

July 31, 2008

Dr. David Brill, Director  
Executive Office of the Governor  
Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development  
The Capitol, Suite 2001  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Re: EAA Economic Opportunities

Dear Dr. Brill:

1000 Friends of Florida is a nonprofit growth management advocacy organization that is a member of the Everglades Coalition which is closely following Governor Crist's major announcement regarding the purchase of U.S. Sugar holdings within the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA). We are most appreciative of this tremendous effort to protect the Everglades, and wanted to take this opportunity to bring to your attention two particular areas of interest that affect our advocacy in that area. Those are (1) growth management considerations related to the proposed "inland port", and (2) adequate provision for farmworker housing. It is our understanding that OTTED will be coordinating all aspects of the economic considerations involving acquisitions, trade lands, and sales of any land or facilities. As such, your role in the successful outcome of this important effort is critical in making certain that every possible consideration is given to making the correct choices.

I believe you are aware of an ongoing FDOT project that is evaluating the feasibility of locating an "inland port" at one of several sites within the EAA. The stated goal is to provide a transshipment facility connected by rail to the Port of Palm Beach so that trucks can more easily pick up and deliver container freight while avoiding the I-95 corridor. Such a facility could be quite large involving thousands of acres, and in addition to the rail line, require new roadway construction. While we believe this idea has great merit, there are significant implications for Everglades restoration activities depending on the location chosen. In addition, the land uses in and around such a facility could, if not properly planned and located, have major infrastructure and environmental impacts that would compound issues generated by the facility itself.

Our concern is that as the acquisition process is concluded and trade lands as well as sales negotiations take place that hasty decisions regarding the location of the inland port not occur. Hopefully this will not be part of this process as we feel strongly that the only appropriate way to properly locate the inland port is to evaluate sites **after** the initial acquisition process is finished. Only then will be it possible to understand what works best for Everglades restoration and to maximize the public benefit of this undertaking. Our intent is to support a properly located inland port based on its economic and environmental impacts. What we very much want to avoid is a protracted dispute over the location as occurred with the ill fated and poorly considered Mecca Farms site associated with the Scripps Biomedical Research Institute. While we were always consistent in supporting the project, the location and the secondary and cumulative effects of such a facility caused us to strongly oppose the Mecca Farms site in favor of one that was not only consistent with the county's comprehensive plan. The final site ultimately chosen after lengthy legal challenges avoided costly and inappropriate infrastructure

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and environmental impacts. I cannot emphasize this point too much, and should a site be given even a "preliminary" approval pending permit considerations, we see the Mecca Farms scenario beginning again.

We also believe that it is important that any plan for the remainder of the EAA focus on sustainable agriculture and sustainable growth within and around existing communities. One critical component of maintaining agricultural production in the EAA compatible with the goal of ecological restoration is ensuring that there is affordable housing for the agricultural workers who are some of the Glades poorest residents. Without these workers, the EAA's vegetable industry which produces approximately 25,000 acres of sweet corn, 10,000 acres of green beans, 7,000 acres of lettuce and 5,000 acres of radishes could not exist. There is a desperate shortage of affordable farmworker housing in the EAA. According to the October, 2007 report of the Shimberg Center on the need for farmworker housing in Florida, Hendry County needs an additional 1,122 multifamily units and 1,934 single person beds and Palm Beach County needs 2,121 multifamily units and 4,971 single person beds to meet the need for farmworker housing. While the problem has existed for decades, Hurricane Wilma destroyed or damaged hundreds of units of farmworker housing in Clewiston, South Bay and Pahokee much of which has not been repaired. The result is grossly overcrowded and substandard housing which has been the subject of continual coverage since Edward R. Morrow's "Harvest of Shame" documentary nearly 50 years ago.

The greatest single impediment to the construction of new farmworker housing in the Glades has been the unavailability of suitable sites. The purchase of the U.S. Sugar properties presents an opportunity to address this problem in a comprehensive way which will help ensure the future of agriculture in the EAA. We suggest that the U.S. Sugar holdings be inventoried as soon as possible to identify potential sites suitable for farmworker housing in and adjacent to the cities of Moore Haven, Clewiston, South Bay, Pahokee and Belle Glade. These sites could then be set aside in a "land bank" to be made available for development of farmworker and other affordable housing in partnership with local government, by the local housing authorities and non-profit organizations.

Thank you for considering these comments. My staff and I would be pleased to meet with you to discuss these issues in greater detail at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Charles G. Pattison, FAICP  
President

Cc: Governor Charlie Crist  
DEP Secretary Mike Sole  
SFWMD Executive Director Carol Wehle  
DCA Secretary Tom Pelham