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SFWMD

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GOV. CRIST TO RECEIVE 'CHAMPION OF THE EVERGLADES' AWARD FROM AUDUBON OF FLORIDA

10/24/2008
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CRYSTAL RIVER, Fla., Oct. 24 -- Gov. Charlie Crist, R-Fla., has issued the following news release:

Governor Charlie Crist today will address the Audubon of Florida Annual Assembly in Crystal River. The two-day workshop will focus on exploring the impact human activities are having on Florida's birds and their habitats.

"Tourism is Florida's number-one industry, with 85 million visitors arriving each year to enjoy all that the Sunshine State offers, which is why we must conserve Florida's natural places and resources," Governor Crist said. "It is important that we all do our part to protect Florida's natural environment for future generations."

David Anderson, executive director of Audubon of Florida, will present Governor Crist with the "Champion of the Everglades" Award for his leadership in encouraging the South Florida Water Management District to negotiate for the purchase of the United States Sugar Corporation. The negotiations have the potential to provide the "missing link" needed to provide for the cleaning, storing and moving of water through Everglades National Park to the Florida Bay.

During his remarks, Governor Crist is expected to commend Florida's Congressional delegation for working to include the continued implementation of the Modified Waters Deliveries system to National Everglades Park as part of the Continuing Resolution passed by Congress last month. He will recognize Congressman Bill Young for his continued leadership in ensuring federal funding for the Everglades.

"Obtaining federal funding for the Everglades is one of my top federal priorities. There is no project more important to the restoration of Everglades National Park than ensuring more natural water flow under Tamiami Trail," Governor Crist said. "Forward movement on this project has been eagerly anticipated for almost 20 years. I applaud our federal partners for moving forward with the Tamiami Trail modification."

Governor Crist also will thank Mayor Ronald Kitchen of Crystal River for his leadership in conserving nearby Three Sisters Springs. Last month, the Florida Communities Trust approved \$6.3 million for acquisition of Three Sisters Springs, contingent upon appraisals for the property. The City of Crystal River has pledge \$2.7 million toward the acquisition, and other partners in the project to protect this warm-water refuge for manatees include the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Felburn Foundation, Citrus County, the Friends of Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, the Citrus County Tourist Development Council and numerous other groups and individuals. Former Representative Helen Spivey and Dr. Pat Rose with the Save the Manatee Club are also raising funds for the acquisition of the springs.

Highlights of Florida's Land Conservation Efforts

This year, Governor Crist signed legislation expanding for another decade Florida Forever, Florida's land conservation program and the largest conservation effort in the nation. Through Florida Forever, and its predecessor, Preservation 2000, Florida has invested \$5 billion to place more than two million acres throughout the state in public ownership, conserving environmentally sensitive land, restoring water resources and preserving important cultural and historical sites.

In 2007, Governor Crist signed legislation that expands the restoration of the famed River of Grass to include Lake Okeechobee and the farthest northern reaches of the Everglades ecosystem, highlighting the connectivity of the entire ecosystem from the Kissimmee headwaters to the Florida Keys. This legislation requires the development of technical plans, schedules and provides dedicated funding to improve and protect the Northern Everglades, including Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee coastal estuaries. Also in 2007, the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund was extended for 10 years through 2020 and expands its purpose, underscoring Florida's commitment to Everglades restoration.

About Modified Water Deliveries

The Tamiami Trail Modification Project is part of the Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park Project (Mod Waters), whose purpose is to enhance the hydrologic regime in the East Everglades, Northeast Shark River Slough and Everglades National Park. Mod Waters was authorized by the

Everglades National Park Protection and Expansion Act, enacted by Congress in 1989. Mod Waters is a foundation project that is critical to the successful restoration of the Everglades, as its completion is required before the implementation of portions of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. The bridging of Tamiami Trail, U.S. Highway 41, is the most critical component to completing Mod Waters and restoring water flow to the park.

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Buy sugar land, save Martin

10/26/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online

Sally Swartz

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Nobody knows Martin County's rivers and reefs like Mark Perry, director of Florida Oceanographic Society. Mr. Perry moved to Martin at age 5 in 1957. He remembers swimming in the St. Lucie River when the water was clean and clear, fish and oysters were healthy and signs warning people not to touch the water never were posted on the riverbanks.

The FOS Coastal Center, on Hutchinson Island in Stuart, offers nature walks, Indian River Lagoon adventures and a chance to feed fish and stingrays in a big-game fish lagoon. The society, which Mr. Perry's father formed in 1964, has grown since the '70s under the son's leadership. But he took on a new mission in 1998, when devastating dumps of dirty Lake Okeechobee water caused massive fish kills in coastal rivers.

More discharges over the past decade have harmed dolphins, sea turtles, oysters, sea grasses, coral reefs and the juvenile game fish that live in rivers. When dumping continues for a long period, as it has this year, a plume of dirty fresh water 12 feet thick extends 6 to 8 miles offshore.

Mr. Perry helped start the Rivers Coalition, an unlikely alliance of businessmen and environmentalists. He co-chairs the Everglades Coalition and cheerleads for the South Florida Water Management District's plan to buy 187,000 acres of sugar land south of the lake. Mr. Perry has championed the idea behind the proposed deal since 2000, when he told a U.S. Senate committee that sugar farms are killing Lake Okeechobee, the coastal rivers and the Everglades. The solution, he said then, was what the state now plans: Buy land south of the lake to store and clean water before sending it farther south to the water-starved Everglades. The district board gets an update on the plan next month.

Speaking to the Martin Conservation Alliance last week, Mr. Perry talked about some of the obstacles that remain. Buying out U.S. Sugar Corp. isn't all the state needs to do. Florida Crystals, owned by the Fanjul family, now wants an inland port in the path of the water, which could make a land swap more expensive and difficult. Palm Beach County wants to allow rock mines in the

path.

'We're hoping to inspire Florida Crystals to do the right thing,' Mr. Perry said. The right thing - a land exchange that is fair to Florida Crystals without ripping off taxpayers - will be easy for negotiators to identify. It's a buyer's market.

But both dealmakers and the hopeful enviros must be realistic. The sugar industry almost always gets what it wants. The dealmakers - the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Gov. Crist's office, a water district team and various experts - have to ensure that the public gets what is needed to help the Everglades. Supporters of Everglades restoration must be prepared to accept the best plan they can get, which may not be exactly what they want.

Meanwhile, the Rivers Coalition has filed a federal lawsuit to make the water district and the Army Corps of Engineers, which manage the lake and Everglades restoration, stop discharges to the rivers. The case goes to trial next spring. 'If you or I dumped water into the estuaries, we'd be fined,' Mr. Perry said. 'But federal and state agencies get away with it.' The agencies, he said, are not enforcing the 1972 federal Clean Water Act. 'We end up raising private money to fight the government in court.'

If the Rivers Coalition wins, the agencies will have to make a plan to stop dumping lake water. That's why the U.S. Sugar deal is crucial. Buying the land would provide a place for the water.

Sally Swartz is a former member of The Post Editorial Board. Her e-mail address is sdschwartz42@comcast.net

U.S. Sugar Lands May Offer Place to Store Lots of Water

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U.S. Sugar Corp.'s Lands May Offer Place to Store Lots of Water

By Del Milligan
THE LEDGER

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The proposed \$1.75 billion purchase of U.S. Sugar Corp. lands south of Lake Okeechobee might eventually provide storage for 325 billion gallons of water.

"Having the storage to manage the system will really change our opportunities," said Susan Gray of the South Florida Water Management District.

"The question is: Do you still need all the storage to the north?"

Can you get adequate storage to the south? Does it eliminate the need for storage to the north? I don't know the answers, but we will be working on it," Gray said.

The purchase agreement with the state of Florida was announced by Gov. Charlie Crist on June 24 at Loxahatchee and includes 187,000 acres that cover 300 square miles between Okeechobee and the Everglades. The SFWMD, which negotiated the deal, would build reservoirs and marsh systems on the land.

The purchase, which has been postponed until 2009, would restore the natural flow of water south out of Lake Okeechobee into the Everglades - the "River of Grass" - to its historical footprint.

Tom Van Lent, chief scientist for The Everglades Foundation, said little water from Okeechobee reaches the Everglades now.

"Before they built the levees, there were two ways the lake interacted with the Everglades," Van Lent said. "When the lake filled up, it spilled over the southern rim into the Everglades. That happened pretty regularly. Another way is when there was a hurricane, when it picked up the lake and set it in the Everglades."

The Everglades Foundation estimates that taking the land out of sugar production will decrease pollution going into the Caloosahatchee River toward the Gulf of Mexico and through the St. Lucie River into the Indian River Lagoon near Port St. Lucie by 85 percent.

Although U.S. Sugar would have six more years to manage the land, the deal would eventually stop back-pumping excess water containing pesticides and phosphorus-rich fertilizers out of the sugar cane fields into the lake, as well as the need for water to be pulled out of the lake during dry periods.

Don Fox, a fishery biologist for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, is taking a wait-and-see approach on the proposed purchase, one of the largest conservation acquisitions in the nation's history.

"Until the nuts and bolts of how all that's going to be laid out, it's awfully hard to speculate on what the benefits and impacts will be," he said.

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