My colleague, Eric Buermann, recently pointed out in a letter to your newspaper that many environmentalists have called the purchase of U.S. Sugar’s land “fresh hope” for the Everglades.

I find it extremely sad that hope is all we have after all the years of hard work to produce actual benefits to the Everglades and estuaries. This past week the South Florida Water Management District requested court approval for massive public debt to fill a bottomless environmental “hope” chest with no reasonable expectation of ever realizing any meaningful public benefit from it.

It is likely, as the state attorney has opined, that the $2.2 billion requested cannot be authorized under state law. That means the district will not have the money for existing authorized projects. Those of us who oppose the structure of this deal do not oppose Everglades restoration.

Quite the opposite is true. There is no denying the urgent need for storage and treatment. There also is no denying the district’s admission in court that much of this land will be unavailable for 20 years and that other projects already authorized, funded and designed on land we already own will not go forward as a consequence of this purchase.

This point is critical and often missed in the debate. Twenty years is a long time.

What's more. it is entirely likely that the A-1 Reservoir, already authorized, funded, under construction and now out of court, could be finished in three years. It also is likely it would hold more water than any project built on the U.S. Sugar land.

Proponents of the deal constantly refer to their “vision.” Visions are cheap, projects are expensive, and delaying restoration for obscure, undefined and illusive visions is irresponsible.

Michael Collins
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Collins is a member of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board.