and drain the Everglades to help create the rich, mucky soil that his family now farms. 'That was his proudest accomplishment,' said Berner, 53. 'Now, the irony is they are spending all this money and going through all this effort to flood it again.' Survival At Brenda's

The owner of Brenda's bar is embracing the uncertainty. 'I am not worried about the town,' said Bobby Mitchell, who bought the bar from his mother-in-law, Brenda, about a year ago. 'People are going to drink no matter what, even if they don't have money for rent.' U.S. Sugar workers often come to Brenda's to relax after a shift.

Once the town's only bar, it is now among the town's last refuges for serious drinkers.

The sign outside says the bar opens at 10 a.m., but the regulars know it opens about 8 a.m. By 10, a few regulars can be heard debating whether it's too early for a bump of Jack Daniel's.

On Sundays, they hold an informal church service led by 'anybody who feels like talking,' said Diane Forrester, a bartender whose father, ex-husband and former fiance all worked for U.S. Sugar.

The bar used to have a cage where customers danced to the country western or rock 'n' roll songs that blasted from the jukebox.

Forrester had to explain to patrons that the law required any dancer to wear at least one item of clothing.

The most high-spirited dancers wore nothing but a sock.

A lot of naked women danced in Brenda's over the years, Forrester said. A few naked men, too.

It was a big draw.

Mitchell sheepishly admitted that his wife made him remove the cage when he bought the bar from her mother.

Now the remaining amenities are the jukebox, a pool table and two televisions.

Forrester and Mitchell figure if they can survive without the dancing cage, they can survive without U.S. Sugar.

Reporter Baird Helgeson can be reached at (813) 259-7668 or [bhelgeson@tampatrib.com](mailto:bhelgeson@tampatrib.com).

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## Clewiston ponders a future without U.S. Sugar

07/13/2008

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Heroux, Marcia

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Clewiston residents ponder the fate of their town after U.S. Sugar leaves  
By Marcia Heroux Pounds | South Florida Sun-Sentinel

CLEWISTON - Berner Oil Co. was founded here in 1930 by Carl Berner for one customer: U.S. Sugar Corp.

His grandson, Carl, now CEO, wonders what will happen to his business when the nation's largest sugar company sells itself to the state for \$1.75 billion.

"What's going to happen? How is it going to affect the people and our community?" said Berner, echoing the question residents of "American's Sweetest Town" have been asking since Gov. Charlie Crist's surprise announcement on June 24.

A sweet deal for U.S. Sugar Corp. is leaving a sour taste in the mouths of long-term residents such as Berner, whose grandfather built a home here in 1916. Clewiston is a close-knit community on the southwest shore of Lake Okeechobee, about a hour-and-a half drive from Fort Lauderdale or West Palm Beach.

Incorporated 1925  
4.57 Square miles  
6,500 Town residents  
38,000 Residents in Hendry County

Source: Town of Clewiston

"If U.S. Sugar is the first domino to fall, I suspect that's the market signal sugar production has peaked and is on the downside. Clewiston and its employment base are going to have to reinvent themselves," said Kevin Plenzler, an associate with Fishkind & Associates, a real estate consulting firm in Orlando.

Residents show a lot of pride in Clewiston and its heritage. Berner and others in the community go back two or three generations. The town and the sugar company have been dependent on each other for 77 years.

"Everything is tied to U.S. Sugar," said Cheryl Eby Gutjahr, a real estate broker who came to Clewiston because the sugar company was her former employer's largest customer.

Residents were shocked by the state's plan to buy U.S. Sugar's vast sugar cane fields, refinery and other assets to help restore the Everglades. Clewiston sits in the middle of that acreage, in Hendry County.

"The big surprise was they sold to the state, and it was lock, stock and barrel," said Mali Chamness, Clewiston's mayor since 2001.

"If U.S. Sugar is not here, we need an industry to take its place," said Chamness, who has requested a seat at the negotiating table with the purchasing agency, the South Florida Water Management District.

She said the state only needs about 120,000 of U.S. Sugar's 187,000 acres for Everglades restoration so property surrounding the town should be available for development or a new employer.

Miller Crouse, chief executive of First Bank, operating in Clewiston since 1922, doesn't see why Florida should pay \$1.75 billion for U.S. Sugar's assets when it doesn't need all of the company's land to restore the Everglades. "It makes no sense to me as a business person," he said.

Crouse also is concerned about the sale's effect on local economic development projects including Hendry Regional Hospital, which is in the middle of expansion.

With U.S. Sugar going out of business, the economic impact goes much further than the 1,700 sugar company employees, said Crouse, a 35-year resident of Clewiston. The company already has shrunk from about 2,500 workers a few years ago. And many of those displaced have become contractors and suppliers to U.S. Sugar.

With no concrete plan for Clewiston's survival, residents are concerned about their home values.

"We're kind of at a standstill," said Gutjahr of Rawl Real Estate in Clewiston. "When the news came out, people canceled their contracts that were buying."

But those who have invested in Clewiston, including two companies from Broward County, say the region offers an untapped opportunity.

"Taxes and labor are cheaper," said Daniel Weekley, whose Pembroke Pines firm, Weekley Brothers, recently built an industrial park in town. "I'm not pessimistic about it, even with this change."

An inland port proposal for South Bay, just 15 minutes away, also could help Clewiston, which sits along a rail line that's part of U.S. Sugar's assets going to the state. "We're a great transportation hub," Gutjahr said.

The pending U.S. Sugar sale gave Hendry County officials a jolt because the company makes up 24 percent of the county's tax base. But due to recently passed state legislation, U.S. Sugar will have to continue paying its property taxes for the next six years — the transitional term of the deal with the state.

Besides sugar, Clewiston's economy depends on tourism. People come from around Florida and other states to fish in Lake Okeechobee and with the drought, the bass haven't had a chance.

Clewiston also is depending on the growing popularity of ecotourism, especially businesses like Roland and Mary Ann Martin's Marina and the historic Clewiston Inn.

"People don't like change, but sometimes change is a good thing," said Mary Ann Martin, owner of the marina where boat owners dock for lunch or supplies. Martin supports the state's efforts to restore the Everglades and thinks her business, which employs 60, will survive the land sale.

Clewiston newcomers Floyd Salkey and Yasir Khan bought the Clewiston Inn from U.S. Sugar last June. The owners of Florida's Finest Developers have invested more than \$10 million in renovating the inn, built in 1938, a shopping center redevelopment, and local housing.

They've begun sponsoring ecotourism tours through the Clewiston Inn to

draw visitors interested in bird watching and the area's natural beauty.

"This is Old Florida. It really gives you a chance to step back in time," Salkey said.

Marcia Heroux Pounds can be reached at mpounds@sun-sentinel.com or 561-243-6650.

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## **Editorial Don't dump other water projects**

07/14/2008  
News-Press

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Just because the state is buying out U.S. Sugar doesn't mean water management projects should go by the wayside. The report last week that the South Florida Water Management District might dump the plan to build the C43 reservoir is disturbing.

The reservoir was going to be created to help store and purify excess water from Lake Okeechobee for storage and to ensure that nutrient-laden water didn't spoil our Caloosahatchee River - as we've seen in the past.

The price tag is \$500 million.

The explanation is that the recent \$1.75 billion deal to buy 187,000 acres south of Lake O for Everglades restoration could eat up that budget.

Plus, the federal government is not doing its part to pay for its promised share of the bill.

The feds are a 50-50 partner, and they should pony up.

We repeat, the U.S. Sugar buyout does not eliminate the need to continue important efforts to improve our water quality.

This is for the good of our environment, our economy and our quality of life.

And our members of Congress, especially our own district representative Connie Mack, R-Fort Myers, should fight harder to make the federal government live up to its commitment.

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## **Editorial Research the details first on Everglades restoration**

07/12/2008  
Naples Daily News

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Everglades restoration is a work in progress. Even with what is widely regarded as a major step forward, there are questions whether the science is right. That's good. Let's hear skepticism now about a proposed purchase of 300 square miles of sugar cane fields for \$1.75 billion.

That beats hearing it later, after the money is gone.

Too often we see programs jump in and "do something," only to sweat the details and impacts later. That is even an apt description of some of the development that has drained and polluted the Everglades and efforts so far to bring it back to sustainable life.

Now we hear from observers with knowledge of the project that it might be too little too late, or that the land to be retired from farming is beyond affordable repair.

Even the most idealistic advocate of Everglades restoration should want to know all there is to know, now.

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## Is Florida the Sunset State?

07/11/2008

Time - Online

MICHAEL GRUNWALD

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Michael Grunwald-TIME

Water Crisis Mortgage Fraud Political Dysfunction Algae Polluted Beaches  
Declining Crops Failing Public Schools Foreclosures

Greetings from Florida, where the winters are great!

Otherwise, there's trouble in paradise. We're facing our worst real estate meltdown since the Depression. We've got a water crisis, insurance crisis, environmental crisis and budget crisis to go with our housing crisis. We're first in the nation in mortgage fraud, second in foreclosures, last in high school graduation rates. Our consumer confidence just hit an all-time low, and our icons are in trouble--the citrus industry, battered by freezes and diseases; the Florida panther, displaced by highways and driveways; the space shuttle, approaching its final countdown. New research suggests that the Everglades is collapsing, that our barrier beaches could be under water within decades, that a major hurricane could cost us \$150 billion.

We do wish you were here, because attracting outsiders has always been our primary economic engine, and our engine is sputtering. Population growth is at a 30-year low. School enrollment is declining. Retirees are drifting to the Southwest and the Carolinas, while would-be Floridians who bought preconstruction condos in more optimistic times are scrambling--and often suing--to break contracts. This is our dotcom bust, except worse, because our local governments are utterly dependent on construction for tax revenues, so they're slashing school and public-transportation budgets that were already among the nation's stingiest. 'This may be our tipping point,' says former Senator Bob Graham.

Florida was once a swampy rural backwater, the poorest and emptiest

state in the South. But in the 20th century, air-conditioning, bug spray and the miracle of water control helped transform it into a migration destination for the restless masses of Brooklyn and Cleveland, Havana and Port-au-Prince. Florida developed its own ventricle at the heart of the American Dream--not only as an affordable playground and comfortable retirement home with no income tax but also as a state of escape and opportunity, a Magic Kingdom for tourists, a Fountain of Youth for seniors, a Cape Canaveral for Northerners looking to launch their second acts. Even the soggy Everglades, once considered a God-forsaken hellhole, became a national treasure.

But now the financial and environmental bill for a century of runaway growth and exploitation is coming due. The housing bust has exposed a human pyramid scheme--an economy that relied on a thousand newcomers a day, too many of them construction workers, mortgage bankers, real estate agents and others whose livelihoods depended on importing a thousand more newcomers the next day. And the elaborate water-management scheme that made southern Florida habitable has been stretched beyond capacity, yo-yoing between brutal droughts and floods, converting the Everglades into a tinderbox and a sewer, ravaging the beaches, bays, lakes and reefs that made the region so alluring in the first place. 'The dream is fading,' says University of South Florida historian Gary Mormino. 'People think Florida is too crowded, too spoiled, too expensive, too crazy, too many immigrants--name your malady.' Still, the winters really are great! And this doom-and-gloom might sound familiar. In 1981, TIME declared crime- and drug-plagued South Florida a 'Paradise Lost.' The region then embarked on an epic boom. Southeast Florida--including Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach--ballooned into the nation's seventh largest metro, while southwest Florida--Naples, Cape Coral, Fort Myers--became the fastest-growing metro. Last year 82.4 million visitors found their way to this lost paradise. And last month Governor Charlie Crist unveiled a \$1.75 billion deal to buy the U.S. Sugar Corp. and its 187,000 acres of farmland, a move that would help restore the Everglades. It's the state's best eco-news in decades.

So lifers like seventh-generation Floridian Allison DeFoor--lawyer, lobbyist, historian, Episcopal minister, environmental consultant and Republican operative--are disinclined to panic just yet. 'Sure, it's the end of Florida as we know it,' DeFoor quips. 'It's always the end of Florida as we know it.' Florida's history is lush with volatility and flimflam. As Groucho Marx's real estate huckster warned in *The Cocoanuts* in 1929, 'You can even get stucco! Oh, how you can get stucco.' But eventually, the lies always seemed to come true, because there were always new dreamers from cold climates, and worthless swampland was just a drainage canal and a zoning variance away from becoming a golf-course subdivision.

Yet even boosters admit that Florida's Miracle-Gro has created many of its current problems. 'We need steady growth, not crazy growth,' Crist says. There's a sense that paradise has been ruined by awful traffic, overcrowded schools, overtapped aquifers and polluted beaches. The land of Disney dreams for the middle class is now a high-cost, low-wage state with Mickey Mouse schools and Goofy insurance rates, living beyond its environmental and economic means in harm's way. As peculiar as it sounds, this go-for-broke state of boundless possibilities--the land of Kimbo Slice, Miami Vice and Mar-a-Lago--might be leading America into a new era of limits.

The Busted Dream

Juan Puig embodied the Florida dream, proving that an ordinary guy with moxie could make a fortune and enjoy the high life by selling the dream to others. A Cuban immigrant, he started his career as a janitor and then a baggage handler at the Miami airport, living in a Hialeah apartment without air-conditioning, peddling sunglasses to co-workers on the side. In the 1990s, he discovered real estate, rehabbing and selling a few foreclosed duplexes, then developing town houses and branching into condo conversions as the market went nuts. He soon built a statewide empire with 300 employees, including a staff priest who blessed his projects. He bought a waterfront mansion in Coral Gables, a fleet of classic cars, a Ferretti yacht, huge collections of fine wine, Cuban art and luxury watches. Just last year he spent \$80,000 on an antique billiard table.

Puig's financial records were a mess, and his accountant was a convicted felon with ties to the Colombian drug kingpin, Pablo Escobar. But that never seemed to bother Puig's investors or lenders, who kept showering him with money as long as condo prices kept soaring. It certainly didn't bother Puig, who explained in a recent deposition that he never paid attention to his books, in part because his expertise was in matters like where to advertise property and whether to paint the doors yellow or white, and in part because he never imagined the Florida housing market could tank: 'Of course, I trusted that the business, like always, would be successful.'

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## **EDITORIAL Save the Thicket Texas should join a national movement to buy and preserve irreplaceable**

07/11/2008

Houston Chronicle

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Jul. 11--In the past month elected officials in Florida and Wyoming announced massive purchases of private lands to protect wilderness areas from development. It's a distinct contrast with Texas, where state officials have poorly maintained current parks, been unable to add to them and repeatedly considered selling off state-owned wilderness areas, including the Big Bend Ranch and Christmas Mountains areas.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry even opposes a federal judge's ruling supporting the creation of a national refuge on the Neches River that feeds the Big Thicket National Preserve in East Texas. The governor is siding with the efforts of the city of Dallas to build a reservoir that would flood much of the refuge's targeted 25,000 acres, submerging hardwood bottomlands and jeopardizing one of the state's richest migratory bird sanctuaries.

In the case of Florida, Gov. Charlie Crist announced a tentative deal with United States Sugar that would secure 187,000 acres that are vital to maintaining the natural habitat that sustains nearby Everglades National Park and its diverse wildlife. The state will pay \$1.75 billion to the company, which essentially will phase itself out of business over six years. Environmentalists praised the deal as a key step in restoring the Everglades, which have been polluted by fertilizer runoff from farming and desiccated by reduced flow of water diverted to residential developments. Crist called the acquisition "as monumental as the creation of the nation's first national park, Yellowstone."

Sen. Max Baucus of Wyoming was instrumental in securing federal legislation that will provide tax credit bonds to help two environmental groups purchase 500 square miles of forest from Plum Creek Timber for more than \$500 million. The acquisitions will fill in gaps in federal lands and create ecological bridges between separated wilderness areas. The land is located in an area known as the Crown of the Continent, one of the most intact ecosystems left in the nation. Under the terms of agreement between the company and the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land, logging using sustainable forestry techniques would continue for 15 years.

Texas has elected officials who share the environmental concerns of Gov. Crist and Sen. Baucus. U.S. Rep. Kevin Brady, R-The Woodlands, who represents the Big Thicket area, has introduced a bill to add 100,000 acres to the Big Thicket Preserve by purchasing land from willing sellers or accepting it as gifts from donors.

Sierra Club spokesman Brandt Mannchen told the Chronicle there is a sense of urgency in acquiring land while it is still available. "I don't think things are getting better with the habitat," he said, "so whatever we can save now may be all that we can get."

The Texas congressional delegation should get behind Brady's bill to ensure that the wild beauty of the Big Thicket will be enhanced and attract future generations of Lone Star residents and tourists. Rather than opposing the Neches River Refuge, Gov. Perry should rethink his priorities and support federal efforts to preserve rather than bury a natural treasure.

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## **Sugar industry likely to remain political force**

07/14/2008

South Florida Sun-Sentinel - Online

William E. Gibson, Linda Kleindienst And Ryan McNeill

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William E. Gibson, Linda Kleindienst And Ryan McNeill-South Florida Sun-Sentinel

U.S. Sugar Corp.'s plan to sell its land to clear a path for Everglades restoration signals the decline of a major political player that has shaped state and national policy for decades.

U.S. Sugar and its allies in the sugar cane and sugar beet industry have poured millions into political campaigns, boosted or cut short political careers and made their imprint on Congress and the Florida Legislature.

The unfolding land deal does not herald the end of Big Sugar a powerful industry of growers and refiners, much of it based in Florida or its political clout. Observers on all sides of the transaction say it could strengthen the remaining players, notably Florida Crystals and other concerns run by the Fanjul family of . Big Sugar's survival was assured by congressional passage last month of price supports that keep the industry alive. Its clout over the next few years may be enhanced by the conversion of sugar cane into ethanol, a potentially profitable enterprise

... tied to the politically popular cause of developing alternative fuels. 'The land deal just removes a player from the field,' said Eric Eikenberg, chief of staff to . 'But there are multiple interests within the industry that will remain very much a part of the landscape.' U.S. Sugar's potential demise over the next six years indicates some limits on the company's political clout.

The firm ran into resistance from an independent-minded governor and his appointees to the . A turning point came when Crist and the district's board refused to allow U.S. Sugar to back-pump polluted water into Lake Okeechobee. 'For the first time in the history of U.S. Sugar, its executives looked the governor in the eye and got told no,' said Charles Lee, director of advocacy for Audubon of Florida. 'That was the first time they faced the fact that their political contributions and all their lobbying were not going to get them where they needed to go.' Instead, Crist offered to buy the company out for \$1.75 billion, a deal that depends on land swaps with Florida Crystals that would create a flow-way between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. 'Even though we are exiting the business, we think it's got a bright future,' said Robert Coker, senior vice president for U.S. Sugar Corp. 'I plan on continuing to be active over the next six or seven years,' he said. 'I don't know what will happen after that. But there's a lot of other big players in Florida a whole pile of people involved.' Florida's sugar empire has three major players: U.S. Sugar, built in the 1930s; Florida Crystals, run by the Fanjul family; and the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida, with 54 Florida farmer members.

Since 1994, sugar interests have funneled at least \$33.5 million into state campaigns. More than two-thirds of it was spent to fend off a constitutional amendment in 1996 that called for a penny-a-pound sugar tax to help clean up the Everglades.

In 2002, a group backed by U.S. Sugar torpedoed one of its critics, Mary Barley, when she ran for state agriculture commissioner. Barley was the front-runner for the Democratic nomination until a TV ad campaign, funded by a U.S. Sugar-backed group, accused the former Republican of being a disloyal Democrat. She lost the primary.

In 2006, the same group worked to discredit Democrat Jim Davis in his bid for governor. Ads, targeted at black and Jewish voters, criticized Davis for missing a U.S. House vote on Israel and for voting against compensation for two wrongly convicted black men while he was in the state House.

While sugar companies funded campaigns, its lobbyists held sway in the Legislature. They persuaded members of both parties in 2003 to delay until 2016 tough limits on phosphorous runoff from agricultural fertilizers. 'Some have painted Big Sugar as the devil, evil incarnate,' said former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham, who sometimes worked with and other times against sugar interests during his eight years as governor and 18 years in Washington. But Graham gave the sugar lobby credit for helping secure congressional approval in 2000 of a state-federal plan to restore the Everglades.

Sugar growers and their allies in Congress say they play the political game to protect a major employer and economic engine in rural Florida that provides a staple product for consumers at a stable price. 'We've always been very active [in politics], and I don't anticipate that changing,' said Gaston Cantens, vice president of Florida Crystals.

U.S. Sugar spent \$50,000 on national lobbying in the first quarter of this year, about on par with the pace last year. The entire industry mostly

cane and beet growers nationwide spent \$2.3 million, more than half of what it paid all of last year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a watchdog group in Washington. Much of the lobbying related to passage of the Farm Bill in Congress.

The industry also contributed more than \$2.6 million to political parties, candidates and Political Action Committees on the federal level last year and this year.

The lobbying and contributions helped persuade Congress this year and in past years to extend the controversial price-support program that virtually guarantees a profit. Critics over the years found themselves out-matched, including former Rep. Clay Shaw, R- Fort Lauderdale.

"We almost got rid of the sugar program one year," Shaw said. "I've never seen a situation with more lobbyists sitting in the balcony overlooking the House."

The sugar cane and sugar beet companies, who join forces on the national level, used their money to reward allies and punish Shaw and other adversaries.

Industry donors gave \$22,750 to Democrat Ron Klein of Boca Raton in the 2006 campaign to help defeat Shaw. The industry has given Klein another \$33,150 for his re-election campaign this year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

The top recipient is fellow South Florida Rep. Tim Mahoney, D- Palm Beach Gardens. He's gotten \$34,074.

Klein and Mahoney voted for extension of price supports in a farm bill passed last month. They said the industry has not made heavy demands.

"They have no more or less influence than anybody else who walks through my door," said Mahoney, adding that he primarily wants to preserve the livelihood of workers and their families in sugar country. "Those are my people, and I am going to fight for them."

Big Sugar's power and influence, meanwhile, continues unabated.

"The whole industry is a powerful, well-informed, well-connected lobby," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Weston. "For the foreseeable future, I don't expect their influence to change very much."

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## **Water districts team up to clean waterways**

07/12/2008

Jupiter Courier

JASONE KANE Correspondent

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Jason Kane-Stuart NEWS

MARTIN COUNTY The St. Lucie River soon will be a little cleaner now that Martin County and the South Florida Water Management District have combined resources to fund four big projects.

The county and the water management district, which oversees water resources from Orlando to the Keys, will each chip in \$5 million for the projects, approved last month, over the coming year.

Water quality in the St. Lucie Estuary has deteriorated in part because of excessive nutrient loading, caused when nutrients such as nitrogen or phosphorus enter the water or soil from fertilizer or other sources.

The county marked the four projects as critical for the cleanup of waters coming from Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie Watershed, said Temperince Morgan, the Northern Everglades program implementation manager for the water district.

'It is crucial to restore and protect these resources both for the sake of the resources which exist within them, as well as for the protection and restoration of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem as a whole,' she said.

Officials hope these projects will improve the timing, quality and quantity of waters flowing into the estuary in coming years.

#### THE PROJECTS

Building two stormwater treatment areas in Old Palm City that will serve about 106 acres of residential land, helping reduce sediment and nutrient loading to the St. Lucie River and Estuary.

Starting in December, construction crews will remove about 253,000 cubic yards of muck from the Manatee Pocket of the St. Lucie Estuary, helping improve navigation for boats and reducing pollution, as well as creating a sediment trap that will make the muck easier to remove in the future.

A sewer service will be installed in the North River Shores area, providing about 450 lots with an underground collection system. The water will then be pumped to a treatment plant to be thoroughly cleaned and reused.

A water quality retrofit on Manatee Creek will improve drainage on 833 acres of residential, commercial and industrial land, helping to eliminate discharges into the Manatee Pocket. The second and third phases of this project will provide additional water treatment at the Dixie Park Wastewater Treatment Plant.

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## **MIAMI-DADE WATER AND SEWER DEPARTMENT PROVIDES 20-YEAR WATER USE PERMIT UPDATE TO SOUTH FLORIDA**

07/11/2008  
CMD First Source  
US States News

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CMD First Source

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, Fla. The Miami-Dade County government issued the following news release:

Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department Director (WASD) John W. Renfrow, P.E., provided a six-month update on WASD's 20-Year Water Use Permit to the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD) Governing Board today.

Highlights of the update include:

Design and construction deadlines for alternative water supply projects in the Water Use Permit have been met to date. Some of the projects are:

Reclaimed water facility for groundwater replenishment in south Miami-Dade

Blending wells to introduce Floridan aquifer water at the Preston-Hialeah plants in north Miami-Dade

Reverse-osmosis water treatment plant to be jointly owned by Hialeah and Miami-Dade

A one million gallon per day (MGD) reclaimed water system for Key Biscayne

A 7 MGD reclaimed water system to serve North Miami and North Miami Beach for irrigation purposes

A pilot plant to determine the feasibility of achieving the water quality requirements to rehydrate coastal wetlands

Water use has declined from 345 MGD to about 304 MGD (11 percent reduction), due to the department's aggressive water-use efficiency program and water use restrictions.

The Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners and the Mayor have adopted an ordinance establishing water-efficient plumbing fixture requirements more stringent than the Florida Building Code and providing for annual updates to incorporate new technologies.

Overall, significant progress is being made across all Water Use Permit requirements, and WASD continues to work closely with the SFWMD, other regulatory agencies, and stakeholder groups to achieve the Water Use Permit objectives on time and on budget.

A copy of the Water Use Permit Compliance Highlights is available online at: <http://www.miamidade.gov/wasd/wup-reports.asp>.

Contact: Frank Calderon, 786/552-8251, [fcald@miamidade.gov](mailto:fcald@miamidade.gov)

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**Hallandale program aims to conserve water City project installs rain sensors that shut off your spr**

07/13/2008

Calibre MacroWorld

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'We're offering at no cost to the resident a rain sensor on existing timed sprinkler systems. The sensor will sense that there is enough water saturation in the ground and will allow the timer to automatically turn off if it was scheduled for a particular time,' said Mary Francis Jeannot, administrative analyst with the city's public works department.

The project is part of a \$50,000 grant awarded by the South Florida Water Management District to fund low-voltage irrigation systems and the cost of the sensors. The district typically invests \$400,000 a year in water conservation projects 'Water is something that we need to treat conservatively,' said Mark Elsner, director of the district's water supply implementation division. 'Water is a finite resource that is dependent on our rainfall to recharge it. It does have a limit.' The district has had a long-standing conservation program, but public interest seems to peak primarily during water shortages, he said. The district's goal is to institute measures that will affect conservation on a daily basis.

Turning sprinkler systems off when it's raining is one way to do this. 'We need to use what we have to extend those resources and possibly avoid or at least forestall what could be a very significant investment in alternative water supply development,' said district spokesman .

The rain sensor retrofit program targets residents whose houses were built prior to 1992. New houses are generally required to have the rain sensor as part of their construction.

The city hopes to install 400 devices, saving an estimated 11.5 million gallons of water a year. So far, the city has about 50 approved applicants; more are pending. 'We are doing the best we can to prevent water waste,' said Earl King, deputy director of the public works department.

To apply for the program, call 954-457-1608. It typically takes two to three weeks before the sensor is installed.

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## **Hurricane Preparedness Expo today in Kissimmee**

07/13/2008

Orlando Sentinel

McCoy, Patrick

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Patrick McCoy |Orlando Sentinel

The Kissimmee Utility Authority will host the 2008 Osceola Hurricane Preparedness Expo at the Kissimmee Civic Center from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday. The event is free to the public.

The expo will feature presentations from emergency responders on power restoration, generator safety, tree trimming, debris collection, and county and city disaster response. Presenters also will field questions from the audience.

Expected exhibitors include KUA, Osceola County Emergency Management, City of Kissimmee, Toho Water Authority, Osceola County Council on Aging, University of Florida's IFAS Osceola County Extension, South Florida Water Management District, American Red Cross, Florida Division of Emergency Management, Federal Emergency Management Agency and the local club of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service. Emergency response vehicles also will be on display.

Attendees will receive a 2008 Osceola Hurricane Handbook. The 40-page guide includes practical tips to prepare for hurricanes and floods, plus helpful Osceola County telephone numbers, a disaster supplies checklist and a hurricane tracking chart.

Check current weather conditions Refreshments will be served and those who attend will be eligible for several door prizes.

The Kissimmee Civic Center is located at 201 E. Dakin Ave. in downtown Kissimmee.

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## Hallelujah! Summer Rains are Back

07/11/2008

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Hallelujah!: Summer rains are back

Wet season makes a comeback

West Palm Beach, FL – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) announced that South Florida rainfall averaged 8.3 inches District-wide in June, which is about the historical average for the month. With a slow start transitioning into the wet season early in the month, June's rainfall patterns progressively improved throughout the District with daily afternoon showers becoming more consistent, wide-spread and heavy over the last three weeks of the month.

Florida's wet season typically lasts about five months, through November 1.

The wet season on average produces two-thirds, or 35 inches, of the region's annual rainfall. About 20 percent of the annual total—or about 11 inches—typically falls between the Memorial Day and the Fourth of July weekends. Since May 24, the region received about 9 inches of rain.

The transition into the 2008 wet season comes on the heels of a multi-year rainfall deficit and a below-average November through May dry season, which ended with about 2.5 inches below the historical average.

During this year's dry season, the region received a total

See Rains — Page 2

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Submitted photo/ Waddy Thompson

Mother Nature has a way of replenishing herself. This year it's taking a little longer than usual, but the summer rains are finally doing their work.

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Submitted photo/ Waddy Thompson

Toadstools are growing again in yards, fields and pastures - part of nature's cycle in Southwest Florida.

Rains

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of 14.57 inches of rain, or 77 per-cent of the historical average. Although groundwater and surface water levels in most areas of the District are benefiting in the short-term from June's rainfall, the agency's 16-county region remains in a water shortage, and emergency landscape irrigation restrictions remain in place to help protect local water supplies from the impacts of the long-term rain shortfall. During the wet sea-son, residents are reminded to turn off sprinkler systems and let the daily rainfall naturally irrigate lawns and landscapes.

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## Complaints pour in about county water bills

07/11/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online

MITRA MALEK

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MITRA MALEK-Palm Beach Post

The rainy season should bring relief - not only from summer heat but also from expensive water bills.

County water customers have been wincing at high June water bills, wondering if their pipes leaked or if workers misread meters. Palm Beach County Water Utilities Department since July 1 has logged more than 8,200 complaint calls from frustrated residents.

Turns out, with the exception of a few identified leaks, nothing went wrong in tabulating the bills, water department staff said.

Instead several merging factors caused the spike.

Wet weather preceded April and May, the hottest and driest two-month period since spring 2007. And on April 18 the South Florida Water Management District bumped watering restrictions from once a week to twice a week. That means residents' bills had been low compared with June.

Plus, the water department estimates bills based on past consumption. Real usage wound up higher than the estimates.

Finally, a 15 percent surcharge that started May 1 kicked in, raising rates for some people. 'Bills were accurate,' said Robert Nelton, a spokesperson for the county's water utilities department.

The county reread meters and spot checked their accuracy. It also reviewed bill calculations. Water department staff addressed the few cases where leaks were part of the problem, a county news release said.

Records show that county's 500,000 water customers used 992 million gallons in June compared with 777 million gallons in March.

The late-afternoon thunderstorms so characteristic of summer season should provide some relief to residents, Nelton said. 'The situation is going to correct itself,' he said. 'The bills are going to come back down.'

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## 8,000 complain as Palm Beach County water bills soar

07/11/2008

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Hafenbrack, Josh

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By Josh Hafenbrack | South Florida Sun-Sentinel

For Diana Davis, the start of summer came with a shocker in the mail: a \$300 water bill, triple what she usually pays.

She checked for water leaks. Nothing.

"We have those European shower heads, which practically dribble out the water, and those low-flush toilets," said Davis, 52, who lives west of Boynton Beach. "When I'm brushing my teeth, I turn the faucet off. Nothing has changed."

Davis is among an unprecedented wave of more than 8,000 county water customers who have called since July 1 to complain about unusually high bills, many claiming they didn't use the number of gallons their water meters report.

How to keep your water bills under control

How to save money: Bathroom conservation tips Photos County officials, though, say the meters aren't lying. To blame: Converging factors of a 15 percent surcharge that kicked in May 1, the end of tight watering restrictions and weeks of hot, dry weather.

"The customer always likes to think they didn't use the water, but somebody used the water," said Water Utilities Department director Bevin Beaudet. "It didn't just go into the blue sky."

The county's roughly 500,000 water customers used 991.8 million gallons of water in June, an increase from the 777 million gallons that flowed in March, according to county figures. The rise is even more dramatic given the county population is higher in March, when snowbirds still were in town.

County officials said faulty meters were not the culprit in any of the 8,200 complaint calls they fielded in recent days.

The county's two-month billing cycle meant many customers paid their May bills based on an estimate relying on past water use. But when workers read meters in June, they found an unexpected, sharp increase

in the number of gallons that flowed to homes. The uptick came as once-a-week Water restrictions were eased on April 18, followed by summer and below-average rainfall through early June.

Still, customers such as Brent Key aren't convinced. Key's meter read 25,000 gallons for June — nearly twice his monthly average over the last year. His bill doubled, to \$143.50. He said he never drained and refilled his pool and he kept sprinklers on their normal, twice-a-week schedule.

"We've actually made a conscious effort, my wife and I, to cut back," said Key, 49, who lives in the Springhill development west of Lake Worth.

Beaudet counters that these customers did use more water, whether they realize it or not, and might be experiencing sticker shock at today's costs

Many only now are feeling the pinch from the county's costlier, year-old tiered rate system. The first 4,000 gallons are 85 cents per 1,000 gallons. But, in an effort to promote conservation, the price ramps up dramatically for heavier water users. Once a customer hits 10,000 gallons, the price jumps to \$4.75 per 1,000 gallons.

Also, a 15 percent surcharge was added to water bills starting May 1 to make up for a shortfall in revenues. The county says the charge is temporary, but no date has been set for it to expire.

"Water costs more," Beaudet said. "The price is not going to go down."

Fuel prices are a big reason, making pumping water through the county's 2,064 miles of pipelines costlier.

Another major factor: the collapse in the real estate market, which stalled development and deprived the water department of new customers and lucrative hookup charges. Now, customers are stuck with the bill for hundreds of miles of pipelines laid in western Palm Beach County in anticipation of growth that never happened.

"People just think there's no consequences — let's just stop growth tomorrow," County Commissioner Mary McCarty said. "One of the consequences is what you're seeing. We have to build an infrastructure to prepare for the future. If the future doesn't come, that infrastructure is still there and still has to be paid for."

Josh Hafenbrack can be reached at [jhafenbrack@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:jhafenbrack@sun-sentinel.com) or 561-228-5508.

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## **East Bonita landowners feel taken by water district**

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By CHARLIE WHITEHEAD - Naples Daily News

Some east Bonita Springs residents are more convinced than ever that they've been treated unfairly by the South Florida Water Management District.

So is their attorney.

Bill Moore of the Brigham Moore law firm has represented around 30 landowners in east Bonita for almost a decade, since the district launched a program they call the Southern CREW. The program was meant to purchase 4,770 acres and return them to their natural state to prevent a repeat of the severe flooding that plagued Bonita Springs in the mid-1990s.

Moore fought against condemnation orders in court, losing first in circuit court and then on appeal. He was shocked this week when he read that the district is looking to sell the land it bought south of the Kehl Canal.

"We were stunned when we saw that article," he said.

Specifically, Moore said, district officials testified in court that the project required every one of the 4,770 acres.

"They said they had done all the planning and engineering," Moore said. "That's not the truth apparently."

Apparently not.

District officials are now proposing to sell the land south of the Kehl Canal, in part because of the financial realities of the situation and in part because it's not needed for the flood reduction project.

The financial reality is a project originally expected to cost \$14 million has already cost the district \$28 million to buy about 3,700 acres. District officials expect to need another \$16 million.

According to Tommy Strowd, the district's assistant deputy director for Everglades restoration, the land south of the canal is not needed for the project. The district governing board got a briefing last week about potentially removing that land from the project. Strowd said afterward that the detailed planning and engineering had not been done before the project began.

That's no surprise to Sam Snell, who still lives on Snell Lane just south of the canal.

"They've lied. They've told stories. They've not been totally truthful," Snell said. "I did my time in southeast Asia. When I came back, if someone said something to me about my government, I'd have been glad to knock the hell out of them. I'm losing it."

Snell has had a condemnation order hanging over his house for eight years.

"I'm kind of tired of it," he said.

Snell built his house 20 years ago, also building the road to it that bears his name. His five acres has two houses, a pool and a garage. At the peak of the market, he said, he'd have wanted \$2 million for it.

But it's virtually unsellable now, he said. He could literally get a letter

any day that would give him 60 days to move out. Plus he quit fixing things eight years ago.

"I thought I was going to have to move out tomorrow," he said.

Snell said he will never willingly sell to the district.

"They testified they wanted the property for a watershed area," he said. "I intend to see that's what they use it for."

If he doesn't agree to sell and the district takes the property anyway, Snell believes he or his kids would have legal standing to challenge the district if they try to sell.

The district does want to sell. Officials have proposed Lee County's Conservation 2020 land-buying program buy 240 acres for \$6.8 million. If the program can't or won't buy it, the surplus land could be sold on the open market.

Melody Bowers, the attorney for Conservation 2020, said she doesn't know whether the purchase would be legal. The program deals only with willing sellers. The Conservation 2020 board is supposed to discuss the proposed deal in August.

Moore said he is considering "legal remedies" for his clients.

"Private property owners should not be treated that way," he said. "It's an intolerable situation."

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## **COMMUNITY NEWS ROUNDUP**

07/12/2008

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Palm Beach County

Water-saving information is provided in Spanish

A Web site offers water-saving tips in Spanish.

The South Florida Water Management district this month launched the site that includes tips about positioning sprinklers for optimal effect, using low-flow faucets and ways to cut water use in the kitchen.

Go to [www.savewaterfl.com](http://www.savewaterfl.com) and click on "en espanol."

The site includes information geared toward residents, businesses and agriculture.

South Florida water supplies remain strained by back-to-back years of drought. Most of the region is under twice-a-week landscape watering limits.

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## New Pompano park planned

07/13/2008

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d'Oliveira, Sean

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By SEAN d'OLIVEIRA | South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Pompano Beach city commissioners recently approved establishing a park at 200 E. Atlantic Blvd.

With only 0.75 acres to work with, the park will be a passive area, consisting mostly of benches, paths and landscaping. The park is not expected to have any playground equipment, but will feature plenty of green space.

The resolution approved the project and budget for the park, but final plans must be submitted to the parks and recreational board for final approval, said city engineer Helen Gray. Gray plans to submit the proposal later this month.

The \$125,000 cost to establish the park is coming from the city's capital improvement plan.

The city purchased the property several years ago, said City Commissioner Rex Hardin.

However, the city was not able to develop the land sooner because of environmental concerns; a gas station used to be on the site. The primary environmental issues were underground gas and oil pipes that Gray said are common for old stations.

"It's kind of been an eyesore for a long time," Hardin said.

The state and county financed quarterly monitoring tests of the site, said Mayor Lamar Fisher. The site was recently deemed environmentally safe.

"We can now move forward and present this property as a nice addition to our community," Fisher said.

The property is just east of Cypress Road on the south side of Atlantic Boulevard. Directly west of the site is a corner property owned by the South Florida Water Management District. Hardin suggested coordinating with the district to spruce up the entire section.

"If we work with the [district], we could have a nice piece of property," he said. "It'd be nice to keep the rest of the corner green as well."

"The area will be more aesthetically pleasing, which is desperately needed," Gray said.

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## Turtle nesting: It's a 1-in-1,000 proposition

07/13/2008

Palm Beach Post

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By WILLIE HOWARD-Palm Beach Post

The beaches of northern Palm Beach County are prime nesting areas for sea turtles this time of year.

Late at night, when the beaches are quiet, female turtles pull themselves slowly up onto the sand, choose a spot where the sand feels just right, and dig specialized pits for egg laying. Then they use their flippers to excavate a cylinder about 18 inches deep in the sand to hold their leathery eggs and protect them from predators.

Watching the miracle of sea turtle nesting is something that happens frequently this time of year as trained guides at beachfront nature centers take small groups on night turtle walks.

The July 2 walk at John D. MacArthur Beach State Park (where there is already a waiting list for this summer's turtle walks), began with a video describing sea turtle nesting.

Park ranger Charlie Hein and several volunteers took us quietly to the beach, leading the way with red-beam flashlights. We were not allowed to use cameras with flash or flashlights. Man-made light arouses suspicion among turtles and can make them look elsewhere for a nesting beach. We had to be quiet. Cellphones were silenced.

One reason the turtles like MacArthur Beach State Park is that no buildings are visible from the beach. Park beaches are darker than those of condo-studded Singer Island.

"It's isolated, and you get a little bit of everything," said volunteer guide Dante Weston. "Last night, a fox walked on the beach."

At 10 p.m., one of our scouts reported a loggerhead moving up the beach. False alarm. The turtle apparently didn't find the right consistency of sand or, for some other reason, decided to turn around and head back into the calm ocean.

Half an hour later, what looked like a dark spot started moving up the beach right in front of us. Then a scout to the south called via hand-held radio. A turtle was digging a "body pit," or depression in the sand used for egg laying.

Once the turtle had finished digging the egg chamber and started dropping eggs, our group of 18 observers was called over to watch. We were 3 feet from this turtle, a loggerhead. The red beam of the guides' flashlights illuminated the scene. We could see her positioned in her special laying pit, dropping eggs, sometimes two or three at a time.

After the mother loggerhead had finished dropping her eggs, she used her flippers to sling sand around for what seemed like half an hour, covering the nest. We walked back across the bridge to our cars and headed home around midnight.

As of Friday, 672 loggerhead turtles, 84 greens and 15 leatherbacks had deposited eggs on the beach at MacArthur Beach State Park.

Palm Beach County boasts the second-highest number of sea turtle nests in Florida (behind Brevard County), with an average of 10,791 loggerhead turtle nests, 1,713 green turtle nests and 280 leatherback nests countywide.

Northern Palm Beach County is much preferred by the turtles. On average, 1,200 loggerheads per mile nest at Coral Cove Park in Tequesta each season. Only 43 per mile nest in Delray Beach.

Threats to sea turtles include man-made light that can lead the young turtles onto the road instead of into the ocean, illegal theft of eggs, entanglement in fishing line, ingestion of plastic and loss of nesting beaches.

Each female turtle can nest three or four times a season, sometimes more, depositing about 100 eggs each time. But even if everything goes perfectly with nesting, only one in 1,000 sea turtle hatchlings survives to adulthood.

A call to boaters

Marine industries officials are asking boaters to contact Palm Beach County commissioners and to attend a county budget workshop Monday to oppose a proposed \$10 launch fee on weekends and holidays at the county's ocean-access boat ramps.

The launch-fee proposal came up last week as a way to raise an estimated \$400,000 for the county's parks and recreation department. Ramps affected by the proposed fee would be Burt Reynolds Park, Bert Winters Park in Juno Beach, Juno Park, Phil Foster Park and Light Harbor Marina (under construction) in Riviera Beach.

Monday's budget workshop begins at 1:30 p.m. at the county government center, 301 N. Olive Ave., West Palm Beach.

New access area to open

The South Florida Water Management District will dedicate a new public access area at 9 a.m. Wednesday at Stormwater Treatment Area 1 West off County Road 880 west of 20-Mile Bend. The public access area will be open during daylight hours only, Friday through Monday. The area features parking, a bridge, a toilet and a viewing platform for watching birds in the marsh. For details, go to [www.sfwmd.gov](http://www.sfwmd.gov) and click on recreation.

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## Correction

07/11/2008

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## Stuart News

On Page 7B July 10, under the headline "Lake O rises, but still low by 2 feet," the name and title of a South Florida Water Management District official were incorrect. Susan Sylvester is SFWMD director of operations control department..

It is our policy to correct errors promptly. If you see that we have printed a mistake, please bring it to our attention by calling 409-1321. Corrections are published on this page.

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## Developers want looser growth plan

07/11/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online

PAUL QUINLAN

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WEST PALM BEACH Developers are asking county leaders to strip all prohibitions from the long-term blueprint for growth.

The change, they argue, will give county leaders the chance to evaluate a wider range of development proposals and weigh each on its individual merits. Critics say the change would significantly water down rules aimed at controlling growth and land development.

The request came from the Gold Coast Builders Association, a powerful building lobby. The group asked county commissioners in a July 9 letter to remove all 'shall not' policies from the county's comprehensive plan.

The plan, required of every county under Florida's growth management legislation, is a set of broad principles that development proposals are expected to conform to if they are to win approval. 'Shall not' policies in the comprehensive plan include prohibitions on increasing housing densities in hurricane evacuation areas, guidelines requiring that certain types of commercial development connect to high-volume roads and prohibitions on commercial development in parts of the county's Agricultural Reserve, such as the area west of State Road 7. The group noted that some large-scale projects, such as The Scripps Research Institute, have received waivers from comprehensive plan policies. Smaller-scale projects deserve similar consideration and latitude, it said.

The letter landed in commissioners' mailboxes the week before a scheduled meeting to discuss a closely related matter: Whether development petitions that violate the comprehensive plan deserve to go before the board for any consideration whatsoever.

Commissioners asked for a meeting to discuss the matter, set for Tuesday morning, after a property owner appeared before the zoning commission seeking to divide one lot into two. Since the property is in a hurricane evacuation area, where density increases are prohibited under the comprehensive plan, the request was denied. Some commissioners questioned whether the petition should have come up for consideration at all.

The Gold Coast Builders Association's request appears to take the question one step further: Why should the plan prohibit anything outright when commissioners can be expected to use their judgement and consider an application on its merits? 'In short, we believe that all applications, public or private, should be afforded the opportunity for review and consideration by (county commissioners),' Gold Coast President Scott Worley wrote.

County Planning Director Lorenzo Aghemo cautioned against such a change. 'My concern is the integrity of the comprehensive plan and its internal consistency if you start removing these policies,' Aghemo said. Commissioner Karen Marcus said that while certain provisions of the plan should come under periodic review, she would not support stripping it of its prohibitions, saying that would remove what 'teeth' the policies retain. 'I think we need to have some backbone in the plan,' said Marcus. 'If we want to change our policy overall, then we change the policy.'

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## Potential of Scripps II justifies faster approvals

07/13/2008

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Palm Beach Post

This is the chance to get it right.

Everything that could have gone wrong with the first proposal for a vast biotech village built around The Scripps Research Institute at Mecca Farms did go wrong. Blame greed, secrecy and favoritism.

A smaller biotech village on a smaller site is being planned for the so-called Briger tract in Palm Beach Gardens. The plan requires the cooperation of: Palm Beach County, which is paying for part of it; Scripps, which gets 70 acres for expansion; and the Lester family, which owns the remainder of the 683-acre property.

As part of the package that moved Scripps from Mecca, the Lesters agreed to set aside 100 acres for biotechnology research. Combined with the 70 acres for Scripps, the result is space for 4 million square feet of biotech, half of what ex-Gov. Jeb Bush demanded at Mecca. The other half is available within 10 miles. But where Mecca was a land development scheme, designed to open remote western areas to development, the Briger tract and the main Scripps site next door at Florida Atlantic University in Jupiter are in the developed eastern half of the county. The swamp is not being busted.

Some will argue that building on the Briger tract is wrong because it, like areas bordering Mecca, was on a list of sites the county wanted to buy for environmental preservation. Building on Briger, though, is an acceptable trade-off to avoid building at Mecca and the neighboring Vavrus Ranch, which contains high-quality wetlands. Additionally, Interstate 95 slices the Briger site in two, diminishing its environmental value. Finally, the county couldn't afford to buy Briger for the very reasons that make it a good biotech site: It's in the middle of neighborhoods and stores.

Economic development officials want fast-track permitting approval for

Briger. This would force state agencies known for stretching deadlines to review plans quicker. But it also would require the public to be especially vigilant, since hearings would be closer together. It would be the county's responsibility to assure full public involvement.

The main selling point for faster review is that the sooner the development plans are approved, the sooner the county's Business Development Board can start marketing the site. Fast-track approval is better than legislation, which Gov. Crist vetoed this year, that would have eliminated development reviews for sites near state-financed biotech ventures, like Scripps.

Also, the business board no longer is trying to cash in, as the board tried to do through its control of land at Vavrus. Then, the board set up a not-for-profit corporation to accept millions from developers allowed to build at Vavrus. Now, the board is sticking to its mission: recruiting employers.

Scripps II has a great chance to succeed, enhance the neighborhood and ignite the economic engine that makes Scripps the best hope for diversifying the economy. All of that should be on the fast track.

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## **Environmentalists canvass in Creek Group attempting to gain supporters**

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Jul. 13--Coconut Creek officials are notifying residents that an environmental group is going door-to-door to raise awareness of its programs and seek volunteers.

The Clean Water Action Group is based in Miami. It recently began working in Coconut Creek to promote Everglades restoration, pollution prevention, energy conservation and clean and safe drinking water. 'This is the fourth year that we will be canvassing Coconut Creek,' Regional Director Cyra Gish said. 'Of course we get a number of people who aren't interested in hearing what we have to say, but we also get a lot of them who are. They sometimes turn out to be some of our best volunteers.' The organization is part of the Everglades Advisory Council, which was delighted when Florida recently signed a deal to purchase 187,000 acres in the Everglades. 'The significance of this cannot be overstated,' said Everglades Foundation Senior Scientist Tom Van Lent. 'This acquisition will provide the land needed to construct a reliable water supply for the Everglades much faster and at a lower cost than previously envisioned, and it will do so decades earlier than we thought possible.' 'This is truly a historic moment in the life of the Everglades, when bitter adversaries united to support an unprecedented and unexpected good. Unthinkable progress is now possible, and all in our lifetimes,' said Kirk Fordham, chief executive officer of the Everglades Foundation. 'This is a moment for the record books, a priceless gift for the generations that will follow us.' Yvonne Lopez, the city's public information officer, said people should not be afraid to open their doors to the canvassers. 'They will all have the proper identification, and we've thoroughly checked out the organization,' she said.

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## Investing more than hope in our refuges

07/12/2008

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'Derrick Z. Jackson - Boston Globe

EVEN AS they praise the purchase of nearly 300 square miles of sugar-industry land by the state of Florida, environmentalists wonder whether this attempt to save Everglades National Park by restoring its water flow will translate into concern for wetlands in general. 'I think people have an understanding of what the Everglades is because it is a national park,' said Laurie Wunder, a biologist at Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge in New Hampshire and Maine. 'The wildlife refuge system essentially performs similar functions, but refuges are not as recognized in the public eye. I'm not sure if it will translate into that kind of recognition.' Desiree Sorenson-Groves, vice president of government affairs for the National Wildlife Refuge Association, said, 'Wildlife refuges are small on the landscape, even though in total size nearly 100 million acres, they have more land than national parks 84 million acres. They are like postage stamps compared to parks.' They are not as iconic like Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons and their majestic views. They are usually low in altitude but high in biodiversity. They contain all the habitat, and they are where all the animals go. Because they are so small, they have lots of pressures on them, such as encroaching development. But because they are not as dramatic, they often end up as a stepchild. In May, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement, a coalition of 22 groups ranging from the NWRRA, the Nature Conservancy, and the Audubon Society to hunting groups and the National Rifle Association detailed in a report to Congress that the underfunded system is deteriorating. The report said the system, currently receiving \$434 million a year for operating funds, needs \$765 million a year. With budget cuts eliminating 300 jobs in recent years, the operations and maintenance backlog has grown to \$3.5 billion. The coalition says 2.3 million acres are being overrun with invasive plant species and the refuges have only about a quarter of the law enforcement needed to protect them and their visitors.

Last month, a House appropriations subcommittee proposed a raise in refuge operations to \$469 million. Subcommittee chairman Norm Dicks, a Democrat from Washington state, said, 'These refuges have been desperately understaffed, with almost 200 of our wildlife refuges having no staff at all to protect the wildlife and serve the visitors.' Environmentalists are grateful for any extra few million, but in Capitol Hill testimony last fall, NWRRA president Evan Hirsche detailed needs that demand many more resources. Hirsche said that half of the 548 refuges do not have a single biologist, which runs contrary to the 1997 Refuge Improvement Act, where Congress said the Secretary of the Interior shall 'ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the system are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.' Hirsche said there was no active habitat management or wildlife surveys in the refuges along the Potomac River and that nationally, volunteers now do 20 percent of the work in the system. 'The refuge manager explains that he is 'hoping for the best,' for the eagles, herons, and hundreds of bird species' along the Potomac, Hirsche said. 'Hoping for the best can't be what the architects of the Refuge Improvement Act had intended.' Hoping for the best will not

be good enough in the long run, with wetlands from the Everglades to Umbagog to precious prairie potholes (for migratory waterfowl) likely to be among the first places to feel the effects of global warming. Umbagog, with the help of the Trust for Public Land, is in the middle of a several-year effort to expand the refuge, currently at 21,647 acres, to nearly 70,000 acres, partially to include adjoining upland forests. 'People are becoming aware that having land to complement refuges is important, but it's also hard to put the priority up there against things like healthcare that play an urgent part in society,' said Rodger Krussman of the trust. 'There's never enough money for conservation. We can always use more.' Sorenson-Groves added, 'If we could, we could add another 100 million acres to the system.' Derrick Z. Jackson can be reached at [jackson@globe.com](mailto:jackson@globe.com).

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## **New nests for a rare bird found in wildlife area**

07/14/2008

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Khari Johnson-South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Delray Beach - U.S. Fish & Wildlife biologists have found nests and recently hatched birds of the endangered Everglade snail kite in a small wetland in the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.

These are the first nests seen in the area since 1998. The rare raptor was added to the endangered species list when it was created about 40 years ago. If current trends continue, they could be near extinction in another 40 years, officials said. 'Every nest, every bird that is produced right now is absolutely critical to keeping their population sustained through time,' said Wylie Kitchens, who leads a team of researchers that tracks snail kite populations in Florida over the long term.

Last year, they predicted that about 1,200 snail kites were in Florida. This year, the population may be somewhere around 700 to 800 birds. In total, 12 adult snail kites and four nests were found, one nest with three hatchlings and one nest with three eggs. The birds are in a 32-acre wetland near the southwest entrance of the refuge but far from their typical nesting grounds in the more than 100,000 acres of the park's interior. Water levels can be controlled in the area, which is surrounded by levees, and create optimal nesting grounds. 'The good news is some of them are finding opportunities. The bad news is there's not opportunity in the traditional nesting sites,' Kitchens said. 'There haven't been any birds to speak of coming out of the water conservation areas. That spells real trouble.' The hatchlings, which are about a week old, are visible to the public from the top of a levee. Refuge officials suggest visitors bring binoculars. The other three eggs should hatch soon, said Cindy Fury, the refuge's senior biologist.

Florida's snail kite population has been 'backed into a corner' by a variety of influences, said Brian Reichert, a graduate student involved in the project.

Key among the bird's challenges are recent droughts and water management efforts. Erratic water levels hamper a delicate and necessary balance and threaten their main source of food, the apple

snail. 'The highs have been too high and the lows have been too low in one year so you have these drastic water changes that essentially affect the snails and decrease the food for snail kites,' Reichert said. Runoff from agriculture and encroachment from development also could be factors. Kitchens said he is unsure how big a role global warming plays in the equation today but expects it to exacerbate erratic weather and water levels in the future.

The bird's best chance, he said, is the Everglades Restoration Plan which would restore free-flowing rivers and more natural water cycles. 'The hope is that the restoration initiative will iron some of this out,' he said. 'The concern is whether that will happen in time.' Khari Johnson can be reached at [kjohnson@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:kjohnson@sun-sentinel.com) or 561-243-6690.

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## **Osceola county exotics nuisances: Cuban tree frog, water flea, walking catfish, grass carp, hydrilla**

07/14/2008

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Kumari Kelly | Sentinel Staff Writer

LAKE TOHOPEKALIGA - The pink fuzz on the cypress trees invites questions from curious boaters: What exactly is that stuff? The simple answer: nothing biologists and lake experts want in Lake Toho.

The pink island apple snail eggs cling to the side of the cypress trees on Kissimmee's famed bass-fishing lake, alerting those with a keen eye to what ecologists have long known: The exotic island apple snail is populating the lake, and it's not a good thing.

Why is it bad?

The large variety of snail competes with a smaller native species, the preferred food for the endangered snail kite. The kites, which rely heavily on Lake Toho for nesting and survival in the U.S., much prefer the smaller native snail, which they can hold in their talons more easily.

"You have this larger snail, and the young aren't able to feed on it as easily," said Brian Reichert, 25, a University of Florida researcher who is studying snail kites on Lake Toho.

It's unclear to scientists whether the kites can thrive long-term on a diet that includes so many of the large snails, considering younger birds may not be able to get enough to eat if they drop too many. Reichert and others are continuing to study it.

Is it dangerous?

What is clear is that the snail is just one of the exotic animal problems in Osceola County.

Pinning officials down on which species is more dangerous than another is difficult.

"From our perspective, all non-native species in Florida waters are important -- we wish they were not there and are working to prevent further introductions. The difficult part is: What are the harmful environmental, economic and human health effects," said Pamela J. Schofield of the U.S. Geological Survey in Gainesville, which keeps an extensive database of non-native species and tracks new arrivals.

"Many introductions probably have both positive and negative aspects -- it just depends on where you are standing as to what you see," she said.

"Also, in most cases, there is just not enough scientific evidence to say what effects -- good or bad -- introduced species are having on our ecosystems."

Kumari Kelly can be reached at [kkelly@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:kkelly@orlandosentinel.com) or 407-931-5933.

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## State report calls for reducing pollution in major Collier, Lee rivers by 20 percent

07/11/2008

Naples Daily News

JENNA BUZZACCO

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JENNA BUZZACCO-Naples Daily News

The water in Collier and Lee counties is getting less polluted. But it isn't happening overnight.

A state environmental agency released a report Friday that said Lee and Collier counties need to reduce pollutants in two major waterways by more than 20 percent.

That same report states that pollutants in a Collier County lake need to be reduced by at least 60 percent.

The state Department of Environmental Protection on Friday released a draft of its total maximum daily load, or TMDL, report. The draft document was the next step in a years-long process that could ultimately reduce pollution throughout the state.

A TMDL is a water pollution budget that says how much waste, nutrients or other type of pollution a river, lake or other body of water can tolerate before it is too polluted to use.

Officials said Friday that Collier County needed to reduce pollutants in the Gordon River by 29 percent, while Lee County needs to reduce pollutants in the Imperial River by 22 percent. They went on to say that significant reductions, between 60 and 77 percent, also need to be made in Lake Trafford in Immokalee.

The issue with both the Gordon River, which empties into Naples Bay, and the Imperial River, which empties into Estero Bay, is that there are too many nutrients in the water. Those nutrients eat up the oxygen, making it difficult for aquatic life to survive.

Naples Natural Resource Manager Mike Bauer said Friday he wasn't

surprised with the state's recommendations. Bauer said the city already is working toward reducing the pollutants by creating stricter rules regarding fertilizer, cleaning up storm water lakes and creating artificial oyster reefs. It's not just rivers that need to clean up their act, though.

According to Woo-Jun Kang, a watershed assessment specialist with the DEP, said Collier County needs to reduce pollutants in Lake Trafford by at least 60 percent.

Lake Trafford is the largest freshwater lake southwest of Lake Okeechobee, and acts as the headwaters to the Corkscrew marsh and drains through the Fakahatchee Strand to the Ten Thousand Islands.

The lake has no defined streams for outflow.

One way to reduce the pollutants, according to Kang's presentation, is to control nutrient inputs from the surrounding landscapes. Those nutrients can come from a variety of sources since the predominant land use for the surrounding area is agricultural, pasture and low-density residential.

Setting these reduction standards isn't the end of the road, though, said Jan Mandrup-Poulsen, an environmental administrator with DEP's watershed assessment section.

Mandrup-Poulsen said stakeholders now have until July 21 to submit comments regarding the recommended reductions.

Once the recommendations have been put in place, the agency will work with local water management districts to create, and eventually implement, the plan.

The report can be found online at <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/tmdl>.

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## Remote weather stations give farmers timely advice

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Associated Press- Miami Herald

For apple growers like Abby Jacobson, making or losing money depends as much on what they don't do as what they do.

So when data from Michigan State University's high-tech weather monitoring network helped her decide to skip four costly chemical sprayings this spring, she considered it an unqualified success. 'I think it's really positive for our industry and it really benefits our customers,' said Jacobson, who co-owns Westview Orchards, about 25 miles north of Detroit, with sister Katrina Schumacher.

Technicians installed the station in March in an open field near fruit trees at the 188-acre orchard near Romeo. The station checks wind speed and direction, air temperature, humidity, precipitation, solar radiation, leaf wetness, and soil moisture and temperature at two depths.

A modem links the station - one of 57 statewide - to Verizon

Communications Inc.'s broadband wireless network, which feeds the data every five minutes to Michigan State's Enviro-weather computer programs.

They, in turn, crunch the numbers and give farmers up-to-the-minute advice on when to plant; apply fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides; irrigate and harvest their crops. The information is instantly available free to farmers by logging in to Enviro-weather's Web site.

Washington State University operates its own network of 109 stations, and smaller systems are growing in Florida, Georgia, North Dakota, Pennsylvania and Utah.

Tech-savvy farmers are eager for the help that real-time weather data and analysis can provide them while they make decisions on pest control, disease control and water management, said Robert Krebs, operations manager for Washington State's AgWeatherNet system.

He said those who grow grapes and tree fruits find it particularly useful to know when it's safe to skip chemicals. 'If you can avoid one spraying application, you've paid for that station,' he said. Enviro-weather operates with funds from a variety of public and private sources. Individual farmers or produce associations pay for the stations, which cost about \$10,000 each to install, operate and maintain for three years.

The stations are remarkably self-sufficient, requiring biannual maintenance, plus occasional repairs for such hazards as severe weather and animals chewing through wires, said Steve Marquie, manager of field operations for Enviro-weather.

By the end of July, the network is adding five more stations across southern Michigan to test conditions for growing prairie grass and switch grass as biofuels, he said.

The synergy between agriculture and high-speed wireless communication amazes Verizon Wireless data sales manager Heidi Olesko. 'Who would have ever thought a farmer would be looking at a Web site to decide whether to grow corn or beans this year?' said Olesko, who worked with Michigan State to set up Enviro-weather.

Stations outside Verizon's service area are operated by Alltel Communications LLC and Thumb Wireless.

Two years after Michigan State launched the weather network, many growers now see it as vital in making key management decisions, Marquie said. 'We hear time and time again: 'We don't know what we'd do without you,' he said. Jacobson said she was a fan of Enviro-weather well before she got her own monitoring station, checking data from nearby counties and extrapolating her own conditions.

Now, she no longer has to guess. Relying on data from her station, she has been able to skip one spraying for the fungus that causes apple scab and three sprayings for fire blight, a bacterial condition that attacks apple and pear trees.

Not only does that put more money in Jacobson's bank account and save her time, it keeps dangerous chemicals out of the environment, she said. 'It's just a win-win situation for all of us,' she said.

