

Subject: U.S. Sugar Stories for December 24 - 29**SFWMD**

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Sara Fain: Sugar Deal Renews Hope For the Everglades

12/29/2008

Tallahassee Democrat

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Sara Fain: Sugar deal renews hope for the Everglades
Sara Fain • My View • December 29, 2008

Buzz up! In recent weeks, we've seen plenty of criticism about the details of the proposed purchase by the South Florida Water Management District of 181,000 acres of U.S. Sugar Corp. land for the benefit of Everglades restoration.

While the deal is not perfect, perhaps the naysayers cannot see the forest for the trees. The very ability to manage water — provide drinking water, prevent flooding and maintain basic ecosystem functions in South Florida — is at stake, and the opportunities made possible by acquiring this land are the key to long-term success or failure.

There is no question that Florida's Everglades are suffering. Every day that we don't move forward on restoration, this intricate ecosystem breaks down a little more.

Over the recent years, South Florida suffered from one of the longest and worst droughts in its history. One result was a raging fire in eastern Everglades National Park, an area constantly starved for water. This fire burned almost 40,000 acres. Peat soil that took thousands of years to accumulate was lost in a single afternoon.

Yet, more recently, Water Conservation Area 3A, north of Everglades National Park, was drowning with dangerously high water levels. These unnatural extremes are devastating not only to the environment, but to our native wildlife, including the Florida panther, American crocodile, wood stork, snail kite, Cape Sable seaside sparrow and coral reefs.

The harm we have witnessed from either too much or not enough water in different parts of the Everglades ecosystem is a stark demonstration of the well-documented, fundamental flaws in our antiquated water management system.

According to a recent report by the National Research Council's Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress, if progress is not made soon on important restoration projects, the Everglades' continuing degradation may, at least in part, become irreversible.

The committee stated: "Ongoing delay in South Florida ecosystem restoration not only has postponed improvements to the hydrological condition but also has allowed ecological decline to continue. . . . Unless near-term progress is achieved on major restoration initiatives . . . the Everglades ecosystem may experience irreversible losses to its character and functioning."

Much has been stated about the high cost of this land purchase. Yet, little attention has been paid to the many benefits that will come from this important investment.

With more than 7 million people already living in South Florida, we've outgrown a water-management system built for fewer than 2 million residents. The new design takes the natural system into account and will be a tremendous improvement. And with the fortuitous U.S. Sugar land acquisition, we'll now have the acreage required to create reservoirs and treatment areas to restore clean water flow from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades, reducing harmful discharges out to our sensitive estuaries.

Tourism will benefit

Millions travel from all over the world to visit the Everglades every year, filling hotels, rental cars, restaurants and other tourist attractions. Recreational use of natural areas and parks by both tourists and residents is one of the most important economic activities in Florida. Research shows that protected lands actually correlate more with greater economic growth than do lands utilized for natural resource exploitation.

Is \$1.3 billion too much to save a unique ecosystem that exists nowhere else in the world and has received international recognition for its incredible biodiversity? Is it too much to ensure that we have a clean water supply and economic development for future generations of South Floridians?

The Everglades Coalition of more than 6 million members believes it is not.

When President Truman dedicated Everglades National Park in 1947, he stated: "The benefits our nation will derive from this dedication will outlast the youngest of us. They will increase with the passage of years. Few actions could make a more lasting contribution to the enjoyment of the American people than the establishment of the Everglades National Park."

As Gov. Charlie Crist provides great leadership for the Everglades, we look to the 110th Congress and the Obama administration to renew its commitment to support and fund the restoration plan. Only with a strong federal-state partnership can we truly achieve our goals.

There's still plenty of work to be done to get there. During the 24th annual Everglades Coalition Conference in Miami on Jan. 9, a key session titled "Restoration after the Sugar Deal" will explore some of the issues we will face. Experts will discuss Everglades restoration as it pertains to growth management, political and public partnerships, endangered and invasive species, wildlife habitat, energy policies and water quality.

Sugar Buyout Only Adds To Complexity of Everglades Restoration

12/29/2008

Florida Trend
Howard, Mark

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November 1, 2008

With the 8-year-old, much-ballyhooed comprehensive plan (CERP) to save the Everglades mired in its own intricacies, Gov. Charlie Crist's billion-dollar-plus impulse bid for U.S. Sugar Corp.'s lands has generated a surge of optimism. Whether the purchase will jump-start the restoration program or just throw a new bundle of complications into the picture is very much an open question, however.

The South Florida Water Management District is now slogging through the process of evaluating how much U.S. Sugar is worth. It must then negotiate a purchase price and terms, finance the deal in the current credit environment (!), decide how many of U.S. Sugar's 187,000 acres to keep, and then sell off excess acreage and other assets like the mill and the railroad that it doesn't want or need — all the while without destroying the agricultural economy around the lake.

Meanwhile, it will have to determine how to use its new land holdings to store and clean the water coming out of Lake Okeechobee — and then figure out a route for that water into the Everglades. And, of course, it will have to revise the existing comprehensive plan to reflect the new possibilities.

Alone, the issue of how many acres to keep could tie knots into the process. One of the key issues in Everglades restoration is avoiding the feast-or-famine cycle of water flow created by man-made changes that have reduced the area's ability to store water. To keep the lake from overflowing during periods of heavy rain, the water management district must dump polluted, phosphorus-laden water from Lake Okeechobee eastward and westward via canals into fragile, damaged estuaries on the Gulf and Atlantic Ocean. But if a drought follows the rainy period, the area quickly goes from too wet to too dry, with too little water for people, farms or the Everglades. Case in point: Less than two years after the water management district dumped massive amounts of lake water into the estuaries in 2005 it had to impose water-use restrictions on the region.

The reservoirs and wells envisioned in the comprehensive plan were supposed to provide the capacity to store water rather than dump it. But none of the projects have been completed, the wells have always been problematic, and calculations of water flow based on the current weather cycle indicate the need to store more water than originally planned.

The U.S. Sugar acreage may provide plenty of room to store and clean water, but not everybody is doing the same arithmetic about how many acres are needed — and for what.

The water district has said it doesn't need all 187,000 acres to amass the 1 million acre-feet of water storage it needs to make CERP work. And it says it's committed to an approach that will keep U.S. Sugar's mill in Clewiston open. Some environmentalists, however, believe the district needs to keep as much of the 187,000 acres as it can for water treatment. A sugar industry executive, meanwhile, says the Clewiston mill won't be economical if the district takes more than about 50,000 acres out of production. Reconciling the storage goals and the economic goals will be tricky.

Then there's the land and mill owned by the Florida Crystals sugar company, which lie between U.S. Sugar's property and the Everglades. Regardless of how many U.S. Sugar acres the water management district keeps, that water is going to have to go either around or through Florida Crystals' land to get to the Glades. Some in the environmental community would like Florida Crystals to fold its tents and ride off into the sunset. That won't happen, nor should it. However you may view its behavior historically, Florida Crystals today is one of the most sophisticated, competitively run agricultural operations in the state if not the country. For power, its mill and operations consume sugar cane and wood waste in the largest biomass power plant in the country. Between the use of biomass and cane's consumption of carbon, the company has virtually no net carbon emissions. It's also working on a biomass-to-ethanol plant.

Whatever deal emerges will have to take Florida Crystals into account — and a lot of people who detest sugar companies as a matter of principle may have to grit their teeth if best serving the Everglades' interests also favors Crystals at some level.

Aside from the potential for further delaying CERP, the biggest problem with the U.S. Sugar deal is that it continues to focus on the land south of the lake as the solution for the phosphorus pollution that threatens the Everglades. Some 558 metric tons of phosphorus continue to pour into the lake each year — almost all of it from communities, dairies, farms and ranches extending north nearly to Orlando. The state's goal to maximize the lake's water quality? 105 metric tons.

Water management district figures show clearly that the agricultural area south of the lake, including the sugar company lands, contributes only a tiny percentage of the phosphorus that flows into the lake. The figures also show that the polluted lake water that flows south into the agricultural area is cleaner when it leaves the agricultural area than when it came in.

Despite the numbers, little effort is made to limit phosphorus pollution at its northern sources. Instead, the approach has been to use Lake Okeechobee as a toilet for the areas to the north, east and west of the lake — and to try to turn the land south of the lake into one big treatment facility. The 2007 expansion of the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act was an acknowledgement that controlling pollution had to involve the areas north of the lake. But that “Northern Everglades” plan, for all the packaging and lip service, was an afterthought and has continued to play a distant second fiddle to CERP.

For the moment, the U.S. Sugar deal has sucked all the air out of any broader discussion of Everglades restoration. “Everybody's taken their lines out of the water to see if Charlie Crist can reel in

the big fish," says one observer.

But it's still worth asking how far the \$2 billion the state will likely spend on U.S. Sugar would go if spent instead on controlling pollution and storing water north of the lake. It will be interesting in any event to see how much additional delay the deal, whether successful or unsuccessful, adds to the restoration. When it comes to preserving the Everglades, even promising new developments rarely seem to advance the cause, but rather just to add more complexity to the challenge.

South Florida water managers want more reservoirs, limits on use

12/28/2008

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South Florida water managers want more reservoirs, limits on use
More reservoirs, limits on use sought in district

By Andy Reid | South Florida Sun-Sentinel
December 28, 2008

The New Year's resolution remains the same for South Florida water managers — keep trying to store more water for times of need and increase conservation to stretch supplies.

But like many resolutions, how to accomplish the goal continues to be a problem because of a growing population increasing demand in a region lacking storage options.

This time last year, work was continuing on a massive reservoir in western Palm Beach County. The reservoir would hold water that could help with Everglades restoration.

Now reservoir construction is on hold as water managers decide whether the 16,700-acre project that already cost taxpayers \$250 million fits in with new plans to store water on 180,000 acres the state intends to buy from U.S. Sugar Corp.

For more than a year, the South Florida Water Management District has considered imposing year-round watering restrictions. But opposition rises each time a final vote nears, and the decision keeps getting delayed. That happened again this month, when the district delayed a January vote and agreed to consider easing the proposed restrictions.

Meanwhile, another November-to-May dry season has begun in South Florida.

The district is readying to negotiate an exit from its deal with reservoir builders, instead banking on the water storage promise of the U.S. Sugar deal.

The lack of storage frustrates those who oppose more watering restrictions.

On a typical rainy day, the canals and levees that protect South Florida from flooding dump about 1.7 billion gallons of water into the ocean.

"What sticks in people's craw is that even during the dry season, so much water is going out and being lost to tide," said Bevin Beaudet, director of Palm Beach County's water utilities.

Instead of more Water restrictions, Palm Beach County officials advocate building another reservoir near the one created from rock pits at Palm Beach Aggregates mining company, west of Royal Palm Beach.

The pits hold water that will be used to replenish the Loxahatchee River and have been called on to back up West Palm Beach's drought-strained water supply.

Converting more pits to water storage, or finding other land nearby to store water, would provide a backup supply for coastal communities. Such a backup supply couldn't be matched by savings from watering restrictions, county officials say.

The district, however, has been slow to consider another land deal with Palm Beach Aggregates. Corruption scandals and cost concerns dogged the \$217 million project.

Money for new projects remains tight, with the \$1.34 billion land deal with U.S. Sugar deal in the works and budget cutbacks expected as the economy falters.

District managers contend the U.S. Sugar deal offers a historic opportunity to restore the "missing link" that allowed water flows from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades.

In addition to providing more water needed to protect what remains of the Everglades, acquiring the U.S. Sugar land offers the chance to build infrastructure needed for flood control and water supply, said district board member Shannon Estenoz.

That does not mean district managers intend to back off plans for year-round watering restrictions. Current temporary restrictions limit most of South Florida to twice-a-week watering.

District managers contend that setting a year-round rule for the entire region would increase conservation. The latest proposal allows communities to shift to three-day-a-week watering and eventually to the statewide target of twice-a-week watering.

Yard watering and other landscape irrigation account for about half the daily water use in South Florida.

More restrictions don't help without somewhere to store the water, said Rim Bishop, executive director of Seacoast Utility Authority, which serves northern Palm Beach County. Utilities already are adding surcharges to customers' bills to make up for revenue lost from watering restrictions.

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Mine obstacle in U.S. Sugar deal

12/28/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online

PAUL QUINLAN

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Gov. Charlie Crist's \$1.34 billion bid to repair the Everglades by buying nearly all of U.S. Sugar Corp.'s farmland comes with a small demand that could lead to big headaches: Forget plans for a 7,000-acre rock mine on the property. Long before the state agreed to buy out U.S. Sugar's farmland, Vulcan Materials, the nation's largest producer of construction rock headquartered in Birmingham, Ala., struck a deal of its own to lease 7,000 acres of U.S. Sugar land for use as a rock mine. It intends to go ahead with its dig, even though the site sits in the heart of the state's sweeping Everglades restoration blueprint.

The stage for this clash was set in April, when Palm Beach County commissioners gave the go-ahead for the mine. At the behest of environmentalists, commissioners asked the to weigh in on how the purchase might affect the Everglades.

They got no response. Two months later, Crist and water district leaders unveiled a plan, the product of months of secret negotiations, to buy and put U.S. Sugar's land to use in an unprecedented environmental repair job.

So as things now stand, Crist and water managers plan to build a chain of Everglades-sustaining reservoirs and filter marshes on land where Vulcan plans to blast a rock mine the size of a city. 'Vulcan has made a substantial investment in the project, and we have been working diligently to obtain all permits and other governmental approvals for the mine,' West Palm Beach attorney Alan Ciklin, who won the commission's approval for the mine, said in a statement responding to questions about its future. 'We're very close to receiving those approvals. We plan to continue our pursuit of the approvals and ultimately, to mine the property,' he wrote. The mine sits in the heart of the Everglades Agricultural Area, the 700,000-acre farming region south of Lake Okeechobee created when the land was drained over the last century with a network of canals. About 400,000 acres are in sugar cane production, and environmentalists have long hoped to use much of that land to restore the historically flowing connection between Lake Okeechobee and the southern Everglades. Hopes for a flow way across the Everglades Agricultural Area lie at the center of their objections to building a rock mine there.

When Crist unveiled the state's landmark plan to buy U.S. Sugar and use its land to build a highly engineered version of the flow way, environmentalists rejoiced.

Months later, two appraisers gave two separate estimates of how much the partially permitted mines added to the total cost of the state's land deal: \$117 million and \$174 million.

With the mining permits, the value of those 7,000 acres of farmland jumped nearly fivefold by one appraiser's estimate. It's not clear how U.S. Sugar Corp. will divest itself of the lease. On

Dec. 16, shortly after casting the 4-3 vote signing off on the \$1.34 billion contract for U.S. Sugar's 180,000 acres, water managers cast a second, unanimous vote 'clarifying that we will not accept the (Vulcan Materials) mining lease as part of this deal,' as district governing board member Jerry Montgomery said at the time. 'I know that we've got a bunch of other work that has to go on relative to a whole slew of other leases, but sending that message immediately makes perfect sense,' Montgomery said. U. S. Sugar executives applauded the district immediately after the votes. Robert Coker, a senior vice president, said Friday the company was evaluating options relative to backing out of its earlier deal with Vulcan. 'We have to make an assessment on how our company's going to proceed at this point, and we'll know more after the first of the year,' Coker said. Plans for the mine, called Lake Harbor Quarry, call for blasting the roughly 7,000-acre site south of Lake Okeechobee and west of U.S. 27 over a 74-year period at a rate of up to 100 acres per year. The sand and rock, called aggregates, are basic materials of construction and road building. Florida Rock Industries, which owns the mining lease, has merged with Vulcan Materials.

Water district spokesman Gabe Margasak issued a statement last week saying the governing board has asked U.S. Sugar 'to cure the mining lease in question,' referring to the unanimous Dec. 16 vote by the board. 'We have not yet received a response back from the company,' he said.

Grimsley Not Big On Deal For U.S. Sugar

12/28/2008

Highlands Today

GARY PINNELL

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SEBRING - If the South Florida Water Management District comes up with \$1.34 million to buy 180,000 acres from U.S. Sugar, your taxes will go up, says State Rep. Denise Grimsley.

About three-fourths of Highlands County is in the water district, and pays property taxes on homes and businesses. 'They say they can make that purchase happen without raising taxes. I don't believe they can,' said Grimsley, R-Lake Placid, who represents Glades, Hendry and parts of Collier and Highlands counties.

One reason for her intuitive conclusion: before SFWMD board members approved the deal Dec. 17 by a 4-3 vote, they inserted an 'out' clause. 'If they can't come up with the money, they can get out of the deal,' Grimsley said Friday.

The board has said they can pull money from other projects, but Grimsley doubts whether they have \$1.34 million in revenues and reserves.

When the deal was announced in June, the state planned to give \$1.7 billion to U.S. Sugar for 187,000 acres on the edge of Lake Okeechobee. The amounts have changed, but water officials

would use the land to create reservoirs to store and clean the polluted lake water before channeling it into the Everglades.

Environmentalists have worked for decades to restore a dying pond of grass - the Everglades. When U.S. Rep. Tim Mahoney first heard about it, he cheered the deal.

But as time passes, questions have multiplied. 'What will this cost? Will this work?' asked Mahoney, D-Palm Beach Gardens, asked at a community meeting in Clewiston, which was covered by the Tampa Tribune. U.S. Sugar, one of the world's largest sucrose growers, is headquartered in Hendry County, about 75 miles from Sebring. 'We're asking the questions, but what's so frustrating is state officials negotiating the deal don't have any answers,' said U.S. Rep. Adam Putnam, R-Bartow. 'No questions are being answered about the impact on the overall restoration plan.' State Reps. Alcee Hastings, D-Miramar, and Allen Boyd, D-Monticello, sent four pages of questions to state Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Michael Sole about two months ago. Among them: 'What is the precise mission of this land acquisition deal?' and 'What are the long-term operation and maintenance costs of implementing this deal?' Grimsley hasn't been contacted about any direct or indirect effect on Highlands County - like a loss of jobs or business. But Clewiston could be devastated: 1,700 U.S. Sugar jobs would be lost. 'When the buyout of U.S. Sugar was announced in June, community leaders were promised an economic transition plan to offset the loss of jobs,' Grimsley told the board in a videotaped speech transmitted from the Capitol in Tallahassee. 'On June 27, I received a letter from Dale Brill, director of the office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development, advising his office would be working closely with community leaders to begin charting a transition for the region. Yet today, we have no plan,' Grimsley said. 'Without a plan to replace 1,700 jobs, I can't, in good faith, support this proposal.' Since the meeting last week, Grimsley has been told the OTTED has met with leaders in the affected counties.

She also criticized the governor for failing to appointment a replacement to the SWFWM board from the Everglades area. 'There are several qualified applicants. My district has been denied a voting seat at the table, and received only broken promises.' Other than the money, why does U.S. Sugar want this deal? 'I don't know,' Grimsley said. 'There's been speculation they are in financial trouble and they need to sell, but I can't verify that.' But she does think the giant corporation, which reported \$121 million in revenue for 2007, is getting above market value for the land.

And why does Gov. Crist want the deal? 'I don't know, and I don't get a lot of feedback from them,' she said. But she does resent how she found out about the deal: a phone call from a Glades constituent. 'We have the opportunity to provide the critical missing link that represents the key to true restoration,' Crist told more than 150 people, including U.S. Sugar executives, leaders of major environmental groups and news organizations from around the country. 'I also want to thank God,' the governor said. 'We're trying to restore what he planned a long time ago.' He compared the purchase to the creation of Yellowstone, the country's first national park.

The deal may be falling apart. Mike Sole, secretary of the Florida

Department of Environmental Protection, he recognized the contract he crafted with U.S. Sugar would need broader political support to survive - especially from Glades communities and state lawmakers, the Miami Herald reported. 'We can either let the opportunity slip through our fingers or continue to pursue the opportunity,' Sole said during a conference call with Eric Buermann, chairman of the South. 'This is a deal that makes absolutely no sense,' said district board member Michael Collins, who contends most of the tracts aren't needed and are in the wrong place. 'Just like the holy grail, this is based on a myth. If you get rid of the sugar industry, you solve all the Everglades problems. It's not true.' If the matter comes before the Florida Legislature, Grimsley doesn't believe it will pass. 'Too many unanswered questions,' she said. Grimsley is scheduled to meet with officials next week.

Highlands Today reporter Gary Pinnell can be reached at 863-386-5828 or gpinnell@highlandstoday.com

2008 An Exciting Year For SFWMD

12/28/2008

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The year 2008 was an extraordinary one for the South Florida Water Management District, and one of the districts leading officials met with members of the Loxahatchee Groves Landowners Association last week to put it all in perspective.

Fred Rapach, director of the SFWMDs Palm Beach County Service Center, spoke to LGLA members at their Dec. 18 meeting. The year began with the state in the grip of a drought that continued to worsen, and Rapach said the SFWMD made educating water users about the drought and how to conserve water a top priority.

We had a good public relations outreach effort going on, he said. We put together 20 drought management teams, and we did weekly in-depth analyses and extensive utility drainage district coordination. We did all kinds of outreach efforts. We did several publications just to make sure that everyone knew what was going on.

But the district also took advantage of an extraordinarily low water level in Lake Okeechobee to get work done during the drought, Rapach said. We started to do some demucking of organic materials, he said. We relocated trees. We even found tires. Once the water came down, we found about 50 tons of discarded tires.

Rapach said that as summer came, his colleagues at the SFWMD were hopeful that a significant tropical system would deliver enough rainfall to alleviate the severe drought conditions, and that Tropical Storm Fay filled the bill in August, although it made the lives of several thousands of Floridians miserable.

You look at the district-wide rainfall, he said. There was over a seven and a half inches of rain in some areas, and in Martin and

St. Lucie [counties], there was in excess of 20 inches of rain. It was amazing.

While the SFWMD was also busy in projects that involved reduction of phosphorus content in surface water and Everglades restoration work, Rapach singled out the completion of the Lake Region Water Treatment Plant to serve residents of Pahokee, Belle Glade and South Bay. The \$55 million plant draws water from the Floridan Aquifer rather than Lake Okeechobee, he said.

It is providing water to the tri-cities area, Rapach said. Its main goal was to move the cities off of Lake Okeechobee as a source of water. The lake had high organics, and a lot of material in it. It was a pain in the neck to clean it.

Currently the SFWMD is taking part in the general suffering from the effects of shrinking revenues and a struggling economy, Rapach said, and is seeking ways to cut back and eliminate unnecessary spending, such as restricting travel and conference attendance. He said the district would also continue to stress conservation in water use. Seen by much of the public simply as restrictive measures, he said conservation should be seen in a more positive light.

Conservation is essentially a good thing to do, Rapach said. You need to conserve a resource and use it wisely, and thats a positive thing. It doesnt mean doing without. It means using it and not wasting it. Thats how we conserve a resource. Thats a good thing.

Rapach also expressed hope about the conclusion of a deal by the district and the state to buy more than 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar land for Everglades restoration and better water management in South Florida. The proposed \$1.34 billion purchase is the culmination of more than five months of complex negotiations and extensive due diligence on the part of the SFWMD including multiple land appraisals, environmental assessments and engineering evaluations.

LGLA member Pat Johnson asked Rapach if the district would have to pay for the cleanup of the land, and if so, how much. Rapach said U.S. Sugar would be required to bring the land to a basic standard, and that the SFWMD would do further work where necessary.

U.S. Sugar will pay for some of the cleanup, Rapach said. They will clean it up to a certain level. Different levels of cleanup would be required.

While a recent counteroffer has come from a giant farming corporation seeking the land, complicating the prospects of completing the deal, Rapach also noted that the district also must wait on the State Legislature before it can be certain the money for the purchase will be made available.

We have the 2009 legislative session to go through, Rapach said. I am sure there will be a lot of discussion on that. As you know, they have a special session right after the New Year to look at the state budget. There will be a lot of discussion on that. They are \$2 billion in the red starting out. We will have to wait and see how this plays out, but I think its an excellent opportunity.

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Big land sale will help slake Florida's thirst

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Eric Buermann

Big land sale will help slake Florida's thirst

By Eric Buermann, Special to the Times

In print: Saturday, December 27, 2008

America's Everglades received a vote of affirmation this month when the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board approved the purchase of more than 180,000 acres of agricultural land south of Lake Okeechobee. The land will be used to protect and restore one of the nation's most valuable treasures.

The heart of Everglades restoration is water. Scientists have long recognized the need to capture vast quantities of rainfall, store it, treat it and deliver it to the natural system with the right timing, quantity, quality and distribution. Only then will the wildlife of the Everglades be sustained, critical drinking water sources replenished, coastal estuaries protected from lake discharges and abundant, clean water flow south into Florida Bay. This is especially critical for the long term, as we anticipate global climate changes and the associated sea level rise that will inevitably impact Florida's coastlines.

This historic land acquisition provides the unprecedented opportunity to store and treat water on a scale never before envisioned. It is the single most important action to protect the Everglades since the designation of Everglades National Park 60 years ago, and it is a key moment in time. But make no mistake, Everglades restoration is about much more than wildlife and birds.

Consider what a healthy Everglades means to South Florida. The quality of life for 7.5-million residents depends entirely on the water held in our natural system. We depend on it for drinking, recreation, agriculture, landscaping, well-field protection, boating, fishing and countless other components that contribute to a healthy economy and the Florida way of life. The 2006-2008 water shortage vividly reminded us how much we need adequate water storage to sustain our environment, our economy and our quality of life.

Gov. Charlie Crist's vision to acquire this vast tract of land for Everglades restoration was a monumental step forward, and I

applaud him for it. The approval of the largest land purchase in Florida's history was a milestone, but there remains a great deal of work ahead. In the coming months, we will work hard to finalize financing and complete our due diligence. Equally important, we will work closely with our partners — local communities, the Florida Legislature and our federal restoration partners — to assure that the resulting environmental project achieves our restoration goals, sustains regional agriculture and supports the local economy.

The Everglades once covered almost 11,000 square miles of South Florida, but today this invaluable place is about half that size. Protecting what remains is essential to protecting South Florida's ability to thrive as a productive region of our state. The immense benefits of this acquisition and its lasting value to Florida are nearly beyond measure, and the acquisition cost is small in comparison.

Eric Buermann is chairman of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board.

2008 REWIND Everglades restore getting land infusion

12/27/2008

Florida Keys Keynoter

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The best environmental news for the Florida Keys in 2008 came from about 200 miles north, when state officials decided to buy a massive chunk of Florida sugar land. But the decision is hardly being hailed unanimously as a good deal for the state.

The proposal, announced by Gov. Charlie Crist to much fanfare in June, is now for the state to work to purchase about 181,000 acres -- nearly 300 square miles -- of land owned by the U.S. Sugar Corp. south of Lake Okeechobee.

The battered and shriveled Everglades ecosystem would benefit from returning more land to a natural marshy state, and by making it possible to create a semblance of the 'river of grass' that once fed freshwater to South Florida and Florida Bay.

Over the decades, Florida Bay has changed from a brackish ecosystem to a more saltwater environment.

'It has been determined that restricted freshwater flows through the Everglades ecosystem has caused significant and sustained damage to the resources of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, including to patch reefs and to the nursery grounds of spiny lobster, shrimp and reef fish...', the Sanctuary Advisory Council said in a December resolution backing the acquisition.

The planned purchase was the biggest Everglades news in eight years, since state and federal officials hailed the launch of wide-ranging efforts to restore the Everglades. The overall cost is now estimated at more than \$11 billion.

But experts at a Key Largo workshop in November acknowledged that while planning and some significant projects have taken place since the 2000 start of restoration work, the effort generally has fallen far behind schedule.

Crist's proposal brought renewed focus to the Everglades. The governor first proposed to pay \$1.75 billion for U.S. Sugar's assets, and handed responsibility for the deal to the South Florida Water Management District.

In mid-December, the water district's board voted 4-3 to go forward with the purchase. The price would be cut by about \$400 million but U.S. Sugar would keep many of its industrial facilities.

District board member and former Chairman Mike Collins, an Islamorada fishing guide, remains skeptical of the purchase and voted against it. Among other issues, he worries the purchase price will leave no money to undertake construction work needed to handle the south-flowing water. And some state legislators who agree threaten to withhold district money to forestall the purchase.

Many conservation groups, including the Everglades Foundation, continue to support the purchase.

Coral protection

New protections for elkhorn and staghorn corals took effect in November, about two years after the branching corals received federal designation as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

The regulations generally allow more vigorous enforcement of protective measures, many of which had already been enacted locally by the national marine sanctuary

About 90 percent of branching corals have disappeared, lost to declining environmental conditions and disease, biologists say.

While supporting the designation, some critics such as the Center for Biological Diversity say the measures don't go far enough to counter major threats including global warming or ocean acidification.

Support for a new marine protected area at Snapper Ledge off the Upper Keys gained steam this year, with more than 2,000 virtual signatures submitted on an online petition to the marine sanctuary.

Underwater photographer Steve Frink of Key Largo says the diving spot is renowned for watching fish but that fishing activity has harmed fish populations.

Keys sanctuary staff said a preservation-area designation for Snapper Ledge would be considered in an upcoming review.

Fare deal for the Glades

12/27/2008

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In normal times, a bus between Clewiston and Belle Glade would be nothing more than a way for people who can't afford cars to get to jobs, shopping and doctor visits.

But these aren't normal times in the Glades communities. If the sale of U.S. Sugar's land to the South Florida Water Management District goes through next year, a region that grew up on sugar is going to need some government help building a new economic engine.

And help to the Glades has been slow, going back to U.S. Sugar's closing of South Bay Growers in 1994. That cost 1,300 jobs, and the state never produced anything to compensate for the loss.

So we are happy to report that the Florida Department of Transportation will spend \$40,000 to keep the Clewiston-to-Belle Glade bus rolling for at least two months. The bus originally was FDOT's idea. The state paid for three years for a pilot project to bring mass transit to rural areas. Of course, the number of passengers couldn't compare with coastal routes in Palm Beach County. But for many people in the rural towns, the bus offered a needed ride to the hospital or community college in Belle Glade and the Walmart in Clewiston.

Palm Beach and Hendry counties joined with the state last year to keep the bus operating. Hendry agreed to keep paying, but Palm Beach, facing cuts to its more crowded routes, refused.

That set the stage for the state to start showing the people of the Glades that they matter. They have been promised help if the sugar deal goes forward, but it wasn't until last week that the state agency charged with providing that help, the Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development, held a get-acquainted meeting with Glades officials.

The state folks promised to return after next month's legislative special session to work out a plan. The state's newfound willingness to put up some money to keep a rural bus line rolling is an indicator, however slight, that the promise might come true.

Letter: Get The Land And Finish Restoration!

12/27/2008

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Get The Land And Finish Restoration!

As a scientist working on microalgae in both the Everglades and Florida Bay, I am keenly interested in seeing the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) bring to fruition the concept of Everglades Forever. At both the Greater Everglades Ecosystem Restoration conference in July and last weeks Florida Bay and Adjacent Marine Systems Science Conference, the potential purchase of the U.S. Sugar lands and plans for a long-awaited flow way were the topic of many talks and usually dominated the informal networking sessions.

All citizens of Florida and the nation should pressure those with the purse strings and the power to achieve a compromise, buy U. S. Sugar, and work out the needed swaps to obtain the flow way path. As I teach the students in my environmental chemistry classes, water, not energy, is the most pressing issue of the 21st century. We must rejuvenate the Everglades; it makes good economic sense (water, ecotourism, CO2 sequestration, etc.).

The subsidies that sugar in general has received over the years are staggering. All of that money just to give sugar growers in America a huge leg up against foreign competition. The latest issue of the Nassau Guardian (Bahamas) has an article that goes right to that point: if the American people are going to compete in a world market, then it is time to normalize relations. Buy sugar more inexpensively and have cheaper food or ethanol hmm? Caribbean, and especially Cuban, sugar competing on a 1:1 basis with sugar in America would settle the current problem with the Everglades needing these lands and not needing the nitrogen, phosphorous and sulfate that pollutes its waters.

Get the land, create the flow way and lets get on with the restoration!

Dr. J. William Louda, Loxahatchee Groves

Editors note: Dr. Louda is a professor of biochemistry at Florida Atlantic University. He also sits on the Loxahatchee Groves Town Council.

Editorial For the Everglades

12/26/2008

Jupiter Courier

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"We can either let the opportunity slip through our fingers or continue to pursue the opportunity."

So said Mike Sole, secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, during a conference call a few days after the governing board of the South Florida Water Management District voted 4-3 to approve the \$1.34 billion purchase of U.S. Sugar land for Everglades restoration.

By approving the deal, the governing board seized the opportunity and pushed the process forward. Board members also had the foresight to add an amendment giving the board an escape clause if its determined, at a later date, the purchase cuts into the districts core operations.

The deal, in its present form, is far from perfect a reality that may have prompted Sole to add: This is just the beginning. We have a lot of work ahead.

A lot of work indeed.

And the place to start is where this process should begun in the first place: by bringing all interested parties to the table and negotiating a comprehensive deal that provides the best, long-term solutions for all (taxpayers, sugar growers, communities throughout the Everglades Agricultural Area, and the water management district).

The state doesnt need all 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar land to recreate the natural flow-way and restore the River of Grass. But it does need land from Florida Crystals, the other major sugar grower in the EAA, to complete the project.

Yet, inexplicably, Florida Crystals has been virtually excluded from the negotiations.

We have been telling the governors office and the water management district wed be more than happy to sit and talk, Florida Crystals Vice President Gaston Cantens recently told the editorial board of Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers. We did have a written agreement we gave them several months ago, but havent heard back from them. ... The flow-way cannot be built unless they acquire Florida Crystals land. Weve told them we want to be partners. ... We have been wanting to make a deal for six months.

Why the cold shoulder, guv?

The states negotiations, to this point, have been far too secretive and selective.

Florida Crystals wants to be a part of the solution. Florida Crystals would have an incredible incentive to give environmentalists what they need to complete the flow-way if the water district parlayed the agreement with U.S. Sugar into a comprehensive plan with both sugar companies.

Otherwise, the state might need to find millions or billions of dollars more to buy Florida Crystals land.

Meantime, the Lawrence Group, a large agriculture and land company, has made an offer to buy U.S. Sugar. Open

conversations and negotiations between the government, environmentalists, U.S. Sugar, Florida Crystals and Lawrence could benefit all entities. Lawrence and Florida Crystals appear to be willing to use private capital to leverage government dollars.

In the end, its critical that the health of the Everglades and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers be preserved through what likely will be the most expensive environmental rescue in history. Part of this effort will involve cleaning out Lake Okeechobee. State officials must ensure they have the funding to get the entire job done, and the only way theyll be able to do that is if they manage the land purchases prudently.

Comments are the sole responsibility of the person posting them. We don't allow comments that degrade others on the basis of gender, race, class, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation or disability. Epithets, abusive language and obscene comments will not be tolerated... nor will defamation.

Turn Your Telescope Around

12/24/2008

Orlando Sentinel

Thom Rumberger - Everglades Trust

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For a proud city like Orlando, home to the headwaters of the Everglades, it's beyond disappointing to hear the gnashing of teeth and rending of garments over the state's decision to go ahead with the purchase of more than 180,000 acres from U.S. Sugar ("We think: The state gave away too much in deal with Big Sugar," Friday, Orlando Sentinel).

Clearly, your Editorial Board has its collective eye planted firmly on the wrong end of its telescope, continuing to view the purchase and process with a myopic, warped perspective. Turn it around, and you will see the situation a lot more clearly.

Your editorial relentlessly focuses upon the cost today, while utterly ignoring the opportunity we now have to save the billions of dollars piecemeal restoration will undoubtedly cost. You failed to mention the environmental benefits the purchase represents: the removal from production of the phosphorous-soaked land poisoning our drinking water, killing our animals and polluting our precious lakes, rivers and streams.

You failed to mention the economic benefits Floridians will enjoy, especially those communities that have been all but held hostage by Big Sugar, stifling their growth and continuing to cause misery. Restoring America's Everglades means revitalized tourism and a Lake Okeechobee brought back to life, not back-pumped from the sugar fields teeming with every contaminant known to man.

These are part of the cost/benefit ratio that cannot be put on paper, but which all figure into the \$1.34 billion offer. That it figures to be higher than the pure acreage value today is to miss the point; losing this opportunity now most certainly means we will never have a financially viable option for restoring America's

Everglades, cleaning and preserving our water supply and moving the region forward economically.

The pieces are now in place. Gov. Charlie Crist has supplied the vision. All that's left is generating the will by all involved to remove Big Sugar from the equation once and for all.

The year in local quotes He 'just wanted to up the body count'

12/24/2008

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Palm Beach Post Staff Reports

Compiled by staff writer Eliot Kleinberg from the staff and archives of the Palm Beach Post

'This is our moment in time and our moment in history. ... Do we want to acquire the land or not? Vote with your courage.' - Chairman Eric Buermann as the South Florida Water Management District voted Dec. 16 to buy nearly all of U.S. Sugar Corp.'s farmland for \$1.34 billion for Everglades restoration, in what amounts to the priciest conservation land purchase in Florida history.

'Yesterday, this was a street. Now it's like a lake.' - Frank Ardizzone surveying his Port St. Lucie neighborhood on Aug. 19, after Tropical Storm Fay left up to 5 feet of standing water, mostly on the Treasure Coast.

'The ongoing rainfall deficit has presented an opportunity to change Florida's future. With unprecedented awareness about the availability of regional water supplies, we have a chance to reshape our culture toward one of year-round conservation.' - Carol Wehle, executive director of the South Florida Water Management District. Even as heavy rains, much from Tropical Storm Fay in August, helped end a historic water shortage crisis, managers prepared to institute year-round lawn sprinkling limits.

'When I was driving home, I realized I really have nothing left in life except my health and my family's health, and my car.' - St. Lucie County firefighter Allen Civita, who fought for three hours May 13 to get to his home in Palm Bay, only to find wildfires had destroyed it and several other homes across southern Brevard County. On that day alone, 67 wildfires were burning a combined 43,194 acres in Florida, an area equal in size to Washington, D.C.

'They had no system for keeping track of some of the most dangerous substances known to mankind. One of the people that worked at the laboratory told me they had better security at a 7-Eleven.' - Richard Schuler, attorney for Maureen Stevens of suburban Lantana, on Aug. 7. The FBI had announced biological weapons researcher Bruce Ivins had committed suicide as authorities prepared to charge him in the October 2001 anthrax attacks. Bob Stevens, a photo editor at the Boca Raton headquarters of tabloid publisher American Media Inc., was

exposed and later died. Stevens has sued the federal government.

'I'll take the tent down when Palm Beach County builds a shelter for the people of Palm Beach County or when Jesus comes, and it appears Jesus will come first.' - Westgate Tabernacle Bishop Avis Hill Sept. 3. Officials threatened the West Palm Beach church with heavy fines for erecting a giant tent in July to feed the homeless.

'I couldn't think of anybody in the Democratic Party he couldn't club like a baby seal.' - Mac Stipanovich, longtime Republican operative and ally of former Gov. Jeb Bush, on the former governor's chances for U.S. Sen. Mel Martinez' seat. Martinez said Oct. 2 he wouldn't seek reelection in 2010.

'We're in never-never land.' - Gerald Richman, attorney for Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Richard Wennet, ousted by 61 votes after three chaotic recounts.

'Switch parties.' - Sid Dinerstein, head of the Palm Beach County Republican Party, on what shamed former congressman Mark Foley would have to do to revive his political career. In November, Foley came out of two years of seclusion for interviews in which he said he wouldn't rule out getting back in politics.

'Good people sometimes make bad decisions. This is not just a bad decision. This is a crime.' - U.S. District Judge Kenneth Marra on Jan. 11, sentencing disgraced former Palm Beach County Commissioner Warren Newell to five years in prison on a corruption charge.

'They didn't have to do it this way. All they had to do was ask and I would give them anything they needed.' - Palm Beach County Commissioner Mary McCarty after federal agents on Sept. 26 raided her Delray Beach home.

'There is no difference between 'murder' and 'kill' to me. We have a problem of racism. We have a problem with a person that goes around and finds joy with the murder of a 16-year-old.' - Palm Beach County Commissioner Addie Greene on Aug. 7 about the shooting of 16-year-old Ruben Charles DeBrosse by a county deputy. The Palm Beach County Police Benevolent Association later called for Greene to be removed from office.

'I believe the residents are fed up with being victimized.' - Lake Worth City Commissioner Dave Vespo after the commission voted Aug. 4 to have the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office take over police duties.

'In all of this, where is the justice? What else can you take from them? They're already dead. You're trying to take away their dignity, their pride?' - The Rev. Patricia Wallace of Pahokee, after the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office concluded in December that Wallace's son, Jonathan, and partner Donta Manuel are to blame for their deaths in November 2007. Another deputy pursuing a car theft suspect struck and killed the two as they tried to pull 'stop sticks' off a darkened Pahokee road. Their relatives say they plan to sue the sheriff's office.

'This is a sick, abusive man that should have been locked up in a cage a long time ago. I've been shaking like a leaf for the past three years.' - Mary Giannico, girlfriend of Alburn 'Eddie' Blake.

On March 3, Blake killed Palm Beach County firefighter Lt. Ray Vazquez and wounded four other people before fatally shooting himself at a Wendy's restaurant in suburban West Palm Beach.

'We heard Pahokee cheering for Pooh the whole game. A lot of our kids knew him. We wanted to say, 'We miss him, too.' We're out here together. We're all in the muck.' - Kenny Funderburk, assistant coach of Glades Central High School. Despite their arch rivalry, both teams at the Nov. 15 Muck Bowl remembered Pahokee High player Norman 'Pooh' Griffith, shot to death in Belle Glade in late September after a homecoming game.

'I needed to give myself a birthday present. Jess didn't even say Happy Birthday to me this morning ... (It's) hard to reconcile the person I loved so much with the person I see before me now.' - Boynton Beach political writer Carol Anne Burger in an e-mail to a friend. Police say she stabbed her former lover, software executive Jessica Kalish, more than 200 times with a screwdriver on Oct. 22.

'(He) just wanted to up the body count.' - Broward County sheriff's Sgt. Neal Glassman Dec. 2 about one of five men authorities say robbed Dunkin' Donuts shops in Tamarac, Sunrise and Delray Beach, as well as a 7-Eleven convenience store in Pompano Beach. A man was hurt in the Delray Beach robbery and another killed in the Tamarac incident. Authorities say the gang also fatally shot a man at random in Lauderhill.

'When there are signs of trouble, trouble often follows. We have rules and regulations for a reason. And sadly, most rules and regulations are written in blood.' - Mary Schiavo, former inspector general of the U.S. Department of Transportation, in January on the troubled Lantana-based Kemper Aviation flight school. On March 13, co-owner Jeff Rozelle died along with three Florida Atlantic University researchers in what was the third fatal crash for the school's fleet since October 2007.

'It was the scariest thing I've ever seen in my life. It looked like it was going to explode right here.' - Beachgoer Jennifer Scalisi July 22 after a twin-engine plane clipped the roof of the unfinished new Ocean Ridge town hall complex and slammed into a concrete utility pole, badly hurting the pilot.

'I'm a superhero. I saved somebody's life.' - 4-year-old Steven Shore of Lake Worth, honored Sept. 30 for rescuing a girl, also 4, who nearly drowned at a June birthday party.

'I wrote KKK all over. It was ridiculous and stupid. I think I got crazy with FOX News, watching too much FOX News.' - Patricia Gatti, owner of 264 The Grill in Palm Beach, who scribbled 'KKK' notes all over her restaurant for her black employees to see on Nov. 4, the night her candidate, John McCain, lost to Barack Obama.

'It's like a Monty Python skit.' - Assistant Palm Beach County Public Defender Carol Bickerstaff in September after a judge ruled it was unconstitutional to make Rivera Beach 17-year-old Julius Hart spend the night in jail for violating conditions of bail when he was cited for the city's 'saggy pants' law. Palm Beach County Public Defender Carey Haughwout says she plans to use the arrest as a test case to throw out the ordinance altogether.

