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Tribe wants 'Glades reservoir work resumed

08/12/2008
Miami Herald - Online

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MIAMI -- The Miccosukee Indian Tribe is asking a federal judge in Miami to restart a huge Everglades restoration project that is now on hold.

A hearing is set Tuesday in federal court over a giant reservoir in Palm Beach County intended to cleanse water flowing into the Everglades.

Water managers put the project on hold in May because of a separate lawsuit filed by environmental groups. The project's future is also uncertain after the state agreed in June to buy out U. S. Sugar Corp.'s nearby farmland.

The Miccosukee Tribe wants assurances that the project will be not be unduly delayed or abandoned. The hearing also will address a court ruling that the Environmental Protection Agency hasn't done enough to protect the Everglades.

football town's future looks grim

08/12/2008

Boulder Daily Camera, The

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'Muck City' hurt by Everglades restoration

Associated Press

BELLE GLADE, Fla. -- Surrounded by a sea of sugarcane, this poverty-ravaged town on the southeastern edge of Lake Okeechobee has long been one of the country's most fertile football areas.

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It's a place where running backs of the future are said to gain speed chasing rabbits, where college coaches begin recruiting trips and where Friday nights produce future NFL stars. Football is the main diversion in Belle Glade, aka 'Muck City,' a place so depressed it lacks a movie theater and even a big discount store.

Now football is being threatened.

When U.S. Sugar -- the nation's largest sugarcane producer -- agreed in June to sell its nearly 300 square miles of farmland to the state for \$1.75 billion, the deal was touted as an environmental victory for the government's ongoing Everglades restoration project. But for the community, it's a big blow.

In what is already one of the country's poorest areas, about 1,700 U.S. Sugar employees will lose their jobs when the transfer to the state is consummated in six years. 'The only thing most people around here know how to do is grow sugar and play football,' 70-year-old resident Jack Brown said. 'Without sugar, there will be no football.'

The town of about 15,000, which got its nickname from its soil's black muck, has football talent just as rich.

Jacksonville Jaguars running back Fred Taylor, Pittsburgh Steelers receiver Santonio Holmes and dozens of other current and former NFL players call Belle Glade home. The four major programs in the area -- Glades Central, Pahokee, Glades Day and Clewiston -- have combined to win 17 state championships. Glades Central, the best of the four, has won six titles.

Pahokee, eight miles north along the lake's shore, produced Arizona Cardinals receiver Anquan Boldin among others. Glades Central and Pahokee have combined to send 48 players into professional football.

'That's just God-given talent,' Boldin said. 'No other way to put it.'

A bit of football folklore has even grown up around a local tradition called 'running rabbits.'

Children started the game decades ago to earn money, and they still sell rabbits for \$2 and \$3 on the streets. When the sugarcane is burned during harvest, rabbits run from the flames and young boys give chase. Only the fastest kids catch rabbits, and residents say the game is what has given area players their legendary speed.

When U.S. Sugar closes, there won't be enough jobs to support the population, and many people will be forced to commute about 45 miles to West Palm Beach. Most likely, residents will have to move and leave proud football traditions behind.

'Football is going to be hit hard,' said Willie McDonald, the football public address announcer and track coach for Glades Central. 'It will survive, but no one knows what will be left of it.'

Antonio McCloude is a star running back for Glades Central, and his mother has worked in sugar mills for 32 years. Her job happens to be safe.

But the senior tailback -- who is being recruited by West Virginia, Pittsburgh and Colorado among others -- said many of his friends' parents weren't so lucky. Some are among those U.S. Sugar plans to lay off.

'I think it's going to have a really big effect around here,' he said. 'There's nothing really to do besides work for sugar companies and play football here. I don't have to worry about it. But them little kids coming up will.'

Belle Glade is in Palm Beach County, one of America's wealthiest, but parts look like they're in the Third World.

West Palm Beach is dotted with luxury high-rises and mansion, yet out here migrant workers comb through the burning, leafy undergrowth as smokestacks puff from distant sugar mills. The town, appearing like a mirage slowly above the swaths of sugarcane, welcomes with a sign that reads, 'HER SOIL IS HER FORTUNE.'

But the fortune has never trickled down.

About a third of the population lives below the poverty line, according to the 2000 census. At times in the 1980s, Belle Glade had the nation's highest rate of AIDS infection, and the town is still fighting one of the highest per-capita rates of the disease. Belle Glade also had the second-worst violent crime rate in the country in 2003, according to the FBI. And Glades Central received its second consecutive 'F' grade from the state for its academic performance this year.

Through it all, though, there has been football.

The sport has provided a distraction -- and a way out -- from life in the sugar fields and factory. But despite their success, the football programs have always needed financial backing from the private sector -- and U.S. Sugar has always helped.

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Sugar Grower Wants Port

08/12/2008

Tampa Tribune - Online

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WEST PALM BEACH - Sugar grower Florida Crystals is lobbying for an inland port with the development of an industrial and commercial center just south of Lake Okeechobee, smack in the heart of the state's proposed pathway for Everglades restoration.

Area officials and the state Department of Transportation support the project they say would link seaside ports on Florida's coasts with roads and rail lines.

Supporters say the project could help make up for job losses in the region in the wake of the state's proposal to buy about 300 square miles of land from U.S. Sugar Corp.

Under the \$1.75 billion proposal, U.S. Sugar would shut down in six years, putting 1,700 people out of work.

Port May Affect Crist's Plans

Opponents of the port, however, fear it could negate benefits from the land purchase touted in June by Gov. Charlie Crist as providing the 'missing link' to the state's multibillion-dollar restoration efforts.

Crist and water managers said then the proposed deal, to be finalized with U.S. Sugar by Nov. 30, would remove agriculture from crucial segments of the River of Grass, allowing water to flow more freely south into the Everglades.

Florida Crystals, owned by the Fanjul family of Palm Beach, said water for restoration could still flow around the inland port at the company's Okeelanta site, where it operates a mill, refinery, rail hub and power plant.

Environmentalists, however, see the move as a betrayal that could put politics and business interests ahead of Everglades restoration. 'We really need to wait for the science,' said Lisa Interlandi of the Everglades Law Center. 'When development proposals come before you have the science developed, you end up with development limiting options for restoration.' Florida Crystals Vice President Danny Martel said the two projects can coexist. 'What we're trying to achieve here is, really, to create a

balance between ... economic development, our sugar operation and the environment,' Martel said. Land Swaps May Be Needed

The state's purchase of the U.S. Sugar property, which isn't contiguous, would likely mean water managers would have to negotiate land swaps with the Fanjuls in order to realize the goal of connecting Lake Okeechobee with the rest of the Everglades ecosystem.

Farming and development have for years stymied restoration efforts, blocking water flow and contributing pollutants, such as fertilizers and runoff, into the wetlands.

Communities that have long relied on U.S. Sugar's presence have expressed worry that once the company leaves, surrounding towns could face economic collapse.

Butch Jones, a Glades County commissioner and U.S. Sugar engineer, said port planning should begin immediately. 'You have 1,700 people here who are waiting for some kind, any kind, of answer,' Jones said. Florida Crystals plans a formal pitch on the port to Palm Beach County commissioners Aug. 19.

Sugar deal could create jobs, clog Everglades

08/12/2008
News-Press

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Sugar grower Florida Crystals is lobbying for an inland port with the development of an industrial and commercial center just south of Lake Okeechobee, smack in the heart of the state's proposed pathway for Everglades restoration.

Glades and Palm Beach County officials and the state Department of Transportation support the project they say would link seaside ports on Florida's coasts with roads and rail lines.

Supporters say the project could make up for some job losses in places such as Clewiston in the wake of the state's proposal to buy some 300 square miles of land from U.S. Sugar Corp., headquartered in Clewiston.

Under the \$1.75 billion proposal, the company would shut down in six years, putting 1,700 people out of work.

Opponents of the port, however, fear it could negate benefits from the land purchase touted in June by Gov. Charlie Crist as providing the 'missing link' to the state's multibillion-dollar restoration efforts.

Crist and water managers said then the proposed deal, set to be finalized with U.S. Sugar by Nov. 30, would remove agriculture from crucial segments of the River of Grass, allowing water to flow more freely south into the Everglades.

The purchase is important to Southwest Florida for two reasons: A

cleaner River of Grass would mean less nutrients flowing into the Caloosahatchee, and it also would mean less economic impact to towns such as LaBelle in Hendry County.

Florida Crystals, owned by the Fajuls of Palm Beach, said water for restoration could still flow around the inland port at the company's Okeelanta site, where it operates a mill, refinery, rail hub and power plant.

Environmentalists, however, see the move as a betrayal that could once again put politics and business interests ahead of Everglades restoration. 'We really need to wait for the science,' said Lisa Interlandi, of the Everglades Law Center. 'When development proposals come before you have the science developed, you end up with development limiting options for restoration.' Crist spokesman Sterling Ivey said the governor doesn't have a specific position on the Florida Crystals proposal. Crist remains committed to restoration of the Everglades. 'The governor has not reviewed the specific details in the proposal by Florida Crystals,' Ivey said. 'While there may be an opportunity for economic development efforts to work in partnership with Everglades restoration, the governor's focus is in making sure that there are no barriers to the restoration efforts.' Florida Crystals Vice President Danny Martel said the two projects can coexist. 'What we're trying to achieve here is, really, to create a balance between ... economic development, our sugar operation and the environment,' Martel said. The state's purchase of the U. S. Sugar property, which isn't contiguous, would likely mean water managers would have to negotiate land swaps with the Fajuls in order to realize the goal of connecting Lake Okeechobee with the rest of the Everglades ecosystem.

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Butch Jones, a Glades County commissioner and U.S. Sugar engineer, said planning should begin immediately on the port. 'You have 1,700 people here who are waiting for some kind, any kind, of answer,' Jones said. Florida Crystals plans a formal pitch on the port to Palm Beach County commissioners Aug. 19.

- Paul Fleming of the Florida Capital Bureau contributed to this report.

OF THE STATE'S MULTIBILLION-DOLLAR EVERGLADES RESTORATION EFFORT. THE

08/12/2008

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YOUR MORNING COMMUTE. 2 SHOT-RIC-WE BEGIN THIS MORNING WITH DEVELOPING NEWS DEVELOPING NEWS OUT OF SOUTHERN PALM BEACH COUNTY. OVERNIGHT A TRAFFIC STOP, A POLICE CHASE, A CRASH, A SEARCH AND SEVERAL ARRESTS, - TARA-IT BEGAN IN BOCA RATON JUST BEFORE ONE THIS MORNING, AND ENDED OFF OF GATEWAY BOULEVARD AND I-95 IN BOYNTON BEACH. SPLIT WITH THE VERY LATEST, WE TURN TO S12'S ALEX ZEQUEIRA, THE FIRST CREW ON THE SCENE, LIVE IN BOYNTON BEACH. ALEX, WAS THERE AN INJURY IN THIS CHASE WELL RIC AND TARA, WHAT WE KNOW RIGHT NOW, IS THAT FOUR PEOPLE ARE BEHIND BARS THIS MORNING, AFTER A ROUTINE TRAFFIC STOP TURNED INTO A MESS. (VO)IT ALL STARTED JUST BEFORE 1:00 AM, WHEN A BOCA POLICE OFFICER TRIED TO OFFICER TRIED TO STOP A RED PICK UP TRUCK, THAT WAS REPORTEDLY STOLEN, SOMEWHERE IN BOCA. THE DRIVER OF THAT TRUCK APPARENTLY THEN RAN INTO THE POLICE VEHICLE, AND TOOK OFF ON I-95. POLICE IN BOCA, BOYNTON BEACH, DELRAY BEACH, AS WELL AS PBSO ALL GOT INVOLVED. EVENTUALLY, THE DRIVER OF THAT PICK UP GOT OFF THE INTERSTATE ON GATEWAY BOULEVARD WHERE AUTHORITIES WERE ABLE TO LAY DOWN STOP STICKS. THE DRIVER WENT SOUTH ON SEACREST WHERE THE DRIVER LOST CONTROL CRASHING INTO A FENCE. AT THAT TIME, WE'RE TOLD AT LEAST FOUR OF THE SUSPECTS IN THE TRUCK BAILED. ONE WAS LATER FOUND HIDING OUT IN SOMEONE'S HOUSE. AFTER ABOUT AN HOUR AND A HALF, EVER NE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WAS ARRESTED. ONE TEEN WHO LIVED AT THE HOUSE WHERE THE CHASE ENDED HAD THIS TO SAY ABOUT HOW IT ALL WENT DOWN. LEAL)I WAS JUST SITTING HERE ON THE PHONE, I WAS LIKE, I SAW THE HELICOPTER FLASHING THE LIGHT AT ME AND I TURNED TO THE LEFT AND SAW THE DODGE TRUCK JUST COME RIGHT INTO THE, FIRST IT STOPPED THEN THE COP RAN INTO IT, AND IT RAN RIGHT INTO THE GATE. CONTINUE VONO WORD YET ON THE CONDITION OF THE BOCA RATON POLICE OFFICER, WHOSE CRUSIER WAS HIT BY THE RED PICK UP TRUCK, BUT AGAIN WE DO KNOW THAT HE WAS TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL. ON CAMWE'LL CONTINUE TO STAY ON TOP OF THIS STORY FOR THE VERY LATEST DETAILS THRO HOUT THE MORNING. WE'LL HEAR FROM BOCA PD WITH MORE AS THE MORNING PROGRESSES. -RIC-NEW THIS MORNING. A FLORIDA SUGAR COMPANY, WANTS TO DEVELOP A PORT, FOR AN INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL CENTER, JUST SOUTH OF LAKE OKEECHOBEE. (VO)THE PROPOSED PROJECT FROM FLOR A CRYSTALS, SITS IN THE PATHWAY OF THE STATE'S MULTIBILLION-DOLLAR EVERGLADES RESTORATION EFFORT. THE COMPANY VIEWS IT AS A WAY TO MAKE UP FOR JOB LOSSES, IN THE WAKE OF THE ATE'S PROPOSAL TO BUY LAND FROM THE US SUGAR CORPORATION, AREA OFFICIALS AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, SUPPORT THE PROJECT, THAT WOULD LINK SEASIDE PORTS, ON FLORIDA'S COASTS. OPPONENTS FEAR THE PROJECT, COULD NEGATE BENEFITS FROM THE LAND PURCHASE. TARA NEW THIS MORNING. OFFICIALS AT THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK IN TENNESSEE SAY A BLACK BEAR MAULED AN 8-YEAR-OLD BOCA RATON BOY, INJURING HIM AND THE BOY'S FATHER. PARK RANGERS LATER KILLED A BEAR MATCHING THE DESCRIPTION OF THE ONE IN THE ATTACK. OFFICIALS SAY THE BEAR APPROACHED EVAN PAL WHILE HE WAS PLAYING IN A CREEK. MILLER SAYS THE FATHER WAS ABLE TO DRIVE THE BEAR OFF WITH ROCKS AND STICKS. THE BOY AND HIS FATHER SHOULD BE OKAY. TARA (VO)NEW

THIS MORNING. WEST PALM BEACH LEADERS SHUT DOWN PLANS TO BUILD A MASSIVE CONDO BUILDING WHERE THE OLD TOWER 1515 BUILDING CURRENTLY STANDS. THE MODERN WOULD HAVE BEEN A 325-FOOT-TALL BUILDING, ONE OF THE TALLEST IN THE CITY. BUT NEIGHBORS AND CITY LEADERS FEARED IT WOULD BE TOO BIG. AFTER MULTIPLE MEETINGS TO CHANGE THE PLAN, COMMISSIONERS FINALLY DECIDED TO NIX IT ALL TOGETHER. (TARA TO BIG MON) 2 SHOTTARA THE TENSIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND ITS NEIGHBOR GEORGIA HEAT UP AGAIN THIS MORNING. FOREIGN MINISTER SAYS THAT GEORGIA'S PRESIDENT, MUST LEAVE OFFICE. THIS, AS THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, PLANS TO TAKE UP A DRAFT RESOLUTION, LATER TODAY, CALLING FOR A CEASEFIRE. CBS12'S JOEL BROWN HAS THE LATEST. (TAKE PKG)TARA AT BIG MON WITH VOTARA EVER SINCE FORMER DEMOCRATIC NORTH CAROLINA SENATOR EVER SINCE FORMER DEMOCRATIC NORTH CAROLINA SENATOR JOHN EDWARDS ADMITTED TO HIS EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIR, THE MEDIA'S BEEN ABUZZ.

