

Compiled by: South Florida Water Management District
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Water managers must buy land to preserve South Florida's future

03/11/2010

Palm Beach Post

Palm Beach Post Breaking News

Water managers must buy land to preserve South Florida's future

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The purchase of U.S. Sugar land would provide land to clean water for the Everglades and local communities, offering storage and improving flood protection. Originally, the Florida Everglades received its water from the Kissimmee River to Lake Okeechobee and flooded south. Currently, this water is being sent out to tide and damaging our estuaries.

Some estimate that this damage represents an economic loss of more than \$1 billion. The U.S. Sugar purchase can change the dynamics and again send water south. In the long run, this purchase will save money by providing land for Everglades restoration, water storage, stormwater treatment and flood control. Science indicates that having water on large tracts of South Florida land could improve our aquifers and keep saltwater from public water wellfields.

The purchase of this land is essential to protecting our estuaries and our future. Not purchasing this land will reduce the options for meeting all of these challenges. The South Florida Water Management District board needs to move forward and extend the purchase agreement for the U.S. Sugar land when it votes today.

DREW MARTIN

Lake Worth

Editor's note: Drew Martin is the chairman of the Sierra Club's Everglades Committee.

U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

03/11/2010

WWSB-TV - Online

SOURCE Florida Crystals

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Latest version of terms reveals restrictive "affordability clause" may not provide an out for District

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., March 10 /PRNewswire/ -- Examination of the latest version of the contract between the South Florida Water Management District and U.S. Sugar Corp. reveals a revised "out clause" that restricts the agency's ability to terminate the contract due to financial shortfalls, resulting in the District having no choice but to raise taxes on the property owners of the following counties: Broward, Collier, Dade, Glades, Hendry, Lee, Martin, Monroe, Palm Beach and St. Lucie, as well as portions of Charlotte, Highlands, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola and Polk counties.

A memo sent to governing board members urging them not to extend the March 31, 2010, deadline for bond validation can be accessed on the Florida Crystals' website at www.floridacrystals.com/content/134/company_news.aspx.

Fla. gov fights for Everglades amid US Senate race

03/11/2010

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WTHR-TV - Online

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) - A key part of Gov. Charlie Crist's political legacy is his grand plan to revive the dying Florida Everglades.

But the Republican's vision to restore the Everglades by buying it back could be close to collapse. And the governor doesn't need any blemishes on his resume right now because he's in the middle of a close race for the GOP nomination for U.S. Senate.

The governor's plan would purchase 73,000 acres of farmland owned by the nation's largest cane sugar producer, U.S. Sugar, and clean polluted water entering the Everglades. But opponents of the proposal claim the cost has been inflated by U.S. Sugar executives and the deal is a waste of taxpayer money.

A board that oversees Everglades restoration is set to vote Thursday on whether to keep the deal alive.

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Crist fights for Everglades amid U.S. Senate race

03/11/2010

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WFTS-TV - Online

Florida Everglades, September 2007. (Joe Raedle, Getty Images)

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Crist's grand Everglades deal under assault

03/11/2010

St. Petersburg Times - Online

Associated Press

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WEST PALM BEACH — Gov. Charlie Crist's grand plan to revive the dying Florida Everglades by buying back the land, a key part of his legacy, could be on the cusp of collapsing and dealing another blow to his Senate hopes.

A panel that oversees Everglades restoration is set to decide today whether to kill the state's proposed \$536 million deal to buy 73,000 acres from U.S. Sugar Corp. The proposal, much trumpeted by Crist, has already been cut by more than half from the initial plan announced in 2008, which was \$1.75 billion for about 180,000 acres and the company's assets.

While the board is likely to vote to keep the plan alive for now, the shaky proposal has been hammered by some.

Critics have questioned Crist's motives, claiming they're more politics than preservation. They contend, among other things, the cost has been inflated by U.S. Sugar executives hoping to pad their pockets, knowing the governor wants the land regardless. They say it will stall other key projects because the state won't have any money left to construct the reservoirs and water treatment marshes needed for restoration, making the entire proposal a boondoggle.

"I think he's killing restoration virtually forever," said Dexter Lehtinen, an attorney for the Miccosukee Indians, who live in the Everglades and are fighting the land deal in court alongside Florida Crystals, U.S. Sugar's main rival.

They seek to stop financing for bonds the state wants to issue to pay for the deal. Florida Crystals has also argued the deal will give an unfair business advantage to its competitor, because U.S. Sugar can lease back the land at a nominal rate for a number of years until projects are under way.

U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

03/11/2010

South Florida Business Journal - Online

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Everglades plan may sink Crist's Senate hopes

03/11/2010

San Francisco Chronicle - Online

Brian Skoloff

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MySpace turns to games to regain prominence 03.10.10

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Mom held in slaying faced endangerment charge 03.10.10

(03-11) 04:00 PST WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.

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This week's board meeting of the South Florida Water Management District comes with Crist locked in a close contest for the GOP nomination for Senate. While the board is likely to vote to keep the plan alive, at least for now, the shaky proposal has been hammered by critics.

Recognizing that at least some of his political fate is connected to the Everglades plan, the usually easygoing governor has grown defiant in the face of criticism that the deal is too expensive and will kill other key restoration projects.

"It doesn't matter what it looks like to the detractors," Crist told The Associated Press. "They're trying to stop it, for whatever reason. I really don't give a damn."

Even if the deal goes through, it could hurt his campaign, as his opponent, former state House Speaker Marco Rubio, has criticized it as a waste of taxpayer money to bail out a struggling sugar company.

It was a bold idea from the start: buy out the nation's largest cane sugar producer, and use the land to help clean polluted water entering the Everglades.

Critics have questioned Crist's motives, claiming they're more politics than preservation. They contend, among other things, the cost has been inflated by U.S. Sugar executives, knowing the governor wants the land regardless. They say it will stall other key projects because the state won't have money left to construct the reservoirs and water treatment marshes needed for restoration.

The Everglades have been dying for decades from the intrusion of farms and development. The ecosystem has been dissected by dikes, dams and canals, effectively draining much of the swamp, and has been polluted by fertilizer and urban runoff.

It once sprawled across more than 6,250 square miles, but has shrunk by half and has since lost 90 percent of its wading birds. Other creatures are at risk, too, including 68 species considered threatened or endangered.

Politically, the governor must stay the course, said Aubrey Jewett, a political science professor at the University of Central Florida.

"If he looks like he's backing off a signature project that was announced with great fanfare, that this was going to be a way to save the Everglades, and now he says he was wrong, it just adds to his image problem," Jewett said.

Everglades dreams elude Crist

03/11/2010

Sarasota Herald-Tribune - Online

BRIAN SKOLOFF The Associated Press

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Crist's campaign has already been hurt by the slumping economy. Florida's unemployment rate has matched an all-time high and the state has a foreclosure rate among the highest in the country. He has also lost support among conservative voters by appearing with President Barack Obama to promote the \$787 billion federal stimulus package, a bill most Republicans opposed.

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It was a bold idea from the start: buy out the nation's largest cane sugar producer, and use the land to help clean polluted water entering the Everglades, something the state and federal governments have tried to do incrementally for years. It has since been downsized twice because of the sour economy.

U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

03/11/2010

Business First of Columbus - Online

Latest version of terms reveals restrictive "affordability clause" may not provide an out for District

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Extend U.S. Sugar deal deadline

03/11/2010

Miami Herald, The

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Like everything involving the Everglades, the state's agreement to purchase 72,800 acres of U.S. Sugar Corp. land for \$536 million has its share of champions and critics. But though it's less than perfect, the deal is worth doing.

Backers say it's a long-term investment in Everglades reclamation -- the biggest land acquisition ever that will go a long way to help clean Florida's environmental jewel. Skeptics say it's a costly taxpayer bailout of U.S. Sugar that will steal funding from other restoration projects.

Some criticism is justified. The 2008 agreement, struck behind closed doors by Gov. Crist and U.S. Sugar, wrongly shut out other Everglades stakeholders, such as the Miccosukee Tribe and Florida Crystals. The initial plan to buy all the company's holdings for \$1.75 billion has been downscaled twice. But the state is still paying too much.

The latest plan, beset by delays and lawsuits, is set to expire March 31 unless the South Florida Water Management District's governing board, the buyer, extends the deadline.

Unique opportunity

It should be extended -- the deal's biggest selling point is its huge value in taking so much land out of sugar production and putting it in the public's hands forever. Such a chance might never come again. An extension will give the district time to review its budget to decide if the purchase remains feasible given the economic downturn and projected costs of other restoration projects. Might it negotiate the price downward given the market?

Proceed despite misgivings

When the jointly funded state-federal Everglades cleanup plan went into effect in 2000, the idea of public acquisition of a big chunk of land for restoration in the Everglades Agricultural Area below Lake Okeechobee was thought impossible. But the impossible happened. So while there are misgivings, the governing board should continue its support.

That land would eventually be used to store and clean water flowing into the Everglades. The cost to convert the land to reservoirs and filters will be high, but the benefits are equally valuable. For flood control, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers releases water from Lake Okeechobee into the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries, killing off their marine hatcheries with runoff pollution from agriculture and development. The U.S. Sugar land would ultimately take the excess lake spill-off, sparing the estuaries.

Those acres could also serve as the first real link in restoring natural sheet flow from the lake to the Everglades, though that is contingent on other long-shot land purchases. Still, so was the idea of buying the U.S. Sugar property once.

Till last fall, the state had invested much more in restoration than the federal government. But the Obama administration wiped out years of gridlock with a down payment of \$350 million, creating welcome momentum for restoration.

Putting the brakes on the U.S. Sugar acquisition would cast a pall over the newfound, justified optimism that one day the Everglades will again be a true "River of Grass."

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Corrections: March 11

03/11/2010

Miami Herald, The
Herald, Miami

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- Chef Govind Armstrong and master sommelier Andrea Robinson make a free appearance at 1 p.m. Saturday at Macy's Aventura Mall home store. The date is wrong in the Nibbles & Bits column on 2E of Thursday's Tropical Life section, which is printed in advance.
- In a story Tuesday on Page 6B, the News Service of Florida incorrectly reported the date that the South Florida Water Management District governing board will vote on an extension of a March 31 contract deadline for the U.S. Sugar land purchase. The vote is Thursday.
- An article on Page 1B Sunday about a fire that shut down the Congress Inn Building in downtown Miami Friday night incorrectly identified the agency that returned its residents the next day after the Red Cross provided a night of shelter. A local government agency provided the transportation to the low-income residents.

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Fla. gov fights for Everglades amid US Senate race

03/10/2010

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Daily Herald Newspapers - Online

BRIAN SKOLOFF

Map shows area of Fla., Everglades owned by U.S. Sugar Corp.

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But the Republican's vision to restore the Everglades by buying it back could be close to collapse. And the governor doesn't need any blemishes on his resume right now because he's in the middle of a close race for the GOP nomination for U.S. Senate.

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Posted in National on Wednesday, March 10, 2010 2:03 pm Updated: 4:10 pm. | Tags:

U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

03/10/2010

Earthtimes.org

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SOURCE Florida Crystals

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Article : U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

03/10/2010

Finance.Boston.com

SOURCE Florida Crystals

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03/10/2010

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BRIAN SKOLOFF

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2010-03-10 21:17:32 GMT

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U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

03/10/2010

HazMat Management

Latest version of terms reveals restrictive "affordability clause" may not provide an out for District

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Florida Crystals

CONTACT: Gaston Cantens, +1-561-366-5128 or Joseph Klock, Jr., +1-305-476-7106

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Fla. gov fights for Everglades amid US Senate race

03/10/2010

Herald & Review

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By BRIAN SKOLOFF | Posted: Wednesday, March 10, 2010 3:03 pm | Loading...

Map shows area of Fla., Everglades owned by U.S. Sugar Corp.

A key part of Gov. Charlie Crist's political legacy is his grand plan to revive the dying Florida Everglades.

But the Republican's vision to restore the Everglades by buying it back could be close to collapse. And the governor doesn't need any blemishes on his resume right now because he's in the middle of a close race for the GOP nomination for U.S. Senate.

The governor's plan would purchase 73,000 acres of farmland owned by the nation's largest cane sugar producer, U.S. Sugar, and clean polluted water entering the Everglades. But opponents of the proposal claim the cost has been inflated by U.S. Sugar executives and the deal is a waste of taxpayer money.

A board that oversees Everglades restoration is set to vote Thursday on whether to keep the deal alive.

Posted in National on Wednesday, March 10, 2010 3:03 pm Updated: 5:05 pm. | Tags:

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This week's board meeting of the South Florida Water Management District comes with Crist locked in a close contest for the GOP nomination for Senate. While the board is likely to vote to keep the plan alive, at least for now, the shaky proposal has been hammered by critics.

Crist's campaign has already been hurt by the slumping economy. Florida's unemployment rate has matched an all-time high and the state has a foreclosure rate among the highest in the country. He has also lost support among conservative voters by appearing with President Barack Obama to promote the \$787 billion federal stimulus package, a bill most Republicans opposed.

Recognizing that at least some of his political fate is connected to the Everglades plan, the usually easygoing governor has grown defiant in the face of criticism that the deal is too expensive and will kill other key restoration projects.

"It doesn't matter what it looks like to the detractors," Crist told The Associated Press. "They're trying to stop it, for whatever reason. I really don't give a damn."

Even if the deal goes through, it could hurt his campaign, as his opponent, former state House Speaker Marco Rubio, has criticized it as a colossal waste of taxpayer money to bail out a struggling sugar company.

It was a bold idea from the start: buy out the nation's largest cane sugar producer, and use the land to help clean polluted water entering the Everglades, something the state and federal governments have tried to do incrementally for years. It has since been downsized twice because of the sour economy.

Critics have questioned Crist's motives, claiming they're more politics than preservation. They contend, among other things, the cost has been inflated by U.S. Sugar executives hoping to pad their pockets, knowing the governor wants the land regardless. They say it will stall other key projects because the state won't have any money left to construct the reservoirs and water treatment marshes needed for restoration, making the entire proposal a boondoggle.

"I think he's killing restoration virtually forever," said Dexter Lehtinen, an attorney for the Miccosukee Indians, who live in the Everglades and are fighting the land deal in court alongside Florida Crystals, U.S. Sugar's main rival.

They seek to stop financing for bonds the state wants to issue to pay for the deal. The Miccosukee and the company largely share the same concerns, that the governor's proposal is just too bold and will only slow restoration efforts. Florida Crystals has also argued the deal will give an unfair business advantage to its competitor, because U.S. Sugar can lease back the land at a nominal rate for a number of years until the state's restoration projects are under way.

The state Supreme Court is set to hear the case next month.

More pressing is the water district board's decision.

A February letter to the district's chief financial officer from a state consultant warned of "difficult decisions" ahead and multimillion-dollar deficits for the agency if the sugar deal happens.

District board chairman Eric Buermann said it's too soon to say whether the contract remains financially viable given that it won't be completed for months. There is still time to review budgets, he said, but the board must approve a contract extension.

"If we don't do that, that's the end of the deal," Buermann added.

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Politically, the governor must stay the course, even if he contends "politics be damned," said Aubrey Jewett, a political science professor at the University of Central Florida.

"If he looks like he's backing off a signature project that was announced with great fanfare, that this was going to be a way to save the Everglades, and now he says he was wrong, it just adds to his image problem, that he's a lot of show with not many results," Jewett said.

Crist simply calls it "the right thing to do."

"Never again will we have the chance to buy this land. If we let this go, shame on us forever," he said. "Why U.S. Sugar? Because they're willing."

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03/10/2010

KYTX-TV -Online

SOURCE Florida Crystals

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03/10/2010

Los Angeles Times - Online

BRIAN SKOLOFF

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Water managers debate U.S. Sugar-Everglades restoration deal

03/10/2010

Miami Herald, The
Morgan, Curtis

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Water managers were expected Wednesday to begin debating the future of Gov. Charlie Crist's controversial land deal with the U.S. Sugar Corp. A vote to extend one expiring deadline in the contract, which opens the door to potentially kill the \$536 million Everglades restoration purchase, is planned for Thursday.

The deal has been under siege from rival growers Florida Crystals, the Miccosukee Tribe and some state lawmakers, who contend it will siphon money from existing projects and push back restoration by years or decades. But it's the state's chronically ailing economy that has done the most damage, forcing the governor to downsize the deal twice since announcing it 20 months ago, and finances aren't expected to get better anytime soon.

Last month, an outside financial advisor warned the South Florida Water Management District that plummeting revenues could leave them with a difficult choice between cutting operations and maintenance or making a deal that environmentalists consider critical to supplying the Everglades with plentiful and unpolluted water.

Plans call for the land to eventually be used for reservoirs and marshes to remove phosphorus, which damages Everglades plants. But opponents contend the district can't afford to buy the land or build any of the needed projects, which would run multiple billions more.

The deal originally called for the taxpayers in the Water District's 16 counties to spend \$1.75 billion to buy out U.S. Sugar, including its mills, railroad and 187,000 acres. With state budget revenues dwindling, it was changed to a land-only deal, then to the current plan, which cuts the land buy into two parts: \$536 million for 72,500 acres with an option to buy an additional 107,000 acres at \$7,400 an acre.

Board members have said from the beginning that they had concerns, inserting a financial "out" clause that would allow the district to walk away if the deal would force cuts of "core" operations, such as flood control. The deal, which would be financed with bond instruments called certificates of participation, would add about \$45 million in annual debt to the district's budget.

The financial advisor's memo sent last month to the district's chief financial officer painted a bleak forecast, with deficits projected to increase to \$110 million by 2012 if the agency pursues the \$536 million land buy.

"If these projections [both revenues and expenses] are even close, the district must make some very difficult decisions," wrote David Moore of Public Financial Management Inc.

The deadline in the contract isn't to complete the deal but to finalize legal "validation" of the bonds. A Palm Beach County circuit judge approved enough bonding capacity to make the first phase of the purchase, but rejected a \$2.2 billion credit line sought by the district that would have made it easier to buy the option lands.

The Florida Supreme Court is scheduled to hear an appeal of that ruling by Florida Crystals and the Miccosukee Tribe on April 7.

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03/10/2010

Associated Press (AP)
Skoloff, Brian

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Associated Press Financial News

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/CONTACT: Gaston Cantens, +1-561-366-5128 or Joseph Klock, Jr.,

+1-305-476-7106/

/Web Site: <http://www.floridacrystals.com> /

CO: Florida Crystals; South Florida Water Management District; U.S. Sugar Corp.

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03/10/2010

Baltimore Sun - Online

BRIAN SKOLOFF

Map shows area of Fla., Everglades owned by U.S. Sugar Corp. (J. Bell, AP / March 10, 2010)

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Bradenton Herald - Online

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03/10/2010

MSNBC.com

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Chris O'Meara / AP

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U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

03/10/2010

Orlando Business Journal - Online

Latest version of terms reveals restrictive "affordability clause" may not provide an out for District

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A memo sent to governing board members urging them not to extend the March 31, 2010, deadline for bond validation can be accessed on the Florida Crystals' website at www.floridacrystals.com/content/134/company_news.aspx.

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Florida governor fights to keep Everglades restoration on track amid tight US Senate race

03/10/2010

Orlando Sentinel - Online

BRIAN SKOLOFF

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Map shows area of Fla., Everglades owned by U.S. Sugar Corp. (J. Bell, AP / March 10, 2010)

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U.S. Sugar land vital to Everglades restoration

03/10/2010

Palm Beach Post - Online

Purchase of sugar land a unique chance to advance restoration

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As a lover of our state's natural wonders, I believe that we have an opportunity that comes along once in a lifetime (or even once in many lifetimes) to restore and protect the Everglades. The opportunity is the state's purchase of 73,000 acres from the U.S. Sugar Corp., including acreage in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) south of Lake Okeechobee.

An important vote today will or will not keep this opportunity alive. I urge the governing board of the South Florida Water Management District to vote in favor of extending the contract to purchase this land. By extending the contract, the district will be giving the court time to decide upon the funding mechanism for the purchase.

Successful restoration of the Everglades depends on storing, treating and conveying clean water from Lake Okeechobee south through the EAA, into Everglades National Park and Florida Bay. The more natural flow of water will replenish parched wetlands, revive natural plant communities and heal habitat that is so important to struggling bird and wildlife populations.

This acquisition is the best opportunity we have to secure acres of land to store, treat and move water south. By acquiring this land, the state will be protecting Florida's natural systems and wildlife, as well as our freshwater resources, for many lifetimes to come.

CYNTHIA PLOCKELMAN

West Palm Beach

Editor's note: Cynthia Plockelman is first vice president of the Audubon Society of the Everglades.

Fla. gov fights for Everglades amid US Senate race

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Palm Beach Post - Online

BRIAN SKOLOFF

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SOURCE Florida Crystals

CONTACT: Gaston Cantens, +1-561-366-5128 or Joseph Klock, Jr., +1-305-476-7106

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Fla. gov fights for Everglades amid US Senate race

03/10/2010

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RealClearPolitics

Brian Skoloff

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Fla. gov fights for Everglades amid US Senate race

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Salon.com

BRIAN SKOLOFF

Map shows area of Fla., Everglades owned by U.S. Sugar Corp.

A key part of Gov. Charlie Crist's political legacy is his grand plan to revive the dying Florida Everglades.

But the Republican's vision to restore the Everglades by buying it back could be close to collapse. And the governor doesn't need any blemishes on his resume right now because he's in the middle of a close race for the GOP nomination for U.S. Senate.

The governor's plan would purchase 73,000 acres of farmland owned by the nation's largest cane sugar producer, U.S. Sugar, and clean polluted water entering the Everglades. But opponents of the proposal claim the cost has been inflated by U.S. Sugar executives and the deal is a waste of taxpayer money.

A board that oversees Everglades restoration is set to vote Thursday on whether to keep the deal alive.

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03/10/2010

Seattle Times - Online

BRIAN SKOLOFF

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AN EVERGLADES DREAM DEFERRED

03/10/2010

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St. Petersburg Times

Editor's note: A major New York Times story this week put before a national audience Gov. Charlie Crist's plan to save the Everglades by buying out U.S. Sugar, a deal the governor once said was "as monumental as the creation of the nation's first national park, Yellowstone." The piece raises questions already familiar to Florida readers about who actually benefits from the land buy as well as the involvement of George LeMieux, the governor's former chief of staff whom Crist appointed to the U.S. Senate seat he himself is seeking. Here we publish some key excerpts of the New York Times' article (click on the full version at links.tampabay.com) with annotated comments from St. Petersburg Times staff writers Alex Leary and Craig Pittman.

Standing amid the marshes at the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in June 2008, Gov. Charlie Crist said, "I can envision no better gift to the Everglades, the people of Florida and the people of America - as well as our planet - than to place in public ownership this missing link that represents the key to true restoration."

Nearly two years later, the governor's ambitious plan to reclaim the River of Grass is instead on track to rescue the fortunes of U.S. Sugar. U.S. Sugar dictated many of the terms of the deal as state officials repeatedly made decisions against the immediate needs of the Everglades and the interests of taxpayers, an examination of thousands of state e-mail messages and records and more than 60 interviews showed.

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Documents and interviews suggest that the price tag and terms of the deal could set back Everglades restoration for years, or even decades.

Negotiations favored U.S. Sugar from the start, when the state accepted two outside firms' appraisals of the company's land that used figures from the height of the real estate market, according to documents.

When a "fairness opinion" commissioned by the state found that those appraisals had overvalued the land by \$400 million, Florida officials orchestrated a public relations campaign to discredit the findings, internal e-mail showed. Appraisers from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, which was required to sign off on the deal, were also cut out of the process after raising concerns, e-mail messages showed.

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More than a dozen projects under way as part of a 10-year-old federal and district restoration effort have been

suspended or canceled in anticipation of the cost of the U.S. Sugar deal. Among them is a massive reservoir in western Palm Beach County that was seen as a major step toward restoration of the Everglades. In total, \$1.3 billion had already been spent on the projects, according to an internal water district document.

Former Gov. Jeb Bush, who initiated most of that work, said in an interview that he was "deeply disappointed" with the decision by Crist, his successor and a fellow Republican, calling the move to halt the projects a setback for restoration.

"To replace projects that were under way for a possibility of a project decades from now is not a good trade," Bush said. "On a net basis, this appears to me there has been a replacement of science-based environmental policy for photo-op environmental policy."

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Based in our Washington bureau, Alex Leary covers politics. Craig Pittman covers environmental issues in Florida.

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In Everglades, dream of restoration deferred

03/10/2010

St. Petersburg Times - Online

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By DON VAN NATTA Jr. and DAMIEN CAVE, New York Times

Editor's note: A major New York Times story this week put before a national audience Gov. Charlie Crist's plan to save the Everglades by buying out U.S. Sugar, a deal the governor once said was "as monumental as the creation of the nation's first national park, Yellowstone." The piece raises questions already familiar to Florida readers about who actually benefits from the land buy as well as the involvement of George LeMieux, the governor's former chief of staff whom Crist appointed to the U.S. Senate seat he himself is seeking. Here we publish some key excerpts of the New York Times' article (click on the full version at links.

tampabay.com) with annotated comments from St. Petersburg Times staff writers Alex Leary and Craig Pittman. e_SCIBStanding amid the marshes at the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in June 2008, Gov. Charlie Crist said, "I can envision no better gift to the Everglades, the people of Florida and the people of America — as well as our planet — than to place in public ownership this missing link that represents the key to true restoration."

Nearly two years later, the governor's ambitious plan to reclaim the River of Grass is instead on track to rescue the fortunes of U.S. Sugar. U.S. Sugar dictated many of the terms of the deal as state officials repeatedly made decisions against the immediate needs of the Everglades and the interests of taxpayers, an examination of thousands of state e-mail messages and records and more than 60 interviews showed.

Documents and interviews suggest that the price tag and terms of the deal could set back Everglades restoration for years, or even decades.

Negotiations favored U.S. Sugar from the start, when the state accepted two outside firms' appraisals of the company's land that used figures from the height of the real estate market, according to documents.

When a "fairness opinion" commissioned by the state found that those appraisals had overvalued the land by \$400 million, Florida officials orchestrated a public relations campaign to discredit the findings, internal e-mail showed. Appraisers from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, which was required to sign off on the deal, were also cut out of the process after raising concerns, e-mail messages showed.

More than a dozen projects under way as part of a 10-year-old federal and district restoration effort have been suspended or canceled in anticipation of the cost of the U.S. Sugar deal. Among them is a massive reservoir in western Palm Beach County that was seen as a major step toward restoration of the Everglades. In total, \$1.3 billion had already been spent on the projects, according to an internal water district document.

Former Gov. Jeb Bush, who initiated most of that work, said in an interview that he was "deeply disappointed" with the decision by Crist, his successor and a fellow Republican, calling the move to halt the projects a setback for restoration.

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U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

03/10/2010

SYS-CON Media

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Latest version of terms reveals restrictive "affordability clause" may not provide an out for District

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., March 10 /PRNewswire/ -- Examination of the latest version of the contract between the South Florida Water Management District and U.S. Sugar Corp. reveals a revised "out clause" that restricts the agency's ability to terminate the contract due to financial shortfalls, resulting in the District having no choice but to raise taxes on the property owners of the following counties: Broward, Collier, Dade, Glades, Hendry, Lee, Martin, Monroe, Palm Beach and St. Lucie, as well as portions of Charlotte, Highlands, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola and Polk counties.

A memo sent to governing board members urging them not to extend the March 31, 2010, deadline for bond validation can be accessed on the Florida Crystals' website at www.floridacrystals.com/content/134/company_news.aspx.

Charles Pattison and Manley Fuller: Purchase is key to Everglades restoration

03/10/2010

Tallahassee Democrat -- Online

Charles Pattison and Manley Fuller My View March 10, 2010

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An article in Sunday's New York Times describing the still-evolving purchase of U.S. Sugar Corp. lands for Everglades restoration surprised us in how it mischaracterized the justification, need and feasibility of such an important purchase.

The scientific community is in agreement that, in order to meet the goal of restoring the Everglades, a key component and first step is converting thousands of acres of agricultural lands into areas that can store and clean water flowing into the Everglades. The added benefits of protecting South Florida water supplies and improving the health of the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers are similarly critical.

No party has presented an alternative option that is more cost-effective than land acquisition — it is simply the best means of solving the critical water challenges facing the Everglades. The alternative of storing billions of gallons of water underground is both more costly and very energy-intensive. With a willing seller ready for the first time to negotiate a major sale, the reality of substantial land purchases within the Everglades Agricultural Area is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that simply cannot be passed up. Failing to act now can only mean even higher costs later.

Economic realities are important in good times and bad. Although the initial proposal was to purchase more than 180,000 acres, that has by necessity been scaled back to about half that amount, with an option to purchase more tracts when the economy recovers and finances improve. The reduced 73,000-acre acquisition, however, still provides the core benefits needed to make this part of Everglades restoration a success.

Finances are always a consideration, and that is why the South Florida Water Management District is carefully reviewing its budget to make certain that this important acquisition can take place while other Everglades restoration projects continue. Given the dynamic and long-term restoration process involved with this unprecedented ecosystem, it is not surprising that adjustments have been made in the past and will continue into the future.

Critics of the effort to purchase U.S. Sugar lands have a vested interest at stake.

Opponents realize that, if the sale can't be blocked, then the opportunity to profit from the public's "free" water supplies here will be lost to them forever. Greed cannot be allowed to thwart what is clearly in the Everglades and public's best interest.

Everglades restoration has made great progress in the last few years, and momentum has increased with the federal government honoring its cost-sharing pledges. The bridging of the Tamiami Trail is under way to restore vital water flows into Everglades National Park, and the Kissimmee River restoration is now producing measurable results that exceed expectations for wildlife recovery and public recreation.

This momentum can only be sustained by taking advantage of the U.S. Sugar land acquisition. It is the best cost option that helps fulfill the adopted Year 2000 Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.

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Tampa Bay Business Journal - Online

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EDITORIAL: Proceed carefully with Glades

03/10/2010

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Tampa Tribune

Mar. 10--Florida environmentalists are worried that a Monday New York Times article could derail a \$536 million deal to purchase 73,000 acres from U.S. Sugar as part of the effort to rescue the Everglades.

It would be better for the deal to be derailed if taxpayers are being fleeced. But that is not at all clear, despite the Times' effort to put the proposal in the worst possible light.

The acquisition has been heralded as essential to saving the Everglades. It will take polluting sugar fields out of production and provide land where water can be filtered and stored before it flows into the Everglades.

Gov. Charlie Crist considers the complex deal one of his major accomplishments. But the Times depicted it as a giveaway to U.S. Sugar that would actually delay Everglades restoration.

The newspaper describes how the construction of a reservoir included in the original cleanup plan had been suspended to allow the land acquisition.

Former Gov. Jeb Bush told the Times, "To replace projects that were under way for the possibility of a project decades from now is not a good trade."

The story's underlying theme seems to be the deal is a scam and the 16-county South Florida Water Management District, which will finance the restoration, should back away. The district is to decide today whether to extend the contract with U.S. Sugar. It is scheduled to expire March 31.

As we have said since the deal was first proposed, the transaction deserves rigorous and continued scrutiny.

But the district should extend the contract, which still would allow the state to walk away from the agreement if something is amiss.

The Times article airs many of the same objections of Florida Crystals and other sugar companies that have opposed the acquisition from the start.

But the reality is this: U.S. Sugar's agreement, whatever its shortcomings, does offer a rare opportunity to undertake a

far more effective restoration effort than would be possible otherwise.

As Eric Draper, director of Florida Audubon, says, "The unassailable fact is that to save the Everglades you must have land in the Everglades Agricultural Area. You can't save the Everglades without it. And until now the sugar industry has not been willing to sell land."

It's clear that U.S. Sugar got a good asking price for the land. Perhaps it is excessive, but some appraisers found it reasonable. Moreover, an appraisal means nothing if the owner is unwilling to sell.

There are a number of proposed projects in the Everglades Agricultural Area, including an inland port, that could increase land prices and make the state's purchase price seem far more attractive.

If the state had insisted on a lower price, it might have lost the chance for comprehensive restoration altogether.

Defenders of the deal point out that stopping work on the reservoir made good sense. The facility was designed before the U.S. Sugar deal, which will allow construction of a far more extensive water-filtering system.

To plunge ahead with the reservoir would have shown bureaucratic indifference to the need for change and could have proved costly.

Supporters also say any delays that result from the acquisition are more than justified by the improvement the additional acreage will bring to the restoration plan.

It's true that not all of the U.S. Sugar land being purchased is necessary for restoration. But some may be traded later to other sugar companies for more important tracts -- something critics ignore.

The project will create thousands of construction jobs, help clean Florida Bay, provide an adequate water supply for South Florida and save the Everglades. All are worthy goals.

No deal is perfect, and this one, no doubt, has flaws. State regulators and taxpayers should continue to vet and debate it. But they also should consider the prospects for the Everglades if the deal is scrapped.

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Long road from and to Tally

03/10/2010

Tampa Tribune - Online

Steve Otto

sotto@tampatrib.com sotto@tampatrib.com

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It was early, and there was plenty of parking when the candidate pulled her white Ford Explorer up in front of the Tropicana in Ybor City on an unusually cold March morning.

March is a tough time to be a candidate for anything, with voting long months away.

It's spring and time for baseball and March Madness and hopefully a tax refund.

But Paula Dockery has little time for that. She wants to be the next governor of Florida, and right now she is No. 3 in an already nasty two-dog race.

That's why she made the drive down from Tallahassee the night before. She began in Lakeland, drove to Ybor for coffee, headed back to Lakeland to be seen at a Detroit Tigers game for a few innings, and then was off to Volusia County to meet with a Republican club there before coming back to Plant City for the strawberry festival.

The primary battle

Her first priority will be the Republican primary, where she will have to take out the better-known current Florida attorney general, Bill McCollum, and then come back with enough strength to face the current state chief financial officer, Alex Sink.

She is what the word underdog is all about.

But she has a few things going for her. McCollum and Sink are engaged in a campaign to destroy each other. Dockery only has to smile as the mud flies in two directions.

McCollum, her first challenger, looks like the insurance guy who tells you that you aren't covered.

Dockery is smart and well-spoken. She has that ability to simplify complex issues into sound bytes. She didn't become a force in the Florida Legislature and majority whip by sitting there. She has put together a strong resume of working for Florida's environment, transparency in government and, more recently, calling out backroom deals that state officials try to make - in particular the SunRail agreement with CSX that critics maintain was a bad deal for taxpayers.

A sweet deal

Dockery is a leading voice questioning Gov. Charlie Crist's push to buy land in the Everglades. Dockery asserts acquiring the land will do nothing for Everglades' restoration and everything for the property's current owner, U.S. Sugar.

Although she is married to multimillionaire C.C. "Doc" Dockery, the Lakeland businessman who spent millions of his own dollars to launch the high-speed rail project 30 years ago, she says financing will be the big thing.

"Right now I'm just beating bushes from the Panhandle to the Keys, talking to anyone who will listen," which explained why she was in Ybor City and a tad unhappy she had to settle for Cuban toast and coffee instead of breakfast with a busy day ahead.

She might be a long shot, but right now she's the one talking about issues and proposing solutions. Somewhere down the line that's going to pay off.

Keyword: Otto Graphs, for more of Steve Otto's musings.

Crist's Everglades plan, like Senate campaign, in precarious spot

03/10/2010

Tampa Tribune - Online

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Recognizing that at least some of his political fate is connected to the Everglades plan, the usually easygoing governor has grown defiant in the face of criticism that the deal is too expensive and will kill other key restoration projects.

"It doesn't matter what it looks like to the detractors," Crist told The Associated Press. "They're trying to stop it, for whatever reason. I really don't give a damn."

Even if the deal goes through, it could hurt his campaign, as his opponent, former state House Speaker Marco Rubio, has criticized it as a colossal waste of taxpayer money to bail out a struggling sugar company.

It was a bold idea from the start: buy out the nation's largest cane sugar producer, and use the land to help clean polluted water entering the Everglades, something the state and federal governments have tried to do incrementally for years. It has since been downsized twice because of the sour economy.

Critics have questioned Crist's motives, claiming they're more politics than preservation. They contend, among other things, the cost has been inflated by U.S. Sugar executives hoping to pad their pockets, knowing the governor wants the land regardless. They say it will stall other key projects because the state won't have any money left to construct the reservoirs and water treatment marshes needed for restoration, making the entire proposal a boondoggle.

"I think he's killing restoration virtually forever," said Dexter Lehtinen, an attorney for the Miccosukee Indians, who live in the Everglades and are fighting the land deal in court alongside Florida Crystals, U.S. Sugar's main rival.

They seek to stop financing for bonds the state wants to issue to pay for the deal. The Miccosukee and the company largely share the same concerns, that the governor's proposal is just too bold and will only slow restoration efforts. Florida Crystals has also argued the deal will give an unfair business advantage to its competitor, because U.S. Sugar can lease back the land at a nominal rate for a number of years until the state's restoration projects are under way.

The state Supreme Court is set to hear the case next month.

More pressing is the water district board's decision.

A February letter to the district's chief financial officer from a state consultant warned of "difficult decisions" ahead and multimillion-dollar deficits for the agency if the sugar deal happens.

District board chairman Eric Buermann said it's too soon to say whether the contract remains financially viable given that it won't be completed for months. There is still time to review budgets, he said, but the board must approve a contract extension.

"If we don't do that, that's the end of the deal," Buermann added.

The Everglades have been dying for decades from the intrusion of farms and development, largely from people settling in a place never meant for development. The ecosystem has been dissected by dikes, dams and canals, effectively draining much of the swamp, and has been polluted by fertilizer and urban runoff.

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Politically, the governor must stay the course, even if he contends "politics be damned," said Aubrey Jewett, a political science professor at the University of Central Florida.

"If he looks like he's backing off a signature project that was announced with great fanfare, that this was going to be a way to save the Everglades, and now he says he was wrong, it just adds to his image problem, that he's a lot of show with not many results," Jewett said.

Crist simply calls it "the right thing to do."

"Never again will we have the chance to buy this land. If we let this go, shame on us forever," he said. "Why U.S. Sugar? Because they're willing."

MORE FROM THIS CHANNEL

- 'Yard Crashers' dig in on South Tampa backyard
- Lawmaker proposes hiring preference for Floridians
- U.S. Senate approves Medicaid stimulus extension
- Florida gets initial funding to hire hourly workers

Proceed carefully with Glades

03/10/2010

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Tampa Tribune - Online

Florida environmentalists are worried that a Monday New York Times article could derail a \$536 million deal to purchase 73,000 acres from U.S. Sugar as part of the effort to rescue the Everglades.

It would be better for the deal to be derailed if taxpayers are being fleeced. But that is not at all clear, despite the Times' effort to put the proposal in the worst possible light.

The acquisition has been heralded as essential to saving the Everglades. It will take polluting sugar fields out of production and provide land where water can be filtered and stored before it flows into the Everglades.

Gov. Charlie Crist considers the complex deal one of his major accomplishments. But the Times depicted it as a giveaway to U.S. Sugar that would actually delay Everglades restoration.

The newspaper describes how the construction of a reservoir included in the original cleanup plan had been suspended to allow the land acquisition.

Former Gov. Jeb Bush told the Times, "To replace projects that were under way for the possibility of a project decades from now is not a good trade."

The story's underlying theme seems to be the deal is a scam and the 16-county South Florida Water Management District, which will finance the restoration, should back away. The district is to decide today whether to extend the contract with U.S. Sugar. It is scheduled to expire March 31.

As we have said since the deal was first proposed, the transaction deserves rigorous and continued scrutiny.

But the district should extend the contract, which still would allow the state to walk away from the agreement if something is amiss.

The Times article airs many of the same objections of Florida Crystals and other sugar companies that have opposed the acquisition from the start.

But the reality is this: U.S. Sugar's agreement, whatever its shortcomings, does offer a rare opportunity to undertake a far more effective restoration effort than would be possible otherwise.

As Eric Draper, director of Florida Audubon, says, "The unassailable fact is that to save the Everglades you must have land in the Everglades Agricultural Area. You can't save the Everglades without it. And until now the sugar industry has not been willing to sell land."

It's clear that U.S. Sugar got a good asking price for the land. Perhaps it is excessive, but some appraisers found it reasonable. Moreover, an appraisal means nothing if the owner is unwilling to sell.

There are a number of proposed projects in the Everglades Agricultural Area, including an inland port, that could increase land prices and make the state's purchase price seem far more attractive.

If the state had insisted on a lower price, it might have lost the chance for comprehensive restoration altogether.

Defenders of the deal point out that stopping work on the reservoir made good sense. The facility was designed before the U.S. Sugar deal, which will allow construction of a far more extensive water-filtering system.

To plunge ahead with the reservoir would have shown bureaucratic indifference to the need for change and could have proved costly.

Supporters also say any delays that result from the acquisition are more than justified by the improvement the additional acreage will bring to the restoration plan.

It's true that not all of the U.S. Sugar land being purchased is necessary for restoration. But some may be traded later to other sugar companies for more important tracts - something critics ignore.

The project will create thousands of construction jobs, help clean Florida Bay, provide an adequate water supply for South Florida and save the Everglades. All are worthy goals.

No deal is perfect, and this one, no doubt, has flaws. State regulators and taxpayers should continue to vet and debate it. But they also should consider the prospects for the Everglades if the deal is scrapped.

Letter: Water management officials should extend contract to purchase land from U.S. Sugar Corp.

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03/10/2010

TCPalm.com

Laurie Odlum

As a Floridian, a long-time resident of South Florida — from Broward to Palm Beach and now Martin — and lover of our state's natural wonders, I believe we have an opportunity that comes along once in a lifetime (or even once in many lifetimes) to restore and protect the Everglades. The opportunity is the state's purchase of 73,000 acres of land from the U.S. Sugar Corp., including acreage in the Everglades Agricultural Area south of Lake Okeechobee.

An important vote this week will or will not keep this opportunity alive. I, for one, urge the governing board of the South Florida Water Management District to vote in favor of extending the contract to purchase this land. By extending the contract, the district will be giving the court time to decide upon the funding mechanism for the purchase.

Successful restoration of the Everglades depends on storing, treating and conveying clean, fresh water from Lake Okeechobee south through the EAA, into Everglades National Park and Florida Bay. The more natural flow of water will replenish parched wetlands, revive natural plant communities and heal habitat that is so important to struggling bird and wildlife populations.

This state acquisition is the best opportunity we have to secure acres of land to store, treat and move water south. The governing board should not miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. By acquiring this land, the state will be protecting Florida's natural systems and wildlife, as well as our freshwater resources, for many lifetimes to come.

president, Audubon of Martin County

Fla. Gov Fights For Everglades Amid US Senate Race

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03/10/2010

TheStreet.com

BRIAN SKOLOFF

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03/10/2010

TheStreet.com

SOURCE Florida Crystals

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Crist continues fight for Everglades

03/10/2010

WALA-TV - Online

BRIAN SKOLOFF

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Florida governor wants to buy land from sugar farm

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Fla. gov fights for Everglades amid US Senate race

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WBBH-TV - Online

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Governor Crist fights for Everglades amid US Senate race

03/10/2010

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WFTS-TV - Online

The Everglades (Joe Shlabotnik, Creative Commons 2.0)

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Fla. gov fights for Everglades amid US Senate race

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WFTX-TV - Online

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U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

03/10/2010

Wichita Business Journal - Online

Latest version of terms reveals restrictive "affordability clause" may not provide an out for District

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Fla. Gov Fights For Everglades Amid US Senate Race

03/10/2010

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WKRG-TV - Online

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Crist fights for Everglades amid U.S. Senate race

03/10/2010

WOAI-TV - Online

Florida Everglades, September 2007. (Joe Raedle, Getty Images)

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03/10/2010

WOFL-TV

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2010-03-10

23:07:53

WILL NOT RUN FOR GOVERNOR IN 2012. THAT IS ACCORDING TO HIS OWN SON. GEORGE P BUSH IS SAYING THAT HIS DAD IS ENJOYING HIS WORK IN THE PRIVATE CENTER.

KARL ROVE, IS PLANNING A TRIP TO THE VILLAGES IN TWO WEEKS. HE WILL BE SIGNING COPIES OF HIS NEW BOOK AT THE BARNS AND NOBLE ON MARCH 25th.

THE GOVERNOR'S MASTER PLAN TO SAVE THE EVERGLADES COULD BE HITTING A ROAD BLOCK. SONNI ABATTA IS HERE.

THE GOVERNOR WANTS TO SPEND \$536 MILLION OF YOUR MONEY TO BUY LAND IN THE EVERGLADES FROM A SUGAR COMPANY. THE SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT IS GOING TO DECIDE TOMORROW IF THAT WILL FLY. SOME PEOPLE HAVE COMPLAINED THAT THE PROJECT IS A WASTE OF TAXPAYER MONEY.

DID A DRUG OVERDOSE KILL COREY HAIM. THE '80 TEEN HEARTTHROB FOUND DEAD TODAY IN LOS ANGELES, HE WAS JUST 38 YEARS OLD. AN AUTOPSY WILL DETERMINE THE CAUSE OF DEATH.

ALSO, DISTURBING VIDEO FROM DOWN UNDER TONIGHT. TWO TEENS IN SYDNEY PULL A MAN OUT OF HIS WHEELCHAIR AND BEATING HIM UP. THE GUY WAS WAITING FOR AN ELEVATOR AT THE TIME. POLICE CAUGHT ONE OF ATTACKERS.

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03/10/2010

WSVN-TV - Online

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Politics

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WTSP-TV - Online

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WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Gov. Charlie Crist's grand plan to revive the dying Florida Everglades by buying back the land, a key part of his legacy, could be on the cusp of collapsing and dealing another blow to his Senate hopes.

A panel that oversees Everglades restoration is set to decide Thursday whether to kill the state's proposed \$536 million deal to buy 73,000 acres from U.S. Sugar Corp. The proposal, much trumpeted by Crist, has already been cut by more than half from the initial plan announced in 2008, which was \$1.75 billion for about 180,000 acres and the company's assets.

This week's board meeting of the South Florida Water Management District comes with Crist locked in a close contest for the GOP nomination for Senate. While the board is likely to vote to keep the plan alive, at least for now, the shaky proposal has been hammered by critics.

Crist's campaign has already been hurt by the slumping economy. Florida's unemployment rate has matched an all-time high and the state has a foreclosure rate among the highest in the country. He has also lost support among conservative voters by appearing with President Barack Obama to promote the \$787 billion federal stimulus package, a bill most Republicans opposed.

Recognizing that at least some of his political fate is connected to the Everglades plan, the usually easygoing governor has grown defiant in the face of criticism that the deal is too expensive and will kill other key restoration projects.

"It doesn't matter what it looks like to the detractors," Crist told The Associated Press. "They're trying to stop it, for whatever reason. I really don't give a damn."

Even if the deal goes through, it could hurt his campaign, as his opponent, former state House Speaker Marco Rubio, has criticized it as a colossal waste of taxpayer money to bail out a struggling sugar company.

It was a bold idea from the start: buy out the nation's largest cane sugar producer, and use the land to help clean polluted water entering the Everglades, something the state and federal governments have tried to do incrementally for years. It has since been downsized twice because of the sour economy.

Critics have questioned Crist's motives, claiming they're more politics than preservation. They contend, among other things, the cost has been inflated by U.S. Sugar executives hoping to pad their pockets, knowing the governor wants the land regardless. They say it will stall other key projects because the state won't have any money left to construct the reservoirs and water treatment marshes needed for restoration, making the entire proposal a boondoggle.

"I think he's killing restoration virtually forever," said Dexter Lehtinen, an attorney for the Miccosukee Indians, who live in the Everglades and are fighting the land deal in court alongside Florida Crystals, U.S. Sugar's main rival.

They seek to stop financing for bonds the state wants to issue to pay for the deal. The Miccosukee and the company largely share the same concerns, that the governor's proposal is just too bold and will only slow restoration efforts. Florida Crystals has also argued the deal will give an unfair business advantage to its competitor, because U.S. Sugar can lease back the land at a nominal rate for a number of years until the state's restoration projects are under way.

The state Supreme Court is set to hear the case next month.

More pressing is the water district board's decision.

A February letter to the district's chief financial officer from a state consultant warned of "difficult decisions" ahead and multimillion-dollar deficits for the agency if the sugar deal happens.

District board chairman Eric Buermann said it's too soon to say whether the contract remains financially viable given that it won't be completed for months. There is still time to review budgets, he said, but the board must approve a contract extension.

"If we don't do that, that's the end of the deal," Buermann added.

The Everglades have been dying for decades from the intrusion of farms and development, largely from people settling in a place never meant for development. The ecosystem has been dissected by dikes, dams and canals, effectively draining much of the swamp, and has been polluted by fertilizer and urban runoff.

It once sprawled across more than 6,250 square miles, but has shrunk by half, replaced with homes and farms, and has since lost 90 percent of its wading birds. Other creatures are at risk, too, including 68 species that are considered threatened or endangered.

Politically, the governor must stay the course, even if he contends "politics be damned," said Aubrey Jewett, a political science professor at the University of Central Florida.

"If he looks like he's backing off a signature project that was announced with great fanfare, that this was going to be a way to save the Everglades, and now he says he was wrong, it just adds to his image problem, that he's a lot of show with not many results," Jewett said.

Crist simply calls it "the right thing to do."

"Never again will we have the chance to buy this land. If we let this go, shame on us forever," he said. "Why U.S. Sugar? Because they're willing."

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U.S. Sugar Contract Could Force SFWMD to Raise Taxes

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Latest version of terms reveals restrictive "affordability clause" may not provide an out for District

PR Newswire

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., March 10

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., March 10 /PRNewswire/ — Examination of the latest version of the contract between the South Florida Water Management District and U.S. Sugar Corp. reveals a revised "out clause" that restricts the agency's ability to terminate the contract due to financial shortfalls, resulting in the District having no choice but to raise taxes on the property owners of the following counties: Broward, Collier, Dade, Glades, Hendry, Lee, Martin, Monroe, Palm Beach and St. Lucie, as well as portions of Charlotte, Highlands, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola and Polk counties.

A memo sent to governing board members urging them not to extend the March 31, 2010, deadline for bond validation can be accessed on the Florida Crystals' website at www.floridacrystals.com/content/134/company_news.aspx.

SOURCE Florida Crystals

Gaston Cantens, +1-561-366-5128 or Joseph Klock, Jr., +1-305-476-7106

