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U.S. Sugar land deal is good for South Floridians

08/14/2009

Miami Herald, The
W. Douglass Pitts

BY DOUG PITTS

www.evergladesfoundation.org

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Florida stands at a critical turning point in its stewardship of water management issues. For those of us who enjoy the recreational benefits of fishing or boating in Florida Bay and visiting Everglades National Park, it would seem quizzical that the future of the very ecosystem that allows us to enjoy a unique quality of life depends on the legal interpretation of what is defined as "public purpose."

This month, millions of people and South Florida's fragile environment stand to be affected by a decision that could be handed down in a West Palm Beach court house. The definition of "public purpose" and access to revenue bond financing used by the South Florida Water Management District are central to the acquisition of land from U.S. Sugar Corp. for Everglades restoration. Obtaining this land for storing and cleaning water before it flows south to replenish Florida Bay and Everglades National Park is clearly a public purpose.

As a member of the business community and board member of the Everglades Foundation, I know how important it is to support responsible stewardship of water resources. Our quality of life, management of growth, economic viability, tourism, recreation, health of our fisheries and job creation are all tied to the smart management of water resources.

For those who have a positive vision of South Florida's future and care to understand how the current U.S. Sugar acquisition aligns with responsible resource management as well as accommodates the greater public good and our environment, it is important to focus on the benefits of the U.S. Sugar contract and support it based on its merits. When comparing this scaled-down acquisition to what was initially envisioned, we would:

- Save more than \$800 million at closing and \$65 million annually in debt service payments.
- Allow the South Florida Water Management District to reduce taxpayers' immediate investment by 60 percent.
- Generate cost savings to free up revenue over coming years for "shovel-ready" restoration projects that create jobs and deliver environmental benefits to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay.
- Increase water storage to reduce harmful freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and estuaries.
- Improve the delivery of cleaner water to the Everglades.
- Prevent tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades.
- Reduce the need for back-pumping water into Lake Okeechobee.

There are other benefits to be realized by this once-in-a-lifetime acquisition that clearly underscores how attaining U.S. Sugar land holds promises for a sustainable future. What we cannot afford to do is prolong a decision to acquire this property. South Florida residents and those who are tasked with managing our water resources lack other economically feasible options as they work toward the greater public good of saving an ecosystem that preserves and creates jobs and sustains an ecological treasure for future generations.

W. Douglas Pitts Sr. is president and chairman of the Courtelis Company and an Everglades Foundation board member.

U.S. Sugar deal would hamper authorized projects

08/14/2009

Palm Beach Post

Michael Collins

Letters to the Editor

U.S. Sugar deal would hamper authorized projects

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My colleague, Eric Buermann, pointed out last week in a letter to your newspaper that many environmentalists have called the purchase of U.S. Sugar's land "fresh hope" for the Everglades (Don't block historic chance to restore Everglades," Aug. 5). I find it extremely sad that hope if all we have after all the years of hard work to produce actual benefits to the Everglades and estuaries.

Last week, the 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 Palm Beach County State Attorney's Office has opined, that the \$2.2 billion requested cannot be authorized under state law. That means that the district will not have the money for existing authorized projects.

Those of us who oppose the structure of the U.S. Sugar deal do not oppose Everglades restoration. Quite the opposite.

There is no denying the urgent need for storage and treatment. There is also 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. Proponents of the deal constantly refer to their "vision." Visions are cheap, projects are expensive and delaying the restoration for obscure, undefined and illusive visions is irresponsible

MICHAEL COLLINS

Islamorada

Editor's note: Michael Collins is a member of the South Florida water Management District Governing Board.

U.S., Florida reach Everglades restoration deal

08/14/2009

MalaysiaNews.net

CURTIS MORGAN

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EVERGLADES

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After years of negotiations, water managers and the White House reached a deal that will finally have federal money flowing to Everglades projects.

Water managers and the White House signed a crucial contract Thursday that promises a much-needed infusion of federal dollars for the Everglades.

The agreement ends years of dispute over splitting up a ballooning restoration bill, which is expected to top \$22 billion, and clears the way to quickly -- and finally -- begin long-stalled construction work.

The "master agreement" details how the South Florida Water Management District and the Army Corps of Engineers will share costs and duties for 68 projects Congress approved in 2000 to restore the natural flow of the River of Grass.

Both sides hailed the agreement -- reached when the Obama administration relented in a dispute over land values likely to shift as much as a half-billion dollars onto the federal ledger -- as a breakthrough that should move restoration from talk to action.

"This is not just a boring, silly administrative milestone," said Shannon Estenoz, a member of the water district's governing board. "This is the place where we pick up speed. I want to get out my boots and hard hat and start

attending ground-breakings."

Terrence "Rock" Salt, a deputy assistant secretary of the Army who oversees the Corps, said construction could begin within months, starting with reclamation of 55,000 acres in the Picayune Strand, site of a Southwest Florida development that flopped decades ago. The Corps has \$41 million in stimulus funding for that job.

"We now have the agreements in place that will support Everglades projects that were, only a decade ago, little more than hopes and dreams," said Salt, who signed the document for the White House.

Over the next two years, the Obama administration has budgeted or is seeking congressional approval for almost a half-billion dollars to begin restoration projects, including ones to restore freshwater flows to Biscayne Bay coastal wetlands, overhaul the C-111 canal to keep more water in Everglades National Park and build a reservoir to bolster Broward County's water supply and limit seepage from adjacent Everglades marshes.

Down the road, the agreement also could potentially open the door for federal help to complete Gov. Charlie Crist's controversial \$536 million deal to buy 73,000 acres from the U.S. Sugar Corp. and convert them to massive reservoirs and pollution-treatment marshes.

In a court challenge, the Miccosukee Tribe and rival grower Florida Crystals Corp. have argued the land deal would delay cleanup, possibly by decades, because the district doesn't have money to build anything on the land. Estimates for conceptual designs range as high as \$17 billion.

In past years, the Corps firmly opposed bankrolling projects primarily intended to clean up farm pollution, calling that a state responsibility. Both sides signaled that stance has been relaxed.

Salt said the Corps would decide whether to help pay for water-quality projects on a case-by-case basis, and he expected to discuss plans for the land with the district.

Board Chairman Eric Buermann said there already have been preliminary discussions about sharing costs for future projects. He also argued that the land deal would send a message to congressional critics of the so-far-sluggish restoration effort, underscoring Florida's commitment to getting the job done. "This is a state that is belying up to the bar," he said.

The restoration plan calls for splitting costs 50-50, with the district covering its half with land purchases and the Corps footing most construction costs. But setting land value has proved to be a major source of friction.

The Corps normally values land a state contributes at market prices. But for the Everglades effort, the state initially agreed to use original, and often cheaper, purchase prices. With delays sending construction estimates soaring, water managers -- outspending the federal government six-to-one in the Glades -- pressed to change the terms.

White House budget managers, concerned about hundreds of millions of dollars added to federal costs, balked. But take-it-or-leave-it letters the district board sent to the White House last month sparked a flurry of high-level negotiations, with the Corps agreeing to calculate land at market prices for most projects.

EVERGLADES Glades projects deal reached

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Miami Herald, The

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STATE, FEDS ENDORSE NEW EVERGLADES DEAL

08/14/2009

Sun Sentinel

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Heralding a new start to stalled Everglades restoration, South Florida water managers and federal officials signed a deal Thursday intended to get money flowing to the suffering River of Grass.

The new agreements, stuck in bureaucratic limbo for eight years, lay out how the state and federal government will split the multibillion-dollar costs for restoring water flows to the Everglades.

This came just one month after exasperated officials at the South Florida Water Management District blamed the federal government for continued funding delays. Angry district board members had even floated the idea of walking away from a deal critical to paying for projects intended to protect what remains of the Everglades.

But Thursday's signing of a new "master agreement" helped the district mend its political fences with the Army Corps of Engineers and other federal agencies that sign off on the money needed to build reservoirs and treatment areas planned to store, clean and direct water to replenish the Everglades.

"This is not just a boring, silly, administrative milestone," district board member Shannon Estenoz said. "This is a place where we pick up speed."

The Everglades restoration plan, agreed to in 2000, calls for the state to buy land needed to restore the Everglades, with the federal government paying for reservoirs and other structures. The district leads Everglades restoration for the state. The long-term plans envision more than 60 projects that cost more than \$12 billion.

The state has purchased about 230,000 acres and appropriated \$2 billion for Everglades restoration, but the federal government has been slow to deliver its share of the money to get projects built.

One of the sticking points was an agreement for the federal government to credit the state for money already spent. That was resolved by Thursday's agreement.

One of the first projects to benefit from the new influx of federal money is work to restore water flows through the Picayune Strand, land on the western edge of the Everglades in Collier County that once was pegged for development. The project, which includes building pumps to deliver water, is expected to cost more than \$400 million.

The political dustup last month came after district officials learned that federal agencies loaded a cost-sharing agreement - thought to be finalized in June - with a slew of changes that threatened to create added delays.

At the district board's July meeting, a self-described "furious" Estenoz publicly blamed "nameless, faceless" federal bureaucrats for stopping the whole thing.

One month later, the new agreement was reached. At the district board's monthly meetings held Wednesday and Thursday, various federal officials were in attendance to pledge their support for the deal.

The new agreements allow the district and corps to make use of the Everglades money approved by Congress and pushed by the Obama administration.

Congress approved more than \$200 million for the Everglades this year, with about \$119 million more coming from economic-stimulus money. The administration also proposed \$278 million for the Everglades in next year's budget.

The district also is embarking on its own \$536 million deal, pushed by Gov. Charlie Crist, to buy 73,000 acres of farmland from U.S. Sugar Corp. to use for Everglades restoration. The district has an option to buy another 107,000 acres if it can raise the money.

The agreements approved Thursday could open the door to the federal government helping with the costs of the U.S. Sugar deal, district board Chairman Eric Buermann said.

Terrence "Rock" Salt, principal deputy assistant Secretary of the Army for civil works, helped cement the agreements. As significant as that was, Salt said, 50 years from now people won't care about the details of a cost-sharing agreement.

"They are going to care about what we accomplish," Salt said.

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Tour the River of Grass

Take an interactive tour through Florida's unique 'River of Grass,' go to SunSentinel.com/sugar

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Florida Bay's ecology on the brink of collapse

08/14/2009

Palm Beach Post - Online

BRIAN SKOLOFF

ISLAMORADA, Fla. — Boat captain Tad Burke looks out over Florida Bay and sees an ecosystem that's dying as politicians, land owners and environmentalists bicker.

He's been plying these waters for nearly 25 years, and has seen the declines in shrimp and lobster that use the bay as a nursery, and less of the coveted species like bonefish that draw recreational sportsmen from around the world.

A A flock of cormorants stand on polls in Florida Bay in Islamorada, Fla., Wednesday, July 15, 2009. A sprawling estuary at the state's southern tip, Florida Bay sits like a saucer beneath a potted plant. Much of Florida's rainwater used to end up here after filtering through the miles of muck and sawgrass of the Everglades. (AP Photo/Alan Diaz)

"Bonefish used to be very prevalent, and now we don't see a tenth of the amount that we used to find in the bay, and even around the Keys because the habitat no longer supports the population," says Burke, head of the Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association.

Experts fear a collapse of the entire ecosystem, threatening not only some of the nation's most popular tourism destinations — Everglades National Park and the Florida Keys — but a commercial and recreational fishery worth millions of dollars.

Florida Bay is a sprawling estuary at the state's southern tip, covering nearly three times the area of New York City.

The headwaters of the Everglades — starting some 300 miles north near Orlando — used to end up here after flowing south in a shallow sheet like a broad, slow-moving river, filtering through miles of muck, marsh and sawgrass.

Historically, the bay thrived on that perfect mix of freshwater from the Everglades and saltwater from the adjacent Gulf of Mexico. It was a virtual Garden of Eden, home to a bounty of wading birds, fish, sea grasses and sponges.

But to the north of the bay, man's unforgiving push to develop South Florida has left the land dissected with roads, dikes and miles of flood control canals to make way for homes and farms, choking off the freshwater flow and slowly killing the bay.

The ill effects extend even across the narrow spit of land that makes up the Florida Keys to the shallow coral reefs in the Atlantic Ocean. Many popular commercial fish like grouper and snapper begin their lives in the bay before migrating into the ocean to the reefs.

"If Florida Bay heads south and there's a lot less fish in there, well, when that's done, it's all over down here," Burke says. "When that goes, your reefs are going to go, too, and it'll just be a chain reaction.

"You could argue that the bay has already collapsed," he adds.

Algae blooms block life-giving sunlight from penetrating the water's surface. Sea grasses that filter the water and provide habitat for the food chain are dying. And some migratory birds aren't returning.

"The health of Florida Bay is very much tied to the state of the Everglades, and the Everglades isn't improving either," says Tom Van Lent, senior scientist with the not-for-profit Everglades Foundation. "Their fates are one and the same."

For decades, the state has struggled to find a way to restore natural flow through the Everglades and curb the pollution caused by runoff from sugar farms, cow pastures and urban sprawl. It is the largest such wetlands restoration effort ever.

"Having that water coming down from the Everglades is key," says Rob Clift of the National Parks Conservation Association. "It has to be restored."

Attempts to fix the Everglades by constructing water treatment marshes and reservoirs, among other things, have been dogged by politics, funding shortfalls, and contentious, litigation-filled disagreements over the best solutions. And while land has been purchased and some projects completed, key restoration components are undone.

"It's really aggravating," Burke says. "We've seen very little, if any, really ground breaking projects that would help change the flow into Florida Bay."

A litany of lawsuits filed by parties favoring one solution over another are partly to blame, says Carol Wehle, executive director of the South Florida Water Management District, the state agency overseeing Everglades restoration.

Name an environmental group, and the agency has been sued by them.

While pro-environment groups say their lawsuits are not designed to stop restoration — but to improve projects — litigation inevitably creates delays. And some plaintiffs, like Florida Crystals, a major sugar producer which farms in the Everglades, is trying to protect its business.

Wehle calls them all "obstructionists," including the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians who have her agency back in court Aug. 6 for closing arguments in yet another lawsuit.

"There are a handful of people that choose not to participate in this process and instead use litigation, and who is losing? The environment is losing," Wehle says.

The Miccosukee, who call the Everglades their ancestral home, have sued the water district repeatedly. In the current case, the tribe and Florida Crystals are trying to block the state's planned \$536 million purchase of land in the Everglades from another sugar giant, U.S. Sugar Corp.

The water district says the deal is a historic opportunity to take sugar out of production and provide land to build much-needed reservoirs and treatment areas to clean and store water.

Tribe spokeswoman Joette Lorion says the deal could end up costing taxpayers billions of dollars, leaving little money to pay for restoration projects, and will create more delays as officials figure out exactly what to do with the new land. Florida Crystals also argues the purchase would give its main competitor an unfair business advantage.

"Meeting upon meeting, and the Everglades continues to die," Lorion says.

Back on Florida Bay, Burke just wants something done before it's too late. To the casual visitor, the area is stunning even today. But Burke knows better.

"In a lot of ways," he says, "it's still pristine and beautiful down here, but it's also on its last dying breath."

Florida, federal officials reach deal for Everglades restoration

08/13/2009

Bradenton Herald - Online

CURTIS MORGAN

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Columbus Ledger-Enquirer - Online

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DEAL ALLOWS FEDERAL MONEY TO FLOW TO EVERGLADES

08/13/2009

Palm Beach Post

QUINLAN, PAUL

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After eight years of wrangling, Florida and the federal government have come to terms on how to split the multibillion-dollar cost of restoring the Everglades, clearing the way for the arrival of money that President Obama has pledged.

The consensus takes the form of eight agreements the board of the South Florida Water Management District is expected to approve today.

"This is a huge moment," said district board member Jerry Montgomery. "I wish I had a bottle of champagne to crack open right now."

The dispute centered on details of how to account for much of the \$3 billion spent so far on the \$10.9 billion restoration plan, which Congress and the state agreed in 2000 to split 50-50.

To date, Florida has outspent the feds 6 to 1, contributing \$2.6 billion to Washington's \$444 million. The state's total does not include an additional \$536 million that the district proposes spending in a land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp. -- a purchase that the new agreement does not address.

Obama, who pledged to jump-start the feds' stalled commitment, wants to spend nearly a half-billion dollars on the Everglades in the next two years. But differences between the district and the Army Corps of Engineers threatened to get in the way.

Numerous letters and conference calls led recently to two days of face-to-face talks, during which officials hashed out differences -- in particular, how to value land purchased for restoration.

According to the 2000 restoration plan, the state was expected to buy much of the land necessary to fulfill its half of the bargain. The state had agreed to allow land to be valued at its purchase price in the 50-50 calculus.

But as early as 2004, as land values began to soar and the corps fell behind on construction, state officials began pushing for a change.

They wanted the corps to value land at its market value, in accordance with the corps' usual policy, to allow the state to take advantage of the rise in land values.

After much negotiation, the corps agreed. But White House budget-writers refused to sign off, blocking \$41 million in money for the Picayune Strand, a \$438 million project to turn a failed housing development in rural Collier County back into wetlands.

Water managers, who thought the issue was all but resolved, bristled in July when they received a new draft of the agreement filled with unexpected corrections and revisions.

Board member and environmentalist Shannon Estenoz blasted the "nameless, faceless" bureaucrats who seemed empowered to stop Obama from getting money to the Everglades.

On Wednesday, she praised all involved for settling the dispute.

"I had felt like all of us had been stuck in the quicksand for a long time," Estenoz said. "Like I tell my children, just cause I'm screaming at you doesn't mean I don't love you very much."

~ paul_quinlan@pbpost.com

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State, Feds endorse new deal intended to jumpstart Everglades restoration

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08/13/2009

Sun Sentinel - Online

WEST PALM BEACH - South Florida water managers today approved a new deal with federal officials intended to jumpstart stalled Everglades restoration.

The agreements, stuck in bureaucratic limbo for eight years, lay out how the state and federal governments would split the multibillion-dollar costs for restoring water flows to the Everglades.

This came just one month after exasperated officials at the South Florida Water Management District blamed the federal government for continued funding delays. Angry district board members had even floated the idea of walking away from a deal critical to paying for projects intended to protect what remains of the Everglades.

But Thursday's approval of a new "master agreement" helped the district mend its political fences with the Army Corps of Engineers and other federal agencies that sign off on the money needed to buy land and build reservoirs and treatment areas planned to store, clean and direct water to replenish the Everglades.

"This is not just a boring, silly, administrative milestone," said district Board Member Shannon Estenoz said. "This is a place where we pick up speed."

The Everglades restoration plan calls for the state to buy land needed to restore the Everglades, with the federal government paying for the reservoirs and other structures. The district leads Everglades restoration for the state.

The state has purchased more than 200,000 acres and appropriated more than \$2 billion for Everglades restoration, but the federal government has been slow to deliver its share of the money to get projects built.

One of the lingering sticking points was an agreement for the federal government to credit the state for money already spent.

That was resolved by the agreements formally approved today. They will allow the district and corps to make use of the money approved by Congress and pushed by the Obama administration for Everglades projects.

Congress approved more than \$200 million for the Everglades this year, with about \$119 million more coming from economic-stimulus money. The administration also proposed \$278 million for the Everglades in next year's budget.

The district also is embarking on its own \$536 million deal, pushed by Gov. Charlie Crist, to buy 73,000 acres of farmland from U.S. Sugar Corp., also for Everglades restoration.

Terrence "Rock" Salt, an adviser for civil works to the assistant Secretary of the Army, helped cement the agreements approved Thursday. As significant as Thursday's accomplishment was, Salt said 50 years from now people won't care about the details of a cost sharing agreement.

"They are going to care about what we accomplish," Salt said.

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State, Feds endorse new deal intended to jumpstart Everglades restoration

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ANDY REID South Florida Sun

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Florida, federal officials reach deal for Everglades restoration

08/13/2009

Tribune - Online, The

By CURTIS MORGAN

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Water managers and the White House signed a crucial contract Thursday that promises a much-needed infusion of federal dollars for the Everglades.

The agreement ends years of dispute over splitting up a ballooning restoration bill, which is expected to top \$22 billion, and clears the way to quickly - and finally - begin long-stalled construction work.

The "master agreement" details how the South Florida Water Management District and the Army Corps of Engineers will share costs and duties for 68 projects Congress approved in 2000 to restore the natural flow of the River of Grass.

Both sides hailed the agreement - reached when the Obama administration relented in a dispute over land values likely to shift as much as a half-billion dollars onto the federal ledger - as a breakthrough that should move restoration from talk to action.

"This is not just a boring, silly administrative milestone," said Shannon Estenez, a member of the water district's governing board. "This is the place where we pick up speed. I want to get out my boots and hard hat and start attending ground-breakings."

Terrence "Rock" Salt, a deputy assistant secretary of the Army who oversees the Corps, said construction could begin within months, starting with reclamation of 55,000 acres in the Picayune Strand, site of a Southwest Florida development that flopped decades ago. The Corps has \$41 million in stimulus funding for that job.

"We now have the agreements in place that will support Everglades projects that were, only a decade ago, little more than hopes and dreams," said Salt, who signed the document for the White House.

Over the next two years, the Obama administration has budgeted or is seeking congressional approval for almost a half-billion dollars to begin restoration projects, including ones to restore freshwater flows to Biscayne Bay coastal wetlands, overhaul the C-111 canal to keep more water in Everglades National Park and build a reservoir to bolster Broward County's water supply and limit seepage from adjacent Everglades marshes.

Down the road, the agreement also could potentially open the door for federal help to complete Florida Gov. Charlie Crist's controversial \$536 million deal to buy 73,000 acres from the U.S. Sugar Corp. and convert them to massive reservoirs and pollution-treatment marshes.

In a court challenge, the Miccosukee Tribe and rival grower Florida Crystals Corp. have argued the land deal would delay cleanup, possibly by decades, because the district doesn't have money to build anything on the land. Estimates for conceptual designs range as high as \$17 billion.

In past years, the Corps firmly opposed bankrolling projects primarily intended to clean up farm pollution, calling that a state responsibility. Both sides signaled that stance has been relaxed.

Salt said the Corps would decide whether to help pay for water-quality projects on a case-by-case basis, and he expected to discuss plans for the land with the district.

Board Chairman Eric Buermann said there already have been preliminary discussions about sharing costs for future projects. He also argued that the land deal would send a message to congressional critics of the so-far-sluggish restoration effort, underscoring Florida's commitment to getting the job done. "This is a state that is bellying up to the bar," he said.

The restoration plan calls for splitting costs 50-50, with the district covering its half with land purchases and the Corps footing most construction costs. But setting land value has proved to be a major source of friction.

The Corps normally values land a state contributes at market prices. But for the Everglades effort, the state initially agreed to use original, and often cheaper, purchase prices. With delays sending construction estimates soaring, water managers - outspending the federal government six-to-one in the Glades - pressed to change the terms.

White House budget managers, concerned about hundreds of millions of dollars added to federal costs, balked. But take-it-or-leave-it letters the district board sent to the White House last month sparked a flurry of high-level negotiations, with the Corps agreeing to calculate land at market prices for most projects.

Farmers south of Lake O beat Everglades cleanup goal again

08/13/2009

Palm Beach Post - Online

PAUL QUINLAN

Farms in the sugar-growing region south of Lake Okeechobee beat their state-imposed goals for reducing pollution flowing toward the Everglades, while their counterparts farther west fell far short.

The South Florida Water Management District reviews progress each year in limiting the runoff of phosphorus, a key ingredient in fertilizer and muck that can wreak havoc on the Everglades' food chain and fuel the growth of unwanted cattails.

The review found that farmers in the 500,000-acre Everglades Agricultural Area reduced their phosphorus runoff by 68 percent below what would have flowed had they failed to reform their watering and fertilizing practices.

That beats the state's 25 percent goal and also bests the EAA farms' average annual reduction of 54 percent, measured over the 14-year life of the program.

"The region's agricultural community has continually strengthened its commitment to protecting and improving South Florida's ecosystems," said district board Chairman Eric Buermann.

But farmers missed pollution targets in a 170,000-acre area to the west of the EAA known as the C-139 basin, a patchwork of vegetable, citrus and pasture lands.

Farms there released 52.3 metric tons of phosphorus — more than double the upper limit of 24.6 metric tons and almost four times the goal of 13.7 metric tons. The C-139 basin has been out of compliance for six of the past seven years.

The failing grade came even though the area is held to lesser standards because of its sandy soils and drainage issues. Unlike the EAA, which must reduce pollution 25 percent, the C-139 must only maintain historic pollution levels.

The state invested \$1.8 billion to improve Everglades water quality since 1994, chiefly in construction of more than 52,000 acres of artificial marshes designed to filter pollution from water flowing south into the Everglades. The marshes are also known as "stormwater treatment areas," or STAs.

"Operating the STAs has been a learning experience," said district board member and environmentalist Shannon Estenoz. "Performance has been mixed."

The marshes and improvements in farming practices have helped stop 3,200 metric tons of phosphorus from reaching the Everglades, according to the district, although they have failed to consistently achieve targets.

District leaders hope that a \$47.5 million, 4,700-acre expansion of one filter marsh in Hendry County combined with improvements to an existing 8,000-acre marsh there will improve cleanup efforts.

The district also expects to use the 73,000 acres that Gov. Charlie Crist wants to purchase from U.S. Sugar Corp. for \$536 million to better clean water for the Everglades.

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Water managers, feds sign agreement to split Everglades costs

08/13/2009

Palm Beach Post - Online

PAUL QUINLAN

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Following eight years of wrangling, state and federal officials signed off today on a revised pact to split the cost of Everglades restoration 50-50.

The so-called "master agreement" will clear the way for Washington to provide the nearly half-billion dollars that the Obama administration has pledged for the Everglades over the next two years. The signing took place at the suburban West Palm Beach headquarters of the South Florida Water Management District.

U.S. Sugar deal

Browse all the news, see photos and video, get facts about the company and the agreement plus more.

Crist downsizing the deal

Leaders praised it as a first step in jump-starting Washington's stalled commitment to the Everglades. The spending impasse was the latest in a series of disputes that have snarled the state-federal restoration project since Congress approved it in 2000.

"Nobody's going to care about the details of what we've signed and approved here," said Terrence "Rock" Salt, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for civil works, who flew down from Washington for the signing. "They are going to care about what we accomplish."

