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.

Laurie Odlum

president, Audubon of Martin County

Stuart