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## EDITORIAL: A bridge to the Everglades

07/01/2009

Palm Beach Post

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Though most attention has been focused on the deal to buy U.S. Sugar's land, Everglades restoration just got another big boost.

It's the ruling by U.S. District Judge Ursula Ungaro in Miami that the 20-year-old plan to build a bridge near the eastern end of Tamiami Trail can proceed. However successful the U.S. Sugar deal, the Everglades can't recover if water can't get there. The Tampa-to-Miami road, which opened in 1928 and also is known as U.S. 41, effectively acts as a dam blocking the flow of water into Everglades National Park. Culverts under the road don't let enough water pass through.

In 1989, Congress approved construction of the bridge, which would allow water into Northeast Shark River Slough, the Everglades' headwaters. Then bureaucratic and legal disputes stalled the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers project. Last fall, Judge Ungaro issued an injunction, because the Miccosukee Tribe claimed that releases of water from the bridge would damage tribal lands. But on June 19, she lifted the injunction.

"The U.S. Sugar sale and the Tamiami Trail bridge work hand in hand," said Everglades Foundation President Kirk Fordham. "Everglades National Park has been starved for water. This thing has been studied to death, but it looks as if the planets finally are starting to align." The Corps of Engineers now can take bids, and Mr. Fordham and a spokesman for the Corps of Engineers predict that if the tribe doesn't appeal, groundbreaking could take place in October. Cost of the bridge, which will be roughly 9 feet above the existing roadway, is an estimated \$212 million. The work will take roughly 3 1/2 years.

Though building the bridge would be a long-delayed victory, it would be a partial victory. The

original plan was for an 11-mile skyway in that section of the trail. Mr. Fordham and a spokesman for the National Parks Conservation Association correctly note that more bridges would be necessary to maximize the water going to Everglades National Park and on to Florida Bay, at the southern end of the system that begins at the source of the Kissimmee River south of Orlando. The Interior Department, which oversees national parks, is pushing for those added bridges.

With luck, the tribe won't appeal. Ken Ammon of the South Florida Water Management District says that government agencies have reduced seepage of water to the east that might harm those tribal lands. The corps spokesman added that pumps in the area also can direct water.

Mr. Ammon points out that as water levels rise in Everglades National Park, they would drop in the district's conservation areas north of the trail. That would help alligators and the endangered snail kite. Lower water levels also would benefit tree islands, a distinctive Everglades feature.

The water district is buying U.S. Sugar's land for \$533 million to restore the natural flow of water from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades. Unless water can get past Tamiami Trail, the water district won't get much of a return on that investment.

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## **Crist signs water management bill**

06/30/2009

Florida News Service

Peltier, Michael

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Historic City News has learned that a measure allowing managers of the five water management districts to approve permits without a formal governing board vote became law on Tuesday over the objections of environmentalists.

Those in opposition say the new law unduly limits public input.

Cautioning executive directors to vet permitting issues before their full board of governors, Gov. Charlie Crist nonetheless approved SB 2080 saying it would further state efforts to improve the quality of water entering Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades.

Crist lauded efforts by the South Florida Water Management District to secure a deal with U.S. Sugar Corp to connect the lake to the northern Everglades. The plan calls for the district to get 73,000 acres from U.S. Sugar, though the company would lease some of the land back over the next 20 years.

That said, the governor acknowledged that legislation that came up late in the session to expand the power of directors caused great concern.

"I am asking the governing boards and executive directors to continue to include surface water and consumptive use permits on all board meeting agendas or other public meetings for discussion and transparency purposes," Crist wrote in a letter announcing his support for the bill.

The measure includes a provision supported by environmentalists that prevents homeowners associations from restricting the use of Florida-Friendly yard practices to reduce the use of water and fertilizer.

Despite the homeowners' provision, Audubon of Florida, 1000 Friends of Florida and the Putnam County Environmental Council urged Crist to veto SB 2080, saying it puts too much power in the hands of district executive directors.

"We're glad he's asking the districts to go ahead and have public hearings but we want to get that part of the law repealed," said Eric Draper, deputy direct of Audubon Florida and a Democratic candidate to become Florida Agricultural Commissioner. "It was a mistake to put this into law."

Backers include the Florida Association of Home Builders, which argued that such hearings are sparsely attended, time consuming and raise the costs of environmental efforts.

By MICHAEL PELTIER  
THE NEWS SERVICE OF FLORIDA

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## **Swiftmud, other water management districts continue in Florida**

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06/30/2009

Tampa Bay Business Journal

Tampa Bay Business Journal

Gov. Charlie Crist signed Senate Bill 2080 into law Tuesday, which renews Floridas water management districts as well as encourages more water conservation-based landscaping.

Crist is asking governing boards and executive directors of the districts to continue to include surface water and consumptive use permits on all board meeting and other public meeting agendas, despite a measure in the bill that delegates final agency action on such permits solely to the executive directors.

Florida is broken up into five water management districts. The Southwest Florida Water Management District, or Swiftmud, covers Tampa Bay. Others are the Northwest Florida Water Management District, Suwannee River Management District, St. Johns River Water Management District and the South Florida Water Management District.

It was the South Florida agency, which covers all of the southern Florida region and into the central part of the state including parts of Polk and Orange counties, that Crist singled out in a letter to Secretary of State Kurt S. Browning.

I want to acknowledge the continued work of the South Florida Water Management District in completing the U.S. Sugar land acquisition which will preserve the Florida Everglades for generations to come, Crist said. I thank the members of the governing board as well as the dedicated staff of the district in ensuring a long-awaited goal of storing, cleaning and moving water from Lake Okeechobee to Everglades National Park. The Everglades remain a natural treasure and this administration remains committed to working with local, state and federal partners in protecting the River of Grass.

S.B. 2080 passed the House 117-0 on May 1 and passed the Senate 39-0 on April 30.

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## **Crist signs bill to continue water management districts**

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06/30/2009

South Florida Business Journal - Online

Gov. Charlie Crist signed Senate Bill 2080 into law Tuesday, which renews Florida's water management districts as well as encourages more water conservation-based landscaping.

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Florida is broken up into five water management districts. Crist singled out the South Florida Water Management District, which covers all of southern Florida and into the central part of the state, in a letter to Secretary of State Kurt S. Browning. I want to acknowledge the continued work of the South Florida Water Management District in completing the U.S. Sugar land acquisition which will preserve the Florida Everglades for generations to come, Crist said. I thank the members of the governing board as well as the dedicated staff of the district in ensuring a long-awaited goal of storing, cleaning and moving water from Lake Okeechobee to Everglades National Park. The Everglades remain a natural treasure and this administration remains committed to working with local, state and federal partners in protecting the River of Grass. In May, the water governing board approved a scaled down version of the historic land purchase deal that was first announced last year by Crist.

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## Excerpts from editorials in Florida newspapers

06/30/2009

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Associated Press (AP) - Tallahassee Bureau

Here are excerpts from editorials in newspapers in Florida:

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June 29

The Palm Beach Post, on how the deal to buy U.S. Sugar is still far from being done:

Since June 24, 2008, when Gov. Crist announced the plan to buy U.S. Sugar, the agency that must pay the bill has voted not once but twice on scaled-back versions of the deal.

Also on that day, Malcolm "Bubba" Wade, the South Florida Water Management District board member who represented the area that would be most affected by the sale, resigned his seat. Mr. Wade, from Hendry County, was a U.S. Sugar vice president, so his board position was a conflict of interest.

Not surprisingly, the news about the company that built Clewiston worried Hendry County officials. They worried that the deal at first to buy 187,000 acres, then 180,000 acres and finally 73,000 acres would devastate the lake towns. But Gov. Crist has refused to give those concerns a voice. Mr. Wade's seat, representing Collier, Lee, Charlotte, Hendry, Glades, Osceola, Okeechobee, Polk, Highlands and Orange counties, remained empty in May, when the board approved a scaled-back plan. It remained empty last week, when the first anniversary of the deal passed.

And it no longer is the only vacancy. A Miami-Dade County member, Paul Huck, resigned in March. The term of Martin County representative Melissa Meeker expired in March. She is not seeking reappointment, but continues to serve.

Gov. Crist can't blame a lack of qualified candidates for his refusal to act. Nine people, four from Hendry County, have applied for Mr. Wade's seat. Three others are from Lee County, which has a representative on the nine-member board. Among the four Hendry residents, Gov. Crist could give Clewiston a voice by appointing Mary Ann Martin, owner of Roland Martin's Marina and knowledgeable about Lake Okeechobee issues. Roger Hatton, from a venerable ranching family, would offer representation from agriculture.

For Mr. Huck's seat, one applicant stands out. Former Florida House Speaker Richard Pettigrew, a lawyer, served as co-chairman in the 1990s of the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South

Florida. Mr. Pettigrew also specializes in land use and environmental law.

Ms. Meeker's seat covers an area from St. Lucie to Monroe counties but usually goes to a Treasure Coast resident. The field of 24 includes a stellar candidate in Tom Bausch, a two-term Sewall's Point commissioner who has a record of advocacy on behalf of the St. Lucie River, which is supposed to benefit from the U.S. Sugar deal. Then there's Callery-Judge Grove General Manager Nat Roberts, who has run a Palm Beach County citrus grove that he wants to convert into a small town. He could provide the farm viewpoint if Mr. Hatton isn't on the board.

The sugar deal is far from done. Gov. Crist owes South Florida, especially Hendry County, full representation at this critical time.

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On the Net: [http://www.palmbeachpost.com/opinion/content/opinion/epaper/2009\\_06/29/a10a\\_wmd\\_ledit0630.html](http://www.palmbeachpost.com/opinion/content/opinion/epaper/2009_06/29/a10a_wmd_ledit0630.html)

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