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The Everglades Needs Your Help Today

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Audubon of Florida News

The New York Times calls it a "good deal for the Everglades" and newspapers across Florida are weighing in to support the state purchase of U.S. Sugar land in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA). Earlier this month, the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board voted unanimously to extend the contract deadline to purchase these lands, keeping the vision of achieving Everglades restoration alive.

But Florida lawmakers need to hear from you today. Lawmakers are being asked to scuttle this purchase and push back Everglades restoration for another generation.

Here's what newspapers are saying:

A Good Deal for the Everglades

What the taxpayers need to remember is that this is a very good deal for the environment.

...some of those projects — a string of underground storage wells, for instance — made little sense to begin with and none are as important as the land deal.

New York Times Editorial, March 17, 2010

Extend U.S. Sugar Deal Deadline

...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.

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."

Miami Herald Editorial, March 11, 2010

U.S. Sugar Land Deal Worth Keeping Alive

...the move is a historic opportunity to return the natural water flow to South Florida.

...taking control of land south of Lake Okeechobee appears to be a better strategy for holding and cleaning the southward water flow than a highly engineered network of wells.

...this land purchase remains a remarkable opportunity for long-term progress if the ultimate price is fair and the public finances work.

St. Pete Times Editorial, March 12, 2010

Proceed Carefully with Glades

...does offer a rare opportunity to undertake a far more effective restoration effort than would be possible otherwise.

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.

Tampa Tribune Editorial, March 10, 2010

Here's what we are saying:

When It Comes to Cleaning Up the Everglades, Don't Mess Up a Good Deal For Taxpayers

Save Tax Dollars

The current proposal by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to buy 73,000 acres will save taxpayers money in the long run. It will reduce the need for numerous "micro" projects and avoid potential condemnation takings, which will cost taxpayers millions more than the current deal.

No New Taxes

The current SFWMD proposal buys the land at near rock-bottom prices and has an opt-out clause if current funding sources will not fund the purchase. In short, taxes will not be raised to make this purchase.

More Effective Glades Cleanup

Large land purchase and use of broad swaths of land will be a far more effective solution than scattered projects.

Supported By Independent Groups

In addition to numerous news outlets, including the New York Times, St. Pete Times, Miami Herald, and the Tampa Tribune, this proposal is strongly supported by virtually every consumer, citizens and environmental organization in the state.

Clean Water For South Florida

The only serious way to scrub ground water is via large tracts of land, and this proposal does just that. As a result, it will help heal the River of Grass and provide clean water for South Florida for generations to come.

A Jobs Generator

This purchase will help move forward thousands of construction jobs almost immediately and will preserve our tourist economy in the Glades and in the Keys for generations to come.

No Wonder It's Being Called

"A Remarkable Opportunity"

"A Historic Opportunity"

"A Rare Opportunity"

"A Good Deal For the Everglades"

Write to your state Legislators today in support of this critical land acquisition.

For more information on the benefits of the monumental River of Grass acquisition, view Audubon of Florida's fact sheet "River of Grass Land Acquisition: Securing Florida's Future for People and Nature."

Sugar buyout is last, best chance to save the Everglades

03/22/2010

Miami Herald - Online, The

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Posted on Monday, 03.22.10

BY THOM RUMBERGER

Florida has one last, best chance to save America's Everglades forever. That is to purchase 72,000 acres of land currently owned and cultivated by U.S. Sugar. Yet, in her March 18 Other Views column Sugar deal has turned sour, state Sen. Paula Dockery, a Lakeland Republican running for governor, would have us squander this opportunity over petty jealousy and intra-industry politics. To do so, however, would be a terrible mistake that costs Floridians dearly for generations to come.

The Everglades system is one of the world's greatest natural treasures, despoiled by decades of ill-conceived drainage and farming practices. At the heart of the problem are the giant cane fields feeding Florida's sugar industry. Buying this land takes it out of sugar production permanently.

That alone would eliminate much of the agricultural activity that now poisons the River of Grass.

Under the ownership and oversight of the South Florida Water Management District, the property will be an ideal and efficient location for water storage and treatment. This treatment is essential for removing harmful pollutants and nutrients from the water before it enters Everglades National Park. In fact, Florida will be ordered by the federal courts to clean up this water, so we will either invest in the land necessary to accomplish that or pay for many more expensive and untested procedures for many years to come.

If Sen. Dockery is serious in her desire to govern the Sunshine State she would be well advised to support this plan now, while it can still be accomplished in negotiations with a single landowner. Otherwise, Florida may be forced to purchase the property through an exponentially more costly condemnation action. If U.S. Sugar sells off this property in parcels -- as is likely if this purchase falls through -- the state will face an even worse fiscal nightmare in dealing with multiple property owners.

On the other hand, if we act now to purchase the U.S. Sugar property, we can jump-start the important work of Everglades restoration, not only saving money, but also putting thousands of Floridians to work. It will have the added benefit of providing and protecting the water supply for seven million of our fellow citizens in South Florida.

As chairman of the Everglades Trust, I, too, was skeptical of this plan when it was first presented. After all, our organization spent years calling attention to the abuses of the sugar industry. But after reviewing the terms and conditions of the current proposal, evaluating the appraisals and the economic benefits -- and considering the bleak alternatives -- we are convinced that this is our best chance to save America's Everglades.

It would be a heartbreaking irony if a faction of the sugar industry and its cohorts spoil this unprecedented opportunity. The fact is, Floridians want and expect better than that. When asked, an overwhelming majority of them say that restoring the Everglades should be one of the state's top environmental concerns.

I suspect that, absent the current political climate, Dockery would agree with that statement, and, absent her political aspirations, probably this proposal as well. But talk is cheap. Actually preserving this natural legacy means taking the kind of bold, decisive action this purchase represents.

In her column, the senator referred to a newspaper article. One can only assume she was referencing a recent negative article about the land-purchase agreement in The New York Times. Just last week, that same paper endorsed the plan moving forward and called it a "good deal for the Everglades."

If Dockery really wishes to lead the state of Florida, she needs to stop following those who aim to kill this plan at any cost.

Thom Rumberger is chairman of the Islamorada-based Everglades Trust.

