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SFWMD

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Game-changer in the Everglades

07/03/2008

Christian Science Monitor
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Going back to the drawing board can seem like an exercise in frustration.

But people working to restore Florida's legendary Everglades – by many accounts one of the most ambitious ecological overhauls ever attempted – are headed to the drafting table with extra spring in their steps. Last week, the US Sugar Corp. and the state of Florida announced that they had agreed to a statement of principles that would shut down the sugar company's operation. In exchange, the state will buy the company's nearly 188,000 acres of land, as well as its equipment, rail lines, and sugar mills. Negotiations over the \$1.75 billion sale are expected to conclude by September.

US Sugar's holdings cradle much of the eastern and southern shores of Lake Okeechobee and are expected to play an important role in the restoration project.

"I've been working on Everglades restoration for a lot of years; this is really a quantum leap forward," says Kimberly Taplin, the senior US Army Corps of Engineers official working with the South Florida Water Management District on the project. "The opportunities and possibilities this opens up for us are huge."

(Editor's note: The following paragraph did not appear in earlier versions of this story.) "This is not a silver bullet," cautions Jeff Danter, who heads The Nature Conservancy's Florida headquarters. Given the history of human intervention, Everglades restoration will be a long hard slog, he says. And the land deal itself leaves "a lot of details to work out, and there will be battles over those details." These include likely land swaps with another sugar company, Florida Crystal, as well as efforts to clean up US Sugar's land – especially any phosphates (fertilizer) or pesticides in the soil. Still, he agrees that the deal represents a remarkable opportunity to inject new life into the Everglades restoration effort.

Over its 5,000-year history, the Ever-glades has come to

represent an enormous natural freshwater holding tank for southern Florida, as well as a biologically rich mosaic of fresh- and saltwater ecosystems. Once spanning some 3 million acres, the vast peatland – with its saw-grass plains, tree islands, wet prairies, and ponds – is now about half its original size. Nearly 70 of its plant and animal species are listed as endangered.

Farming and flood control have drastically changed the way water flows – critical to the area's unique characteristics. And the water is spiked with pollutants from farming and southern Florida's rapid growth.

For a decade, federal, state, and regional agencies have worked to implement a 30-year program aimed at restoring more natural water flows to the area. And while a handful of individual projects – themselves works in progress – show promising results, the program has lost momentum, some analysts say. Among the hang-ups: The federal government has not lived up to its funding commitments. Meanwhile, the price tag has risen from a projected \$8 billion in 1999 to an estimated \$10.9 billion (in 2004 dollars).

Little wonder, then, that last week's announcement struck like a fresh gust of wind hitting limp sails. This isn't the first time the idea of a major land purchase has come up, notes Curtis Richardson, a Duke University ecologist who has spent 15 years working in the Everglades. Even with a successful sale, US Sugar gets another six years to shut down its operations in an orderly manner. Still, he adds, a successful sale would “turn the current plans upside down.”

The Everglades's original plumbing was fairly simple. During the rainy season, water inched its way into Lake Okeechobee from the north through the Kissimmee River Valley. The lake – a relatively shallow, saucerlike depression – would overflow into the Everglades to the south. The slight tilt of the landscape – losing only about an inch of elevation per mile as it slopes toward Florida Bay – ensured that the overflow would spread over wide swaths of land. Combined with the vegetation (including vast expanses of saw grass eight to 12 feet tall), the amount and timing of the water's arrival contributed a thick layer of peat beneath the area. The peat acted like a sponge, soaking up water in the wet season and slowly releasing it during the dry season.

But in the past century, farmers and ranchers drained wetlands north of the lake and turned a meandering Kissimmee River into a virtual water chute. Concerns about hurricanes and flooding prompted calls for flood-control structures. The lake, now surrounded by a 30-foot-high dike, is more an engineered flood-control reservoir than a way station for Everglades-bound water. Its major outlets are the St. Lucie Canal and the Caloosahatchee River – both of which dump the water directly into the ocean. And its waters are heavily polluted.

Given competing demands for Ever-glades water from farming, the densely populated coasts, and the Everglades itself, US Sugar's additional acreage provides “an opportunity to redo the entire Everglades restoration program,” says Jeff Danter, who heads up The Nature Conservancy's state office in Florida. “It's not necessarily to restore 187,000 acres of sawgrass, but it creates a lot more flexibility in the system to move water around to meet everybody's needs.”

Some of the land's benefits are likely to be indirect, derived through land swaps with other sugar growers in the large agricultural zone south of Lake Okeechobee. Still, planners can foresee fresh approaches to meeting water-flow and water-quality requirements.

For instance, original plans called for a 30,000-acre storage reservoir at the southern end of the agricultural zone, miles from the lake. Special protected marshlands set up to treat the water naturally would intercept the water along the way to the reservoir, says Ms. Taplin of the US Army Corps of Engineers. Now, she can envision moving the storage facility much closer to the lake, and shifting the so-called special-treatment areas to the agricultural zone's border with the rest of the Everglades. This new layout also could allow the program to avoid drilling 333 wells to store water in aquifers for later recovery – an energy-intensive approach that has never been tried on this scale and one that would have required heavy investments in water purification as well.

Yet for some, moving water around and regulating its flow still falls short of the area's ecological needs. In some respects, Dr. Richardson says, restoration plans are chasing a poetic “river of grass” vision when the Everglades never were a river of grass, a swamp, or a marsh. Peatlands – and their natural storage capacity – build up and thrive on extremes of water and fire.

“Engineering has a tendency to take out the extremes, and ecological systems live on the extremes,” he says. “The Everglades is a harsh environment that has a yin and a yang,” he continues, “and humans don't like those things. There are some areas we can save, but it's going to be tough.”

Burt Sauders: Buying U.S. Sugar land great deal for Florida

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News-Press

Gov. Charlie Crist and Carol Wehle, executive director of the South Florida Water Management District, recently announced that Florida would essentially purchase the assets of U.S. Sugar over six years for \$1.75 billion.

U.S. Sugar would cease sugar farming, and Florida would take title to more than 185,000 acres of sugar farms. The value of this acquisition to Florida and its environment is too great to calculate.

This is an incredible acquisition for many reasons, and Governor Crist is to be commended for his leadership on this.

Florida and the federal government have entered into a 30-year, 50/50 partnership to restore the Everglades National Park. The project has been fully under way for more than 10 years, with

Florida investing \$2.5 billion, to date. Our federal partners have contributed only approximately \$360 million, or about 13 percent of the total project cost.

This past legislative session, as chairman of the Senate Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee, I had the honor of introducing legislation to renew Florida's commitment to this project and to commit another \$2 billion over the next 10 years to the effort.

A major component of the restoration effort has been the purchase of lands to build filtration marshes and water retention facilities such as large reservoirs.

Restoring the "River of Grass" requires tremendous amounts of land and water. The experts have long discussed the need to acquire the U.S. Sugar land for restoration to fully succeed. Until the governor announced this land deal, few thought it would ever be financially feasible for the state to acquire these critical lands.

As the population of Florida grows, our citizens have rightfully demanded increased efforts to preserve the natural environmental systems that are so critical to our state's future.

Florida's premier land purchasing program, Florida Forever, was just renewed for another 10 years with bonding capacity expanded to enable the state to purchase another \$3 billion worth of environmentally sensitive lands.

By purchasing development rights and environmental easements, it is hoped that farmers can realize profits from the land while continuing to farm and ranch those lands. Farmers are the best land managers and keeping them in business while we protect their land from development is not only good for the environment but good for our agricultural economy.

These two programs will ensure we do all that we can to preserve our natural environment for future generations of Floridians.

And, this opportunity to purchase 185,000 acres of sugar farms will long be remembered as a watershed moment in Florida's preservation efforts.

This land acquisition will provide not only land necessary for successful restoration, but will result in the cessation of a significant portion of the sugar farming activities that have long been the source of phosphorous and other nutrients polluting the Everglades.

The net positive impact on the Everglades National Park cannot be overstated. This will result in sufficient water supplies for the environment, for farming and for projected population growth.

- Florida Sen. Burt Saunders represents parts of Lee and Collier counties in the Florida Senate.

The reality of Everglades restoration.

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Mike Thomas - Orlando Sentinel

It's probably not what you think.

I will begin by telling you the Everglades never will be restored. That is physically impossible. So all we can do is create as near a highly engineered facsimile of what the Everglades used to be. Here is why: The Everglades as we define it is a massive swamp that begins south of Lake Okeechobee. Water from the lake used to flow into this swamp and slowly make its way to the southern tip of the state where it emptied into the sea at a place called Florida Bay.

Now, for the sake of simplicity, let's say the Everglades swamp was 100 square miles. And at any given time, it held 100 billion gallons of water. And when you spread that water out over the whole swamp, it was three feet deep.

I don't want some engineering geek out there correcting me on this! It's only for sake of explanation.

So what has happened over the years is that they carved out 50 square miles to plant sugar and tomatoes. And another 20 square miles to plant houses.

So we have 30 square miles. Half of this is the Everglades National Park. And half is swamp land that has been diked off south of the sugar farms.

Suddenly there still is 100 billion gallons of water flowing into the system, but only a third as much land to hold it. Not only that, but now there are big farms demanding water, as well as 5 million people. They want lots of it during droughts. And when there is too much of it, they want to be protected from floods. Meanwhile, what is left of the Everglades also needs its water.

So what we have here is one huge mess.

More and more polluted water flows into a shrinking amount of land. This runoff is loaded with nutrients (fertilizer) that spurs the growth of cattails and other invading plants, which crowd out the native sawgrass for which the Everglades is famous. This is an amazingly fragile place. Just a slight uptick in nutrients can throw the whole system out of whack.

During drier times, engineers pile up water in Lake Okeechobee, basically turning it into a storage reservoir. This has the dike on the brink of failure.

And when the water is high, since there isn't enough land in the remaining Everglades to hold it all, it is dumped into huge flood canals leading to both coasts. These huge slugs of polluted fresh water are destroying the Indian River in Martin County and creating red tide outbreaks in the Gulf.

The only solution is more land. And the most obvious land belongs to the sugar farms.

Enter this plan to buy 187,000 acres from U.S. Sugar Corp for \$1.8 billion.

The impression most people probably have is that this land will be returned to swamp and the Everglades will live happily ever after.

Unfortunately, no.

Even all this land doesn't come close to replacing what has been carved out of the Glades. It also does not come in one big chunk. It is scattered about in parcels. And so what the state will have to do is sell some off, maybe trade part of it to another sugar farm so it can make a big chunk.

In addition, the land has been damaged, so to speak. All that farming has depleted the soil, taking several feet out of the rich muck. So much of the farm land sits at a lower elevation even than Lake Okeechobee.

Add it all up, and this makes returning this land to a natural Everglades marsh impossible. If they flooded it, you would get nothing more than a big bowl of water south of Okeechobee.

So what will happen? They will carve the land up with dikes.

Some will be used for huge reservoirs to make up for the lack of water storage in the rest of the Glades. This then should reduce the amount of water they have to dump to the Indian River and Gulf. They also will put in man-made marshes to filter water from the other farms and urban areas before piping it into the remaining Everglades.

The cost of all this engineering will be mind boggling. The \$1.8 billion for the land is just a downpayment. It will take much more than that to turn it into something they can use.

How all this will be paid for is an open-ended question. What would happen if the state bought the land and then couldn't afford to do anything with it is another.

Some environmentalists have called for recreating a natural swamp with a flowing sheet of water restored between Okeechobee and the remaining Everglades to the South. That will not happen. The bowl shape of the land, along with the need for more water storage will preclude that.

And so the end result would be anything but natural. It would be a tightly engineered system in which water would be moved with canals, spillways, water-control dams and pumps. Whoever controls the levers would allocate how much the cities get, how much the farms get and how much the Everglades get.

We would get something that resembles the original Everglades about as much as Jessica Alba resembles the Bride of Frankenstein.

But ultimately, if the discharges to the coasts are to be curtailed and if the remaining Everglades are to have a shot at survival, there really isn't another option.

One cheer for Everglades plan

07/03/2008

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Tom Palmer - the Ledger

I hate to say I told you so, but it's quickly becoming apparent that the miracle cure for the Everglades restoration that Good-time Charlie Crist gushed about last week is more complicated than it first appeared in more ways than anyone was stating publicly.

Some of the latest concerns are raised in a story in today's New York Times, which focuses on the fact that the most obvious problem with any environmental restoration of human-altered farm landscape is not just the re-engineering to get the water flow right again, but dealing with the unknown chemical footprint of decades of intense agricultural activity.

There's ample precedent for this, though on a smaller scale, elsewhere in Florida: Lake Apopka.

The lake, the fourth-largest natural water body in Florida, was once a bass-fishing paradise whose water was polluted by decades of farm runoff, similar to Lake Okeechobee in the Everglades. The state bought a good chunk of the farm land that was the source of the pollution, announced the purchase with great fanfare and then the whole thing blew up in everyone's face when there was a massive bird dieoff resulting from pesticide poisoning.

A report last year in the Endangered Species Bulletin contains this passage:

"Lessons learned from the north shore of Lake Apopka will benefit other restoration efforts across the country that are working to convert drained agricultural lands back to wetlands, including certain areas in the Everglades that are contaminated with (pesticides)."

There are, of course, other issues, such as calculating the exact cost of buying the land and restoring it, which is unknown at this point but suspected to run into the billions of dollars.

I'm not saying it's not worth it, especially if it's done right. I'm just repeating my earlier warning that things aren't as simple as they seem at first, especially when they involve natural systems that have had the nature beaten out of them.

Karl Wickstrom: The U.S. Sugar deal should result in the vital 'flowway'

07/03/2008

Florida Sportsman

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Karl Wickstrom, guest columnist-Stuart News

What do you do when your two worst enemies suddenly get together and do a wonderful thing for you?

Smile. Be stunned.

Smiling and being stunned are the reactions to an announcement that a huge chunk of Florida's long-polluting sugar land is to be bought by the state to dismantle the disastrous drainage machine that has troubled the Everglades, and degraded our two big estuaries to the east and west coasts, for the past 50 years.

In case you've been off the planet the past week, the deal is this:

U.S. Sugar agrees in principle to sell its 187,000 acres, plus accoutrements like a refinery and railroad, to the South Florida Water Management District for \$1.7 billion.

Of course, observers say the devil may be dancing in the details. But elated we can be at this point.

If the deal works out, it could meet the ultimate goal of the Rivers Coalition Defense Fund's federal lawsuit against the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. The sale would provide land for a flowway from Lake Okeechobee through what's left of Big Sugar. That in turn could stop almost all the discharges that have hammered the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries in wet years.

That's huge for folks in Martin and St. Lucie counties. Really huge. Still, the lawsuit moves forward at this point until and if there are concrete steps to move lake water south in large quantities of 6,000 to 10,000 cubic feet per second when appropriate.

The Rivers Coalition lawsuit against the Corps, which operates in lockstep partnership with the district, is an obvious factor leading to the Sugarland Deal. For two years, since we brought the flowway concept out of the government's morgue, we have personally kept governors Jeb Bush and then Charlie Crist apprised. Crist has been interested, and that interest blossomed into the sale negotiations.

'PERFECT STORM' UNLEASHED

Other factors also are coming together in what can be likened to the overworked "Perfect Storm" analogy. Separate forces join to trigger a startling event, in this case a welcome one.

Amid the celebratory giddiness over the deal, you won't hear much about underlying situations that assuredly play roles. Here are five biggies:

The case for the flowway is so solid that it must be addressed and accomplished. It's been 50 years to the year since the Stuart area was assured by the Corps that an outlet south from Lake Okeechobee would be created.

The Everglades Restoration program is emerging more and more as flawed, being transformed into a water-supply program disguised as restoration that is crumbling by its own weight of misdeeds and incompetence.

Aquifer Storage Recovery wells, which have been envisioned to handle some 40 per cent of the excess water, are considered unworkable after all (excessive arsenic, among other problems). A storage flowway would be the sought-after "contingency" alternative.

Problems with the massive EAA reservoir, where cost overruns and suspect technology abound, could be solved by re-working the footprint of the great pit into the phased-out sugar property.

From Sugar's view, the deal could resolve a shareholders' lawsuit alleging that officers hid from shareholders a lucrative buyout offer and paid \$1 million in hush money to one of the key persons who worked on the offer. This is the kind of lawsuit one might want to snuff out at any cost.

More subtly, the Sugarland Deal gives the district a chance to don a good-guy hat and back away from its intransigent stance against the flowway based on sugar-friendly claims by people who include U.S. Sugar vice-president Malcolm "Bubba" Wade and staffers. They argued, and still do apparently, that a "bowl effect" due to subsidence makes a flowway impossible.

This can be called "The Great Bowl Hoax" in the view of many, including Rivers Coalition Defense Fund board member Ted Guy. The bowl effect ploy is based on sending water not through Plan 6 but to the east, where the topography is indeed higher.

Under Plan 6, the water would move slowly from the lake to Florida Bay, by gravity, thank you. And if there were bumps along the way, that's why there are pumps. Pumpage is standard procedure for the district.

No wonder that Wade is resigning his seat on the district governing board as a conflict of interest.

It's important, now, to emphasize that the district's 2008 board of governors is a different animal from the one that ran the farm during decades of environmental ruination. A new day of unfettered leadership is in place, which we hope will bring some long-needed staff changes.

THE 'NEW' SFWMD

No longer one of our worst enemies, the district stands on a doorstep leading to great things.

Its biggest challenge at this point is to move as quickly as possible, though we understand that the reform won't be accomplished immediately.

The plan is to let U.S. Sugar farm as usual for another six years. Among questions: Is that too long? Will there be cries for extending even that? Rockpit rights? Will that Satan cowering in the details bog down progress, as so many projects have stagnated in the past?

The unknowns linger.

But today let's celebrate the wedding and toast the bride and groom, whatever their past behaviors.

Wickstrom is coordinator of the Rivers Coalition Defense Fund.

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Cooperation

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News and Sentinel

A historic deal to help safeguard the Everglades represents one more triumph of the most promising, productive approach to such work: cooperation between preservationists and the private sector. It's a shame the victory was marred, to an extent, by the gloating of one environmentalist leader.

Florida Gov. Charlie Crist announced the deal this week. U.S. Sugar Co., the nation's largest cane sugar producer, will sell nearly 300 square miles of land to the state, for \$1.75 billion. Acquisition of the land will allow for better water flow through the Everglades, often aptly referred to as a 'river of grass.' But U.S. Sugar's acquiescence in the plan will put the company out of business in about six years.

An attorney who, according to The Associated Press, 'is a longtime foe of U.S. Sugar,' took part in the announcement. He is David Guest, who commented, 'In the old days, you didn't just beat your opponent, you also ate them. Today, we're eating U.S. Sugar.' What a sad, inappropriate way to sum up a deal that would not have been possible had U.S. Sugar not agreed to it. Guest seems not to worry about the 1,700 people who will lose their jobs when the company ceases operations.

Fortunately, state officials whose agenda was protecting the Everglades, not 'eating' U.S. Sugar, worked with the company to make the plan a reality. That strategy - working with private landowners instead of fighting them - has been the most effective means of safeguarding wild places such as the Everglades. One organization, the Nature Conservancy, has safeguarded 117 million acres of land throughout the world that way.

Some of the Nature Conservancy's successes have been in West Virginia and Ohio, preserving beautiful, significant natural areas.

Other sugar companies own and work on land that could be used, instead, to safeguard the Everglades' health. At some point the state or conservation organizations may attempt to make deals with them, too. Obviously, executives with those companies will be more receptive to overtures from those who are less interested in driving their firms out of business than in conservation.

Rest assured that owners of many tracts of important land have options other than conservation. Making it clear to them that they are viewed as 'the enemy' is not a recipe for gaining their cooperation.

BEING SOLD TO A STATE OF FLORIDA TO HELP RECLAIM EVERGLADES.

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THE NEWS AMERICA'S BIGGEST SUGAR PRODUCER US SUGAR WAS SHUTTING DOWN PERM INAPPROPRIATELY LEFT JAWS DROPPING ALL OVER THE STATE. BEING SOLD TO A STATE OF FLORIDA TO HELP RECLAIM EVERGLADES. A SWEET DEAL? THAT'S ONLY ONE OF THE QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED HERE IN NEXT FEW WEEKS AND YEARS HERE. WERE ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS TO STOP THE DUMPING POLLUTED WATER GOING TO DRAW SUGAR COMPANY OUT OF BUSINESS ANYWAY? ANOTHER QUESTION WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CITY AND ALL THE EMPLOYEES ONCE THE COMPANY GOES OUT OF BUSINESS. HOW ABOUT THE PRICE OF SUGAR WILL THAT GO UP A PRICE OF 1 PHI \$. 75 BILLION IS STATE OF FLORIDA OVER PAYING TO OBTAIN WHAT ENVIRONMENTAL ARE CALLING MISSING LINK IN RESTORING EVERGLADES. VERY INTERESTING TOPIC WE KNOW A LOT OF YOU WILL WANT TO TALK ABOUT HAS. CRAIG PITMAN JOINS US REPORTER FROM FOR ST. PETERSBURG TIMES INCLUDING FLORIDA'S WED LANDS AND EVERGLADES. FORMERLY SERVE IN HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE AND SENATE AN ATTORNEY IN PRIVATE PRACTICE IN BARTOW. CURTIS HOLMES. WELCOME EVERYONE.

YOU ARE INTIMATING FAMILIAR WITH THESE SUGAR GROWERS. WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THIS DEAL WAS ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK? I HAPPENED TO BE ABOUT A DOZEN OF THEM WHEN THEY GOT THE WORD. IT WAS SHOCKING. I HAVE NEVER SEEN A GROUP OF AGRICULTURALISTS RESPOND THE WAY THEY DID. THEY WERE TOTALLY DUMBFOUNDED. CAUGHT TOTALLY BY SURPRISE BECAUSE THIS WAS THE BEST KEPT SECRET IN TALLAHASSEE IN SOME TIME I THINK. BUT THEY HAD NO IDEA IT WAS COMING DOWN THE PIKE. AND THE US SUGAR EXECUTIVES ARE FRIENDS OF OURS. THEY ARE FRIENDS OF THE GROWERS I WAS WITH. THEY ARE WITH EACH OTHER SOCIALLY AS WELL PROFESSIONALLY. AND THEY HAD NO IDEA IT WAS A WELL KEPT SECRET. SHOCKED BECAUSE A AMERICA'S BIG'S SUGAR PRODUCER IS GOING OUT OF BUSINESS? YES AND US SUGAR PROVIDED A LOT OF LEADERSHIP ON LEGISLATIVE ISSUES AND OTHER THINGS. SO WITH THEM OUT OF THE LOOP THEY WERE SOMEWHAT LOST THE OTHER GROWERS KIND OF WONDER WHO WILL ASSUME THOSE LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES. BUT, THEY ARE ABOUT 35 THOUSAND JOBS IN AND AROUND THAT AREA THAT ARE ARE ATTRIBUTABLE TO SUGAR INDUSTRY AND US SUGAR IS BIGGEST COG IN TURN. WITH THEM OFF SCENE IN SIX YEARS AS DEAL CALLS FOR A LOT OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN NOT JUST IN THOSE COUPLE OF TOWNS BUT THAT ENTIRE REGION. CRAIG IS COVERING ALL OF THESE ISSUES DOWN THERE WHAT KIND OF SURPRISE HAS COME TO YOU THAT THIS HAPPENED? THE WELL, IT IS, I THINK IT IS SURPRISED JUST ABOUT EVERYBODY THAT WASN'T IN THE LOOP. JUST ABOUT EVERYBODY. I MEAN THINK ABOUT IT ALL

ORIGINATED WITH FOUR GUYS IN ROOM. ONE OF THEM WAS AT GOVERNOR SO HE CAN MAKE THINGS HAPPEN. TWO LOBBYIST MEET WITH GOVERNOR AND CHIEF OF STAFF AND A LOBBYIST THINGS ARE SAYING CLEARWATER ACT CASE WILL A PREVENT US FROM BACK PUMPING AND WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT IS PREVENTING US FROM DO WHAT CAN YOU TO TO PROVIDE US RELIEF WHEN THEY PICKED THEIR JAWS UP OFF FLOOR THAT STARTED THE PROCESS FOR TALKS ABOUT THIS. ONE THING WE SHOULD MAYBE CLEAR NO FORMAL DEAL THAT HAS SIGNED. THEY'VE AGREED TO START FORMAL OPEN NEGOTIATIONS. SO THAT 1.7 MILLION IS THE CEILING. THEY COULD PAY LESS THEORETICALLY THAT IS THE MOST THAT STATE WILL PAY. LET'S ME ASK ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS THEY ARE CLAIMING THIS WOULD HAVE PUT US OUT OF BUSINESS IF WE COULDN'T DUMP OUR WATER INTO LAKE OKEECHOBEE TRUE OR NOT? THAT IS SOMETHING THEY CONTEND IS THE CASE. THERE IS GOOD CASE TO BE MADE THAT'S THE TRUTH. SOMETIMES IT IS HARD TO SORT OUT WHAT IS HI YPERBOLE AND WHAT IS TRUTH. THEY REALLY BELIEVED THAT WOULD DEATH NAIL. THEY ALSO HAD WATER QUALITY STANDARD OF TEN PARTS PER BILLION ON HORIZON. THAT GOES INTO EFFECT 2014. THAT WAS OUT THERE. MUCH OF THE LAND WHERE THERE SUGAR IS NOW, THEY ARE ALREADY EXCEED THRESHOLD LIMITS. SO THEY WERE WONDERING WHAT MORE THEY COULD DO TO GET PHOSPHOROUS LEVELS DOWN. THEY SPENT TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO GET INTO COMPLIANCE AND YET THEIR FOS FEHR ROSS LOADS WERE TOO HIGH. NOW YOU SAID THE GOVERNOR CRIST HAD LONG BEEN READING ABOUT THE CONCERN ABOUT, LIKE THIS IS A PERSONAL, PERSONAL INTENT INTEREST OF HIS THIS WHOLE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE. I THINK SO. GOVERNOR CRIST WENT INTO STATE SENATE IN 1992. WE SERVED TOGETHER FOR NUMBER OF YEARS. HE ALWAYS HAD AN INTEREST IN THIS, NO QUESTION ABOUT IT. YOU KNOW WHEN YOU LOOK EVERGLADES RESTORATION EFFORT WE DEALT WITH INTH WATER QUALITY ISSUES IN 20017, LEGISLATURE PASSED MORE LEGISLATION THAT DEALT WITH A NORTHERN EVERGLADES AND ST. LUCIE CANAL. BUT WE HAD NEVER REALLY DEALT WITH FLOW AWAY ISSUE, IDEA OF TRYING TO RECREATE SHAET FLOW OVERLAND THAT USED TO HAVE SHEET FLOW BUT NOW DOESN'T HAVE BECAUSE THERE ARE 1600 MILES. SO, A LONG STANDING INTEREST IN THIS ISSUE. THIS, WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT HIS LEGACY? I MEAN WILL THIS, THIS BE WHAT HE IS KNOWN FOR IN YEARS? I THINK IT SATISFACTORY MENTS HIS PLACE IN HISTORY. IF THEY CAN PULL IT OFF. IF THEY CAN PULL IT OFF. THEORETICALLY EITHER SIDE COULD WALK AWAY FROM TABLE THE EITHER POINT. NOT DONE DEAL. CURTIS HOLMES WHAT ABOUT THIS \$1.75 BILLION PRICE TAG I THINK STATE SHOULD WALK AWAY FROM THIS DEAL. THREE TIMES HIGHEST BID USSUGAR HAS OFFERED FOR THEIR COMPANY. SECONDLY TURNING AROUND I DON'T CARE HOW THEY PHRASE THIS THING, THEY ARE TAKING TAX DOLLARS TO BUY THIS PARCEL TO REMOVE IT FROM THE TAX ROLL THAT IS GOING TO SPEND MORE TAX MONEY TO RESTORE THIS FROM WHENCE IT CAME TO HAVE MORE TAX MONEY SPENT ON MAINTAINING A SOME TYPE OF ESTUARY. IT IS ABSOLUTELY RIDICULOUS. THIS LAND ALMOST QUALIFIES FOR SUPER FUND WITH THE PHOSPHATE PROBLEM THEY'VE GOT DOWN THERE.

BUT THOSE MONIES WILL NO LONGER BE USED FOR ITS INTENDED PURPOSE LIKE YOU JUST SAID. THESE PEOPLE ARE WAITING FOR FLOOD RELIEF AND OFFICERS ARE GOING NO,

WE'RE NOT GOING TO DO THAT WE'RE GOING TO GO OVER HERE AND BUY A BUNCH OF SWAMP LAND. BUT YOU HAVE TO, YOU HAVE TO YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND HOW THIS FITS INTO THE EVERGLADES RESTORATION MIND SET. IF YOU BUY INTO THE IDEA THAT WE IN FACT WANT TO RESTORE THE EVERGLADES, MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT UNLESS YOU RECREATE SOME SORT OF SHEET FLOW YOU'RE NOT EVER GOING TO BE ABLE TO DO IT. SO, YOU KNOW, THIS REPRESENTS IN MY WAY OF THINKING A HUGE OPPORTUNITY, AN AWFUL LOT OF QUESTIONS THAT NEED TO BE ANSWERED. A LOT OF LEGITIMATE CONCERNS THAT WILL HAVE TO BE WORKED THROUGH. BUT IF WE BUY INTO THE IDEA THAT WE WANT TO RESTORE THE EVERGLADES, RECREATING SOME KIND OF SHEET FLOW SOUTH OF THE LAKE IS IN ALL LIKELIHOOD GOING TO BE PART THE FIX. ENVIRONMENTALLY IF WE THIS DO IT WHAT HAPPENS? THEN YOU'RE DEALING WITH A COUPLE OF THINGS ONE DEALING WITH AN AWFUL LOT OF PUMPING. BECAUSE THEN THEY HAVE TO ROUTE THE WATER AROUND DIFFERENT LANDS IN ORDER TO GET IT TO EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK. THE OTHER THING YOU'RE GOING TO BE DEALING WITH IS AN UNSOMEWHAT UNTESTED TECHNOLOGY FOR STORING WATER UNDERGROUND. WHICH WAS RISKY TO BEGIN WITH. NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCE RAISED BIG QUESTIONS ABOUT MAKING THAT A PART OF EVERGLADES PLAN. BUT IF THEY HAVE SURFACE RESERVOIRS OR AQUIFERS EXACTLY THEY HAVE TO USE STORAGE WELLS THAT SOME OF THEM HAVE RESULTED IN ARSENIC CONTAMINATION IN WELLS. NOT TO BOG DOWN IF I COULD JUST GET IN THIS PICK POINT IF WE'RE OUT OF TIME WE'RE OUT TOWN. NOT TO BOG DOWN IN DETAIL HERE, BUT UNDERSTAND HOW EVERGLADES USED TO WORK. WHEN EVER THE LAKE OF OKEECHOBEE WOULD HIT A CERTAIN LEVEL OVERFLOW AT BANKS IN FLOW IN SOUTHWESTERN DIRECTION TYPICALLY 50 MILES LONG AND SIX INCHES DEEP. THAT WHAT IS CREATED THE EVERGLADES. THAT RIVER OF GRASS. BUT THAT HAS BEEN TOTALLY INTERRUPTED BY 700 THOUSAND ACRE AGRICULTURE SEVERAL CITIES AND WHAT THIS PROVIDES IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ERIE CREATE SOME OF THAT SHEET FLOW. WITHOUT THAT ALL WATER GO TO GULF OF MEXICO. I HAVE TO TAKE BREAK. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO PRICE OF SUGAR AND PEOPLE THAT WORK DOWN THERE, LOTS OF OTHER QUESTIONS WE CAN TAKE CARE OF EMPLOYEES IN COMMUNITIES AT THE SAME TIME THE GOVERNOR IS TAKING CARE OF EVERGLADES RESTORATION.

Get ready to water your lawn less

07/02/2008

Orlando Sentinel

Comas, Martin

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TAVARES -- Central Florida's water woes are expected to grow worse because of a growing population.

To conserve the precious resource, the St. Johns River Water Management District is proposing to limit watering to once a week from November through March and no more than three-fourths of an inch each time.

During the other months of the year, watering would continue to be allowed twice a week the days depending on address numbers but no more than half an inch of water on each of those days.

On Thursday, residents can learn about the new irrigation proposal and give their opinion about it during a workshop at 10 a. m. in the Lake County Commission chambers at the round courthouse, 315 W. Main St., Tavares.

The new rules are targeted to take effect by spring 2009. They also would apply to reclaimed water and storm water, two sources for irrigation currently exempt.

"We will encourage local governments to enact similar irrigation ordinances and we hope that they will step up in a big way with enforcement," water management district spokesman Hank Largin said.

Currently, the district limits lawn watering to two days a week, before 10 a.m. and after 4 p.m. However, it's up to local governments to enforce the restrictions because the water district doesn't have the staff to crack down on chronic water abusers, according to St. Johns district officials.

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ECWCD receives grant for recharge project

07/03/2008

Lehigh Acres Citizen

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Lehigh Acres Citizen

It was announced today that the East County Water Control District (ECWCD) received a \$90,000 Community Budget Issue Request (CBIR) grant from the state of Florida for a groundwater restoration and aquifer recharge project in southwest Lehigh Acres.

The CBIR has been earmarked for the design phase of the southwest Lehigh structures project, known as the Aquifer Benefit and Storage for the Orange River Basin (ABSORB), and will be matched by ECWCD.

The grant will cover the costs of both the design and bidding process during the second phase of this project.

The nine square-mile area in need of attention covers a triangular area bounded by Lee Blvd. on the north, SR 82 on the west and south, and by Connie Ave. South on the east.

In April 2007, ECWCD hired Quattrone and Associates Inc. to conduct a study, funded by the Caloosahatchee River Watershed Initiative (CRWI) and South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), to establish the feasibility of a project of this size and focus.

"Canal water levels, in an area that we refer to as the virtual desert, are low or completely dry even in the rainy season and ABSORB is crucial to reviving this area," said Dave Lindsay, ECWCD district manager.

Ideal water levels in these drainage basins would be between 3 to 4 feet, but because of the vast number of septic tanks in this region ECWCD can only hope to raise levels by an additional 1 to 2 feet creating an increase in storage while avoiding separation from septic tanks.

Currently, there are only two major structures operating in these drainage basins.

"The District is severely short on storage space for stormwater in Lehigh Acres and the implementation of this 32- structure project will add the much needed detention space in an extremely stressed area," Lindsay said.

The CIBR, sponsored by State Senator Dave Aronberg and State Rep. Trudi Williams, ran into complications when it was singled out by Tax Watch, a political action group.

ECWCD chairman, John Boardman, drafted a letter to Crist asking him to reconsider awarding this particular CBIR. Shortly after the district received a letter from the governor stating they had been awarded the grant.

"The District reached out to state officials to express the importance of this project and luckily we were heard," Lindsay said. "As we move forward with this project, we are one step closer to balancing our water system."

Cape Coral Police HQ plans moving forward

07/03/2008

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Ogles, Jacob

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City Council has not yet given its final OK
By JACOB OGLES • News-Press

Plans for a new Cape Coral police headquarters have not received final approval from the City Council, but officials are aggressively moving ahead with plans in order to start construction in August.

"We have fast-tracked this because everybody wants to get it out of the ground and get it completed," said city engineer Oliver Clarke.

Bids from subcontractors for the approximately \$23 million facility near City Hall are due on July 10, according to Public Works director Chuck Pavlos. Approximately 480 contractors and suppliers have been provided documents. Construction firm Balfour Beatty has aggressively advertised for bids in The News-Press on four occasions.

Applications were submitted for a South Florida Water Management District permit on May 31 and a site permit application with the Department of Community Development on June 2.

A structural shell building permit was submitted June 4 and reviewed on June 9. Clarke said it is unusual to get a shell permit before a request for the full building permit is complete, but officials want the shell permit in hand so a foundation can be laid in August even before plans for the entire building get permitted through DCD.

A meeting took place on June 17 between city officials, architects and construction firm officials.

Balfour Beatty was authorized in March to move ahead with plans for a police station, and asked to bring back a proposal costing no more than \$23 million to the City Council on July 28.

Since then, all of the site design and more than half of architectural, electrical, mechanical and plumbing design was completed by Winter Park-based Architects Design Group in May.

ADG was also the firm contracted with the city to design a \$110 million public safety building rejected by voters in 2007. That plan involved a 215,000-square-foot facility but architects have had to amend their designs and draft plans for a 100,000 square-foot building instead.

Officials from ADG and Balfour Beatty have both said the tight time frame offered challenges, but that the deadlines can be met and a final project price of \$23 million or less can be attained.

ADG vice-president Ian Reeves said he is optimistic the project

will come in under \$23 million.

"That was a break point," Reeves said. "I don't think the council wanted it to cost that much. I think they want it to cost less."

He said the response from contractors asking about bids has been unprecedented, something which can only help the project in terms of cost and quality.

City Council members are waiting for a final plan to be submitted before saying if the plan has their support.

District 4 Councilwoman Dolores Bertolini, an early advocate of hiring Balfour Beatty, is waiting to see if the firm can deliver on all of its promises.

"I am confident they will come up with a design we'll feel comfortable with and a price we'll feel comfortable with," Bertolini said. "If they don't I won't approve it."

District 3 Councilman Bill Deile said price will be particularly important because the council will immediately need to find a way to pay for the project.

"When we get a number and if we decide it's a good number, then we have to figure out financing," he said. "I don't know if Balfour Beatty will offer any financing package, but that is the next hurdle."

Tamiami Trail project moves forward, could break ground in October

07/03/2008

Miami Today

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By Scott E. Pacheco-Miami Today

It's been about 19 years since Congress told the US Army Corps of Engineers to increase water flow to a "parched" Everglades National Park.

But there is hope now that the latest proposal for a one-mile bridge on Tamiami Trail will break ground in October and wrap up in spring 2012. The estimated \$212 million Tamiami Trail Modifications Project would restore more natural water flows into Everglades National Park under the bridge, which is part of the Tamiami Trail, and reduce water levels in the Everglades north of the Trail.

District commander of the Army Corps Col. Paul L. Grosskruger signed off on the recommended project, before it was reviewed by the chief of engineers and the assistant secretary of the Army for civil works. The project was slated to be delivered to Congress July 1.

Currently, the Trail acts as a "dam" between the north and south sides of the roadway, said Nanciann Regalado, spokeswoman for the Corps of Engineers.

"If we build that bridge, what we want to do is allow water to get

higher on the north side of the bridge so we can flow more water' to the south side, she said.

The plan includes raising a one-mile section of Tamiami Trail into a bridge about two miles west of the intersection of Tamiami Trail and Krome Avenue. The road surrounding the new bridge is to be reinforced so it can tolerate increased water levels on the north side.

The two sides "are suffering in different ways," Ms. Regalado said "The north side tends to have way too much water and not enough water is getting into Everglades National Park. Too dry and too wet are both problems. You can't say that one side has it worse than another.

"Water naturally flowed through the entire system. The Tamiami Trail has essentially cut off the flow of water from north to south to cause the Everglades to become much, much drier than it has been."

This is just one of many plans that have been created over the years to aid the flow of water through Tamiami Trail.

In recent years, a plan for an elevated 11-mile bridge was created, complete with an artist's rendering of a white skyway bridge. However, Ms. Regalado said the price tag would be "astronomical" at a time when Congress was asking for costs to be kept at a minimum. The Miccosukee Tribe also opposed the project, saying it would threaten Miami-Dade's water supply and the survival of tree islands central to the tribe's culture.

"The idea is that if we were to turn the whole Tamiami Trail into a bridge we could get more water under the Tamiami Trail and that would be a good thing," Ms. Regalado said.

Regardless, the lack of water has created changes to the ecosystem that the new project hopefully will reverse, she said.

Said Ms. Regalado: "It's been losing the characteristics that make it the Everglades."

Details: www.saj.usace.army.mil.

Mining stands alone on environmentally sensitive issue

07/02/2008

Naples Daily News

CHARLIE WHITEHEAD

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CHARLIE WHITEHEAD-Naples Daily News

Scott McCaleb was all alone Wednesday afternoon.

Actually the Florida Rock executive was in a crowded room in downtown Fort Myers. But when he told the rest of Lee Countys DR/GR committee that the protection of limerock resources should be one of the central themes they recommend to county commissioners in August, he was all by himself.

We do need to look out 50 years, and we need to realize limerock is a scarce resource, he said. Many states have identified where the natural resources are and established protection zones. They protect them from houses being built on top of them.

Thats obviously not a priority for the majority of the committee.

On the other side, I would say, So what if we run out of limerock, said committee member Peggy Apgar Schmidt, who lived along Corkscrew Road until noise, dust and traffic from a nearby mine drove her out.

County commissioners created the 15-member committee when they imposed a one-year moratorium on new mine applications last September. Its membership is divided between residents of the 83,000-acre Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource area in southeast Lee, representatives of large landowners or mining interests and an open category.

That was supposed to ensure balance. Two of the five major landowners, however, are Brenda Brooks, executive director of the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed, and Jason Lauritsen, assistant director of the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

With Youngquist Brothern mine executive Richard Friday and landowners consultant Dennis Gilkey absent McCalebs try at making limerock a priority didnt receive any support.

I dont think well get a consensus on that, McCaleb said after the committee meeting.

McCaleb said there will be a constant demand for limerock in the future, limerock thats found in only a few Florida locations, one of which is southeast Lee County.

That use clashes with others, however, particularly the environmental restoration and protection and rural residential character the committee did agree were priorities.

But they cant make their recommendations work, McCaleb said, without including a concern for private property rights. There are landowners who bought huge tracts in the DR/GR planning with intentions on mining it. Some have put the county on notice they expect to be allowed to mine, a broad hint of future legal action. Landowners attorneys regularly attend committee meetings, though they refuse to discuss the issue.

If we dont deal with the property rights issue its going to be difficult to make this whole thing work, McCaleb said. We could just put together the plan we think works best and let the judge decide.

Assistant county attorney Dawn Lehnert said whatever the committee recommends and whatever county commissioners eventually decide likely will spark legal action.

Theres going to be a legal issue with whatever scenario you choose, she said.

Committee members took home copies of a report by consultants Dover, Kohl and Associates, a report that recommends restricting new mines to the Alico Road corridor. That likely will win the support of the committee when it meets again July 16, but as Lehnert said that wont end it.

County commissioners will begin to debate the recommendations on Aug. 1. The moratorium ends in September.

Crist signs two environmental bills

07/02/2008

South Florida Business Journal

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Gov. Charlie Crist has signed into law measures that extend Florida Forever for an additional 10 years and limit the discharge of treated wastewater directly into the Atlantic Ocean.

Continuing the Florida Forever program through at least 2018 will allow for preservation of the state's natural resources and wildlife through important land purchases, according to the governor's office. It said the program has been instrumental in conserving water and securing the future of the Everglades.

The Leah Shad Memorial Ocean Outfall Program, named for a West Palm Beach environmentalist, will decrease the impact on the Atlantic Ocean and benefit onshore freshwater systems, Crist said.

ALLOW THEM TO REPLENISH UNDERGROUND RESERVOIRS. Rob

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WINK News This Morning - WINK-TV

Sarah: AND FASTER EMERGENCY RESPONSE, AND NEW SCHOOL BUS ROUTES COULD BE COMING TO GOLDEN GATE ESTATES IN THE FORM OF NEW CANAL BRIDGES. RIGHT NOW COLLIER COUNTY TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS ARE LOOKING AT AREAS IN THE ESTATES WHERE THEY FEEL BRIDGES OVER CANALS COULD HELP. THE COUNTY IS GATHERING PUBLIC INPUT RIGHT NOW AND WILL RANK THEIR LOCATIONSS FOR TOP LOCATIONS FOR COMMISSIONER THIS IS FALL. MEANWHILE, LEE COUNTY MAY NEED TO LIMIT HOME BUILDING TO MAKE SURE THERE IS WATER FOR EVERYONE. THAT IS ACCORDING TO A NEW STUFMDS IT SAYS LEE COUNTY NEEDS TO LIMIT DIRT AND ROCK MINING TO SAVE THE WETLANDS. THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE A GOOD WATER SUPPLY IS TO LEAVE THE WETLANDS ALONE AND ALLOW THEM TO REPLENISH UNDERGROUND RESERVOIRS.

