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## Everglades restoration in danger from inland-port plan, groups say

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07/27/2009

Sun Sentinel - West Palm Beach Bureau

Reid, Andy

The fight over where to build Florida's proposed "inland port" has Palm Beach County considering allowing more industrial development on former Everglades land, even if the coveted distribution center goes elsewhere.

That has prompted protests from environmental groups, who warn that the move could get in the way of Everglades restoration plans.

It also could intensify the political wrangling among Florida counties vying for the job-producing project, expected to move to farmland in one of the communities ringing Lake Okeechobee.

"We want to be sure that the jobs stay here in Palm Beach County," said Commissioner Priscilla Taylor, who Thursday called for pressing ahead with industrial development efforts.

The inland port plan calls for creating an industrial distribution center that would link coastal ports from Miami to Palm Beach County, delivering cargo to and from the coast via truck routes and rail lines crisscrossing the state and linking with routes to the rest of the country.

Palm Beach County backs the proposal from sugar giant Florida Crystals, which would put a facility on 318 acres of farmland beside the company's Okeelanta power plant, south of South Bay.

That site is among the properties in the running to become home to the distribution center. The Port of Palm Beach and state transportation officials ultimately pick the site.

On Thursday, Palm Beach County commissioners agreed to consider going ahead and giving Florida Crystals the industrial approvals it needs, regardless of whether the company lands the port project. In addition to needing county approval, the changes would trigger state review.

Even if the inland port goes elsewhere, the Florida Crystals site is strategically located near U.S. 27 and near Glades communities desperate for jobs, Taylor said.

"It would create jobs and give hope to the residents," Taylor said.

Palm Beach County's backing of the Florida Crystals site has drawn the ire of environmental groups. They warn that allowing more industrial development on Florida Crystals land threatens to get in the way of state efforts to buy up farmland south of Lake Okeechobee that could be used to store, clean and deliver water that once flowed naturally to the Everglades.

Gov. Charlie Crist is pushing a \$536 million plan to buy 73,000 acres from Florida Crystals' rival, U.S. Sugar Corp., for Everglades restoration. The deal includes an option to buy another 107,000 acres of sugar cane land.

Creating an industrial distribution hub at Florida Crystals' Okeelanta site could lead to "unnecessary environmental damage" because of its location between Lake Okeechobee and what remains of the Everglades, according to a July 23 letter from the Everglades Foundation to county commissioners.

"Construction of an inland port (at Okeelanta) could forever preclude restoration of the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries," according to the foundation.

Commissioner Karen Marcus said she opposes committing to more industrial development at Florida Crystals. Environmental concerns are likely to lead to legal challenges that would tie the county up in court, she said. Other available land near Lake Okeechobee already is approved for industrial development, Marcus said.

"I want it to be the right site and I don't want it to get litigated," Marcus said.

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## **EDITORIAL Prevent political stall-ball**

07/26/2009

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Palm Beach Post

There was a lot right about the people Gov. Crist picked last week for the South Florida Water Management District board. But there was something terribly wrong about when the governor chose them.

Joe Collins, engineering manager for Tampa-based conglomerate Lykes Bros., fills the seat vacated 13 months ago by Malcolm "Bubba" Wade Jr., a vice president of U.S. Sugar. Mr. Wade resigned when Gov. Crist announced that the water district was buying U.S. Sugar, a deal that now has the district buying just some of the company's land.

Crist delayed one South Florida choice for an unacceptably long 13 months.

Mr. Wade lives in U.S. Sugar's hometown of Clewiston. For more than a year, while the district debated a transaction that would profoundly affect that area, the residents had no representation. They had no advocate to jawbone the state into developing a plan to replace the jobs. There was no shortage of qualified applicants. Gov. Crist just didn't want to risk picking someone who might oppose the sale.

Gov. Crist waited four months to fill the other two vacancies. Gladys Perez, a lawyer who worked for Gov. Crist and Gov. Jeb Bush, takes a Miami-Dade County seat that has been vacant since March. Indiantown developer Kevin Powers fills the Treasure Coast seat of Melissa Meeker, who stayed on after announcing that she didn't want another four-year term after hers expired in March.

Mr. Collins attended the district's first "water summit" in 2007 and has served on other committees examining ways to preserve Florida's most valuable resource. Lykes Bros. also wants to stake out a future in the renewable energy business. Ms. Perez worked on Everglades issues in Tallahassee. Mr. Powers is the son of former board member Timer Powers. It's incredible to think that barely two years after Mr. Bush left office the board needs a development perspective. If Mr. Powers follows his father's example, the district will get a balanced, sensible viewpoint.

Still, the 16-county South Florida Water Management District is the most important public agency in this part of the state. What the governing board positions lack in compensation - they're unpaid - they make up for in power. But the governor has no deadline for filling board vacancies. Governors must appoint judges within 60 days of receiving names from the screening committee, but the thousands of other appointments are on the governor's timetable.

That should change, at least for appointments to the five water district boards. Just as the shot clock in college basketball keeps coaches from stalling and ruining the game, a deadline would keep governors from refusing to fill vacancies for political reasons. If 90 days is too short - applicants need time to apply and be screened by the governor's staff - the Legislature could make it 120 days or 180 days.

Only confirmation by the Senate is required for water district board members. With the Legislature having finished its annual session, even that won't be an issue until March. Judging by Gov. Crist's work schedule, pressing business didn't delay these appointments. Politics did.

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## More good than bad in water management bill

07/26/2009

Ocala.com

Michael W. Sole

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On June 30, Gov. Charlie Crist signed Senate Bill 2080, relating to water resources, into law. Although the bill is not perfect, it is my firm belief - a belief that I expressed to the governor - that this bill should be signed for the many benefits it provides to both to the environment and the people of Florida.

Although the new law requires the Governing Boards of the state's five water management districts to delegate authority to approve permits to their executive directors, each of the water management districts have been - and will continue to be - committed to open government and transparency. The simple fact is nothing in Senate Bill 2080 diminishes, alters or limits the ability of the public from inquiring or obtaining information about a permit application or objecting to an application.

While much attention has focused on delegation, many other aspects of the bill offer greater protection for Florida's water resources that have gone largely unnoticed. However, these changes will help ensure the protection and conservation of Florida's water resources. They include:

Changes to Florida law regarding environmentally friendly landscaping. The use of Florida-friendly landscaping and other measures by homeowners is an effort to conserve Florida's water resources, which is in the best interest of all Floridians.

Expands lands eligible to receive compensation to local governments. This provision puts into Florida law a commitment of the South Florida Water Management District to ensure the smaller Glades communities are not adversely impacted by the U.S. Sugar land acquisition.

Streamlines government and saves taxpayer dollars - allowing meetings to be conducted via technology and authorizing the use of certain long-term permits.

Provides fiscally sound policies that ensure the water management districts do not overextend their financial commitments.

Every drop of water makes a difference to Florida's future, and we must continue to protect and wisely manage our water resources. There is no doubt that Florida's environment is better protected when all stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process. As a result, I am committed to preserving the public process throughout this next year.

I will continue working with the executive directors of the state's five water management districts to ensure openness and transparency. In addition, I look forward to working with the 2010 Legislature to develop a process that sustains transparency and stakeholder participation.

Michael W. Sole is secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

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## Guest commentary Hendry County vies for planned South Florida inland port facility

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07/26/2009

Naples Daily News

During a tour of Hendry County industrial sites, Hendry County Commissioner Karson Turner recently encouraged representatives of regional environmental organizations to support Hendry's bid to become home to the proposed South Florida inland port facility.

The tour was organized by Sierra Club staff member Marti Daltry and included leaders of the Caloosahatchee River Citizen Association, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, Everglades Foundation, Audubon Society, Collins Center and Sierra Club. The purpose of the tour was to provide an opportunity for participants to learn more about Hendry County and the areas that would be affected by the U.S. Sugar purchase, ask questions and express their concerns about the inland port sites.

Focal point for the tour was the Airglades Industrial Park west of Clewiston, where Turner explained the development vision. Cheryl Eby Gutjahr of Rawls Real Estate next guided the group through the Weekley Brothers warehouse and rail yard east of Clewiston before visiting the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation, Storm Water Treatment Area 5, and the Little Cypress Organic Farm operated by Chuck Obern in south Hendry County.

An inland port is needed to relieve container storage, warehousing, rail, truck and air-cargo congestion at South Florida's deep water ports in Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach. Traffic through these ports is expected to increase dramatically when improvements to the Panama Canal are completed, allowing larger ships from the Pacific to reach Caribbean and Atlantic harbors.

Sites in Hendry, Glades, Highlands, Palm Beach and Martin counties are being considered for the new inland port facilities. But environmental advocates are worried that locating the inland port in Palm Beach County would conflict with Everglades restoration efforts and negate the value of the state's huge investments in EAA land purchases. Groups like the Everglades Foundation have written to Gov. Charlie Crist encouraging him to instead look favorably upon the candidate sites in Hendry and Glades Counties.

The initial storage footprint is estimated to cost \$12 billion dollars for construction and create up to 25,000 jobs to the region during the next 20 years.

Contrary to what the name may suggest, an inland port does not have to be connected or have access to a body of water. The formal name for the inland port is Intermodal Logistic Center, or ILC. An ILC provides storage and redistribution services that are supported by trucking highways, rail lines and airports. It would allow the deep water ports to store, reorganize and transfer their cargo at a more rural location, away from the congested coasts.

A hot topic of discussion on the tour was how to avoid having ILC facilities at the Airglades, Hilliards and Weekley Brothers sites becoming a trigger for uncontrolled sprawl in adjacent agricultural lands. Many in the tour group advocated protecting agricultural lands by adding a sprawl prevention package to the Hendry County ILC industrial site proposal. They emphasized the need to center commercial and residential redevelopment in Clewiston, Moore Haven, Port LaBelle, Montura, Pioneer and LaBelle to help revitalize these communities.

The Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association (CRCA) is a grass-roots volunteer organization that promotes environmental education in order to encourage and engage the community to take an active role in preservation, conservation and restoration of the Caloosahatchee River and tributaries. The organization's focus is on educating citizens who live in the Caloosahatchee watershed about water quality and quantity issues that impact the community.

Contact Snapp by e-mail at [president@caloosahatchee.org](mailto:president@caloosahatchee.org) or by phone at (239) 590-7588.

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## CRIST'S BACKERS GIVE TO \$4,800 LEGAL LIMIT

07/25/2009

Sun Sentinel

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Gov. Charlie Crist has a lot of wealthy friends.

And many of them, from plaintiff lawyers and corporate executives to New York socialites and Tallahassee lobbyists, have cut checks to his U.S. Senate bid for the full \$4,800 they're allowed to give to a federal candidate, according to Crist's fundraising report.

More than one-fourth - 580 - of the 2,100 contributors who helped Crist raise \$4.3 million have donated the maximum for both the 2010 primary and general elections, meaning they can't be asked to give again.

The vast majority of Crist's donors gave checks larger than \$1,000 - many giving the full \$2,400 allowed for the primary election, meaning the governor won't have as many names to turn to in his fundraising Rolodex over the next 16 months.

However, Crist advisers said the campaign hasn't tapped out its home state.

"There's still plenty of money left in Florida," said Crist adviser and lobbyist, Brian Ballard, who along with his wife Kathryn gave the maximum \$9,600. "But he put a big dent in Florida."

By comparison, Crist's Republican primary opponent, Marco Rubio, reported 2,500 contributors during the three-month period ending June 30, with only about 100 of them giving the limit. Rubio totaled \$340,000, and this week started trimming his paid staff.

U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek, D-Miami, has raised about \$2.6 million for the Senate race in the first six months of this year. Only 139 of his 4,300 contributors have donated the maximum.

Many of Meek's donors have signed up to pay \$20.10 a month, which will let him keep returning to them until the general election, said campaign strategist Ana Cruz.

"Charlie can't go back to ask a lot of those people for help again," Cruz said.

Federal election law allows individuals to give a maximum of \$2,400 for a primary election and \$2,400 for a general election, or a maximum of \$4,800. At least \$1.4 million of Crist's massive war chest can't be spent during his primary campaign and must be held for the general election.

Crist's campaign rewrote the record books for a Florida campaign for a U.S. Senate seat in its first 50 days. He was the highest-grossing Senate candidate in the country for the fundraising period that ran from April through June.

His urgency in asking donors to write the biggest checks now reflects the campaign's strategy to "drain the swamp." Campaign cash will be harder to come by later in the election season, several donors said.

"I think his ability to raise money will be less [going forward] than in the past," said Miami-Dade lobbyist Ron Book, who gave Crist the maximum \$4,800, as did his wife. "Everybody that has gotten out early is smart."

George LeMieux, Crist's former campaign manager and chief of staff in the Governor's Office, conceded the bad economy and Crist's huge footprint early in the 2009-10 election cycle probably accounted for lower fundraising totals for other Republicans and the state party.

"In large part, people are competing for the same dollars," he said.

Crist's fundraising strategy has shifted to target more out-of-state dollars in places such as North Carolina, where wealthy Floridians spend their summers, and New York, where he raised funds at private dinners last weekend.

Earlier this year, billionaire developer Donald Trump and New York Yankees outfielder Johnny Damon showed up at ritzy dinners in the Hamptons for Crist, whose wife, Carole Rome, has helped him gain entrance into New York social circles.

This week, he was in Washington for back-to-back fundraisers hosted by federal lobbyists.

Crist's campaign has leaned on a small number of "bundlers" - lobbyists who collect multiple checks from friends, clients and relatives - to raise almost \$190,000.

Ponta Vedra Beach-based lobbyist T. Martin Florentino, whose clients include CSX Transportation and AT&T, collected \$139,250 for Crist.

Tallahassee-based health care lobbyist James Eaton raised \$50,700.

The list of 580 contributors who donated the maximum includes U.S. Sugar Corp. CEO Robert Buker and chief company lobbyist Bob Coker. Both were at the center of Crist's successful push for the state to buy U.S. Sugar's land holdings to try to restore the natural water flow of the Everglades.

Half a dozen attorneys with Orlando trial lawyer John Morgan's Morgan & Morgan mega-firm donated the maximum at a fundraiser that netted \$300,000 for Crist in June. Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp is a former partner in the Morgan law firm.

Morgan, a Democrat, is supporting Alex Sink in the race against Republican Bill McCollum for governor. But he said Crist will be the top draw for those willing to open their checkbooks this political season.

"Charlie Crist is the blueprint for Republicans, if they are going to be a national party instead of a bunch of angry male rednecks in the South," Morgan said.

Aaron Deslatte, who reported from Tallahassee, can be reached at 850-222-5564

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## Quarter of Crist donors max out

07/25/2009

Orlando Sentinel

Deslatte, Aaron

TALLAHASSEE -- Gov. Charlie Crist has a lot of wealthy friends.

And many of them, from plaintiff lawyers and corporate executives to New York socialites and Tallahassee lobbyists, have cut checks to his U.S. Senate bid for the full \$4,800 they're allowed to give to a federal candidate, according to Crist's fundraising report.

More than one-fourth -- 580 -- of the 2,100 contributors who helped Crist raise a whopping \$4.3 million have now maxed out for both the 2010 primary and general elections, meaning they can't be asked to give again.

And the vast majority of Crist's donors gave checks larger than \$1,000 -- many giving the full \$2,400 allowed for the primary election -- meaning the governor won't have as many names to turn to in his fundraising Rolodex during the next 16 months.

But Crist advisers say the campaign hasn't tapped out its home state.

"There's still plenty of money left in Florida," said Crist adviser and lobbyist Brian Ballard, who along with his wife, Kathryn, gave the maximum \$9,600. "But he put a big dent in Florida."

By comparison, Crist's long-shot GOP primary opponent, Marco Rubio, reported 2,500 contributors during the three-month period ending June 30, with only about 100 of them giving the limit. Rubio totaled only \$340,000 and this week started trimming his paid staff.

Crist's Democratic opponent, U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek of Miami, who has raised about \$2.6 million in the first six months of this year, has maxed out only 139 of his 4,300 contributors.

Many of Meek's donors have signed up to pay \$20.10 a month, said campaign strategist Ana Cruz, which lets the candidate keep returning to them through the general election.

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## Smashing records

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## Using 'bundlers'

Crist's campaign has leaned on a handful of "bundlers" -- lobbyists who collect multiple checks from friends, clients and relatives -- to raise nearly \$190,000 so far.

Ponte Vedra Beach-based lobbyist T. Martin Florentino, whose clients include CSX Transportation and AT&T, collected \$139,250 for Crist. Tallahassee-based health-care lobbyist James Eaton raised another \$50,700.

The list of 580 contributors who maxed out includes U.S. Sugar Corp. CEO Robert Buker and chief company lobbyist Bob Coker. Both were at the center of Crist's successful push for the state to buy U.S. Sugar's land holdings to try to restore the natural water flow of the Everglades.

Prominent GOP contributor Gary Morse, developer of The Villages, his wife and several relatives each gave the \$4,800 maximum.

And a half-dozen attorneys with Orlando trial lawyer John Morgan's Morgan & Morgan mega-law firm maxed out at a fundraiser that netted \$300,000 for Crist in June. Crist's lieutenant governor, Jeff Kottkamp, is a former partner in the Morgan firm.

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