

Subject: U.S. Sugar Stories for January 1 - 5**SFWMD**

Compiled by: South Florida Water Management District
(for internal use only)

Total Clips: 6

Headline	Date	Outlet	Reporter
U.S. Sugar buyout is most discussed event	12/31/2008	Jupiter Courier	Ed Killer
2009 a big year for the Everglades	01/01/2009	News-Press	Lollar, Kevin
DEP's Annual Report	01/01/2009	Foster Folly News	
Florida Trend's Top Ten Stories of 2008	01/02/2009	Florida Trend	
U.S. Sugar Ends Lease for rock Mine in Quest to Sell Land to Florida	01/03/2009	Sun Sentinel - West Palm Beach Bureau	Reid, Andy
Many risks still could sour deal to purchase U.S. Sugar	01/04/2009	Palm Beach Post	

U.S. Sugar buyout is most discussed event

12/31/2008
Jupiter Courier
Ed Killer

[Return to Top](#)

As the door closes on 2008, these stories were the most talked about in the realm of the outdoors on the Treasure Coast. 1. Proposed \$1.2 billion sale of U.S. Sugar land to state for Everglades restoration.

Sale would allow for construction of flow-way to carry water from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades. Environmentalists hail deal as necessary to save Glades and St. Lucie River estuary.

2. Tournament record 275 sailfish caught and released by 17 fishing teams in Pirates Cove Sailfish Classic.

The early December event celebrates its 20th anniversary by shattering previous highs for total fish caught, plus most by one boat, Floridian (33), and in a single day (112). 3. States freshwater turtle harvest rules examined.

Reports of high demand and high volume shipping rates for wild and farm-raised freshwater turtles from Florida alarms wildlife managers and biologists. State enacts seasonal closure periods for softshell turtles.

4. 13.25-pound bass caught that sets new IGFA 4-pound test record.

Angler Drew Arvary of St. Lucie West catches and releases bass from neighboring pond Sept. 18. He is approved for line class record status from International Game Fish Association.

5. FWC moves to revamp Quota Hunt Permit system for wildlife management areas.

The FWC decides to follow suggestions from Quota Hunt Permit Work Group and make permits non-transferable, adds guest permits and adds hunting opportunities.

6. New rules for gag, red, black grouper suggested, then delayed.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council in September voted to request for an interim rule to prevent the overfishing, then backtracked and said they would seek more public comment on permanent rule.

7. New national angler registry to be created.

NOAA announced last week that in 2010 a national marine angler registry will be created.

8. FLW Outdoors pulls plug on its saltwater tours redfish, kingfish and striped bass.

Weather was frequently an issue with tournament operation and entry numbers for the Kingfish Tour and Kingfish Series were consistently low during their 4-year run.

9. Tropical Storm Fay makes for runoff mess.

Lake Okeechobee receives a record rise of water in August from Fay after it soaked the Kissimmee River Basin. Pulse releases enacted at St. Lucie Locks and finally extended to low-volume releases to keep lake from overflowing.

10. New rules for bass and specks took effect July 1.

Largemouth bass must be 18 inches minimum and only one larger than 22 inches may be kept as part of the daily bag limit. Black crappie must be a minimum of 10 inches.

2009 a big year for the Everglades

01/01/2009

News-Press

Lollar, Kevin

[Return to
Top](#)

By September, the South Florida Water Management District will know whether it is financially strong enough to borrow \$1.34 billion so it can buy 180,000 acres from U.S. Sugar Corp.

That land would become part of the massive Everglades restoration project.

The deal would allow U.S. Sugar to operate for seven years; when the company closes, Clewiston will lose 1,700 jobs.

Buying the land would not only help restore the Everglades, it would also reduce pollution in the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers and their estuaries. After the extremely wet summers of 2004 and 2005, water managers released huge amounts of nutrient-laced fresh water from Lake Okeechobee; excess fresh water upset the salinity in the tidal parts of the river and the estuaries, and the nutrients triggered massive algal blooms.

Meanwhile, the economic crisis could hinder a plan by the water district, Florida Department of Environmental Protection and local governments to improve water quality in the Caloosahatchee. The plan, which will cost hundreds of millions of dollars, includes construction of water storage and treatment areas and studies to determine how to reduce nutrients.

But the state is facing a \$2.3 billion shortfall this year, so the plan is in limbo.

On the endangered species front, experts are hoping for a good wood stork nesting season.

Wood stork breeding depends on the weather, specifically lots of rain during the summer, filling wetlands and triggers reproduction of the small fish that the birds eat.

A drought has kept water levels extremely low in area wetlands, so storks have not nested in Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, the largest wood stork breeding colony in North America, for two years.

But heavy rains during the summer of 2008 relieved the drought and filled the wetlands, which produced enough food to feed wood storks and their chicks.

Wood storks started nesting in the sanctuary Dec. 12; during an aerial survey Dec. 23, sanctuary resources manager Jason Lauritsen counted 19 nests.

In more endangered species news, The National Marine Fisheries Service has proposed that 221,459 acres of the Charlotte Harbor estuary system and 619,013 acres of the Ten Thousand Islands be designated as critical habitat for the endangered smalltooth sawfish.

Smalltooth sawfish once inhabited coastal waters from New York to Brownsville, Texas, and south to Brazil; now the population is almost all in Southwest Florida.

If Charlotte Harbor becomes critical sawfish habitat, any federal project or action there would need to be reviewed under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, which states that actions by federal agencies cannot adversely affect the habitat.

A \$2.5 million project to reopen Blind Pass is under way.

In December, Energy Resources Inc. of Chesterfield, Mo., started dredging the pass, which has been closed since 2001, and will remove 130,000 cubic feet of sand by May.

The pass closed in 1999, and a \$246,307 project opened it by removing 17,500 cubic feet of sand in March 2001; within a month, the pass closed again.

This time, more sand will be removed; dredging will extend 800 feet into the Gulf of Mexico and 4,000 feet on the inside of the Blind Pass Bridge.

The cut will be from 8 to 10 feet deep and will generate a maximum 2-knot current on the outgoing tide, which should keep sand from settling in the pass.

Opening the pass is important because, when it's closed, there's no tidal flushing, so water on the bay side becomes stagnant and turbid, and fish, invertebrates and seagrasses disappear.

As a result of the dredging project, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service might create a 500-acre no-motor zone near Wulfert Keys, just inside the pass.

Dredging will destroy seagrass within the state's Pine Island Aquatic Preserve, so the Florida Department of Environmental Protection wants the damage mitigated.

Usually, mitigation involves "like-for-like": If a project destroys mangroves, then those involved with the project should do something for the mangrove population.

This project will dig through seagrass beds, so officials are looking at helping seagrasses.

One way to do that is to create no-motor zones, areas where internal combustion motors aren't allowed to operate — powerboats could still enter the no-motor zone, as long as boaters use poles or trolling motors (no-motor zones are also called "pole-and-troll zones").

Public hearings on the proposed no-motor zone will be held Jan. 12, 13 and 14.

DEP's Annual Report

01/01/2009

Foster Folly News

[Return to
Top](#)

DEP's Annual Report

Thursday January 1st, 2009

As another year comes to a close, it is a good time to look back and reflect on some of the Department's achievements, while looking forward to the challenges that 2009 will bring. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, preserving and managing the state's natural resources, protecting the quality and quantity of our waters, continuing the goal of restoring the River of Grass and making certain that Floridians and visitors are provided ample outdoor recreational choices are some of the achievements, as well as some of the challenges. But with challenges come new ideas, and new ideas bring innovative solutions. The Department strives to continue to ensure that the state's citizens and natural resources will be protected while preserving the quality of life that makes Florida such a great place to live, work and play.

Restoring the River of Grass

This year was both historic and momentous in the restoration of America's Everglades. In June 2008, Governor Charlie Crist announced a landmark opportunity for Florida to acquire more than 180,000 acres of land in the Everglades Agricultural Area from the United States Sugar Corporation. This proposal was approved by the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) on December 16, after nearly six months of extensive negotiation, due diligence and public input. The transaction, which is subject to obtaining appropriate financing and U.S. Sugar's concurrence with a revised contract condition, will allow the River of Grass to be "re-plumbed" in ways never before thought possible. As the single largest public land acquisition in Florida's history, these vast tracts of land could provide the State not just an opportunity to restore the southern Everglades, but to protect the entire Everglades ecosystem.

In addition, Florida continued to make progress in its unwavering quest to restore the Everglades through its ongoing restoration initiatives, including the joint state-federal Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). To date, Florida has invested approximately \$2.4 billion in CERP, acquiring more than 58 percent (224,489 acres) of land needed for restoration. Florida has also dedicated an additional \$1.8 billion to improving water quality in the Everglades through initiatives like improved farming practices and the construction of 52,000 acres of stormwater treatment areas (STAs). To date, these practices combined with the STAs have prevented more than 2,848 metric tons of phosphorous from entering the Everglades.

Florida remains committed to protecting the entire Everglades ecosystem, which stretches from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes all the way south to Florida Bay. To better protect both the southern and northern reaches of the ecosystem, in 2007 the Florida Legislature passed the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program. As required by the law, which expanded the existing Lake Okeechobee Protection Act, a Technical Plan for Phase II of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Construction Project was completed and ratified by the Legislature this year. In addition, the St. Lucie River and Caloosahatchee River Watershed Protection Plans will be submitted to the Legislature by January 1, 2009.

2008 Everglades accomplishments include:

In the state's 2008-2009 fiscal year, the tightest budget year the state has experienced since CERP was authorized, Governor Crist and the Florida Legislature allocated \$50 million to the restoration of the South Florida ecosystem.

This year, approximately 6,500 acres of land were fully converted into STAs, which are manmade treatment wetlands designed to clean the water entering the Everglades using "green" technology. During Water Year 2008, these STAs treated about 253 billion gallons of water, reducing phosphorous loads entering the Everglades by about 80 percent.

Florida continued to experience success implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs), which are improved farming practices to provide additional phosphorous reductions in water flowing to the Everglades. During Water Year 2008, these BMPs achieved a 44 percent phosphorous reduction, equating to 73.3 metric tons of phosphorous prevented from entering the Everglades.

Restoration continued to progress significantly for the Picayune Strand. Nearly all (54,310 acres or 99 percent) of the land needed for this project is in state ownership, and all of the project's design plans have been completed. On December 2, the SFWMD Governing Board approved a draft Water Reservation rule, a first-of-its-kind rule that will set aside water to protect the Picayune Strand and Fakahatchee Estuary.

The state of Florida took advantage of the drought conditions experienced in early 2008 to begin removing muck in Lake Okeechobee. By removing more than two million cubic yards of muck from approximately 2,000 acres of exposed shoreline, Florida was able to remove an estimated 237 metric tons of phosphorous from the Lake.

Restoring the St. Johns River

Under the leadership of Governor Crist, the lower St. Johns River is experiencing resurgence. In September 2008, the Lower St. Johns River Total Maximum Daily Load Executive Committee developed and approved a plan to restore and protect the St. Johns River. The restoration plan, formally named the Lower St. Johns Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), was developed under the coordination of DEP in partnership with local industries, cities, counties, the SJRWMD, environmental groups and many other stakeholders. It is a comprehensive roadmap for restoring and protecting water quality in the St. Johns River.

Among the programs and projects identified in the BMAP are:

wastewater treatment plant upgrades, redirecting wastewater discharges to beneficial reuse for irrigation and other purposes, stormwater retrofits, urban structural and nonstructural best management practices (BMPs) to reduce loading from stormwater runoff, agricultural BMPs, and environmental education.

These actions represent a commitment to invest more than \$625 million in measures that will improve the conditions of the river such that it meets applicable water quality standards, decreases algal blooms and enhances the growth of native aquatic vegetation. This will result in a net reduction of more than 5.5 million pounds of total nitrogen in the fresh and marine portions

of the river, and more than 200,000 pounds of total phosphorous in the freshwater portion of the river.

Reducing Florida's Greenhouse Gas Emissions

To guarantee cleaner air for Florida's communities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Environmental Regulation Commission's (ERC) adopted the California Motor Vehicle Emissions Standards Rule earlier this month. The rule represents an important step in carrying out the Governor's initiatives to reduce greenhouse gases.

Implementation of the rule plus adoption of the federal Corporate Average Fuel Economy Standards (CAFE) is expected to provide an additional two million metric ton reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2016 and 10 million metric tons by 2020; the equivalent of taking nearly 500,000 passenger vehicles off of the road per year through 2016, and then more than 1.1 million per year through 2020.

In addition, DEP implemented the Idling Reduction Rule. The idling reduction rule creates a five-minute limitation on idling for heavy-duty diesel vehicles weighing more than 8,500 pounds. These vehicles include commercial and government trucks, school buses, transit and excursion buses, all of which account for 16 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions in Florida's transportation sector.

Showcasing the Real Florida

Florida is recognized for its 160 award-winning state parks and 80,000 acres of inspiring greenways and trails. Each year millions of visitors are drawn to these attractions and landscapes to view native wildlife, learn about Florida's history and explore the natural surroundings.

2008 milestones include:

Last fiscal year (July 2007 - June 2008), Florida's state parks welcomed a record-setting 20.7 million visitors, a 6.2 percent increase from last year. Honeymoon Island State Park in Dunedin welcomed the most visitors, with more than one million individuals served. Based on the National Park Service's Money Generation Model, these visitor numbers generated more than \$1 billion for Florida's economy last fiscal year.

Weeki Wachee Springs State Park - The Department acquired the 27-acre Weeki Wachee Springs attraction making it the 160th state park managed by the Division of Recreation and Parks. The 61-year old landmark is one of 33 first-magnitude springs. It is famous for its "mermaids" who give three daily underwater performances as audiences watch from a 500-seat theatre embedded in the side of the spring, 16 feet below the surface.

Caladesi Island State Park - The park's beach was recognized as 2008's number one beach in the nation by coastal geologist Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman, also known as "Dr. Beach." Caladesi is one of the few completely natural islands along Florida's Gulf Coast and is accessible only by boat and ferry. The park offers beach activities, hiking, kayaking and wildlife observation to its more than 230,000 annual visitors.

Best Trails State - This year Florida was named the Best Trails State in the nation by American Trails. American Trails presents the National Trails Awards every two years to recognize the contributions of volunteers, professionals, agencies and other leaders who are working to create a national system of trails for

all Americans. New this year, the Best Trails State award recognizes Florida for its vision, initiatives and management of its statewide trails system.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle & Rethink

To increase recycling throughout Florida, this summer Governor Crist signed the Energy, Climate Change, and Economic Security Act of 2008 into law which establishes a new statewide recycling goal of 75 percent to be achieved by 2020. Within the law DEP is directed to develop a program to achieve the goal and submit it to the Florida Legislature for consideration by January 1, 2010.

In 2006, Florida recycled about 24 percent of the municipal solid waste collected. By improving recycling habits Florida's residents and businesses can protect the environment, preserve natural resources, and contribute to the economic well-being and security of our nation.

To increase awareness about the social, environmental and economic benefits of recycling and encourage people to be a part of creating a better natural environment, DEP's Division of Waste Management:

Hosted two public meetings attended by more than 270 people to receive input on innovative ways the state can recycle more.

Set up an internet bulletin board system to serve as a discussion site for citizens, interest groups, local governments and the recycling industry to share ideas, research and experiences in increasing recycling and diverting more waste from landfills.

Teamed with Recycle Florida Today, Creative Recycling Systems, Inc. and Publix Super Markets for the fifth consecutive year to sponsor the Florida (K-12) Schools Recycling Pledge Card Contest. The three schools that submit the most recycling pledge cards will be awarded with a refurbished computer. Last year, a DEP survey found that more than 86 percent of the 14,000 Floridians who took the pledge to recycle and buy more recycled products through this campaign were elementary, middle and high school students.

Green from the Ground Up

DEP's Office of Sustainable Initiatives is comprised of three voluntary, non-regulatory programs that assist Florida industry and citizens in protecting the environment. The Clean Marina Program, the Florida Green Lodging Program and the Florida Pollution Prevention Program offer a variety of services including on-site assessments, consultations, speakers and workshops, all at no cost to citizens or organizations.

2008 accomplishments include:

In November, the Pollution Prevention Program provided hands-on training on "green" cleaning at the Clara White Mission. The Clara White Mission partners with businesses and local community organizations to reduce homelessness through advocacy, housing, job training and employment. The Mission created a Janitorial/Environmental Services Training Program to train people for work as housekeepers and janitors in the hospitality industry. During its inaugural course, the Mission invited DEP to enhance the program by providing information on "green" cleaning and "green

cleaning kits" to the students. The kits contained microfiber cloths, environmentally friendly cleaning products and ingredients, and directions for creating chemical-free products.

The Clean Marina Program currently has 187 Clean Marinas, 30 Clean Boatyards and seven Clean Marine Retailers. In addition, through the Clean Vessel Act more than 400 pumpout facilities have been installed.

The Florida Green Lodging Program currently has 383 designated properties including 10 Two Palm and one Three Palm facilities, and more than 425 applicants in the process of being designated.

Dial #DEP to Report Environmental Crimes

In April, as part of the 7th annual National Environmental Crimes Prevention Week, DEP's Division of Law Enforcement announced that cell phone customers in Florida can dial #DEP to report environmental crimes, including illegal dumping of hazardous materials, construction debris, oil drums and biological waste.

Other 2008 highlights include:

The Division launched a new Web site for users to learn tips on recognizing and reporting environmental crimes and find emergency contact information - www.dep.state.fl.us/law.

In November, the Division and Florida State Parks hosted a day-long training at Florida Caverns State Park for local public safety agencies and emergency responders. The event demonstrated appropriate techniques for medical and law enforcement responders in the event of an emergency in the park's underground caverns.

In April, the Division participated in a cooperative effort with the Broward County Sheriff's Office and Coral Springs Police Department to pull vehicles from a county canal. The cars have an enormous environmental impact because of their toxicity. Sunken vehicles leak gasoline, motor oil, battery acid, transmission fluid, antifreeze and other toxic chemicals into the water that are both difficult to control and create havoc on water quality. DEP provided local resources and collected evidentiary samples from the gas tanks and lead/acid batteries. These evidentiary samples were delivered to the DEP Laboratory in Tallahassee for processing.

© 2004-2009 Foster Folly News Chipley, Florida. All Rights Reserved. visitor 1,485,762 NGC

Florida Trend's Top Ten Stories of 2008

01/02/2009
Florida Trend

[Return to
Top](#)

Florida Trends Top Ten Business Stories for 2008:

1. The Economy See the 2008 Economic Yearbook (from April) and 'Florida's Economy, How Bad Is It?' - the lead story in November.
2. Green Business Trend See the Industry Outlook 2008: Shades of Green.
3. U.S. Sugar purchase From August 'What Really Motivated U.S. Sugar to Sell?' From November, 'Sugar Buyout Only Adds to Complexity of Everglades Restoration'
4. Phosphate Mining in Florida See the May lead story profiling the Mosaic Co. titled 'One Last Big Push for Phosphate Mining'
5. Cocaines Back From May, see 'Cocaine Is Back, Killing More Than Ever'
6. Local Government Investment Pool From February, see 'Floridas Run on the Bank'
7. Northwest Florida Airport See 'Airport Growing Pains' for a profile of the Panama City-Bay County International Airport.
8. Ethanol in Florida See 'Ethanol, Miracle or Mistake?' first published in July.
9. Charlie Crists Approach to Governing From August 'Crist Governs from the Gut'
10. State Government Adds Jobs in Recession See the article 'Government Keeps Hiring' first published in December.

For a review of the past 50 years of business in Florida, see:

Friday's Top Stories

STATEWIDE:

Changing the Course of Cuba Policy

One benefit of a new approach to Cuba may be an improvement in Washington's relations with other Latin American states. Cuban exiles in Florida should be encouraged to play a role in a new U.S. policy toward Cuba since their skills and capital can be critical in helping to regenerate the country. [Source: Financial Times editorial]

ORLANDO:

Central Floridas 25 Most Powerful People

Orlando Sentinel columnist Scott Maxwell spotlights the regions 25 most powerful people, as picked by a panelists from local nonprofit, religious, government and business communities. [Source: Orlando Sentinel]

JACKSONVILLE:

Community Lifeline

Local philanthropies, led by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund,

announced Tuesday they have raised \$1.3 million behind the scenes this month to launch the Community Safety Net Fund. It will allow nonprofit agencies to replenish their resources and provide emergency assistance to residents in need. [Source: Jacksonville Times Union]

U.S. Sugar Ends Lease for rock Mine in Quest to Sell Land to Florida

01/03/2009

Sun Sentinel - West Palm Beach Bureau
Reid, Andy

[Return to
Top](#)

U.S. Sugar ends lease for rock mine in quest to sell land to Florida
By Andy Reid | South Florida Sun-Sentinel
January 3, 2009

A proposed rock mine that stood in the way of Everglades restoration may have disappeared with the new year.

But the disputed mine already increased the value of land sought by the state, and that cost could remain with taxpayers for decades to come.

One of the key hurdles to U.S. Sugar Corp. completing its \$1.34 billion land sale to the state was the company ridding itself of a lease that allowed Florida Rock Industries to mine more than 7,000 acres in the area targeted for restoration.

U.S. Sugar said Friday that its lease with Florida Rock, a subsidiary of Vulcan Materials Corp., terminated if the company by Dec. 31 failed to get environmental approvals required for excavating.

"Our contract was very clear," U.S. Sugar Senior Vice President Robert Coker said.

Florida Rock filed suit against U.S. Sugar, trying to preserve its lease. Florida Rock argues U.S. Sugar used "subterfuge" to protect its deal with the state and refused to grant an expected extension to the Dec. 31 deadline.

The lawsuit contends U.S. Sugar stands to make \$142 million more in its proposed sale to the state thanks to appraisals that increased the value of the land Florida Rock intended to lease, because of mining potential.

Gov. Charlie Crist in June proposed buying U.S. Sugar land to reconnect water flows from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades.

The South Florida Water Management District, which leads Everglades restoration for the state, approved a contract on Dec. 16 to buy 180,000 acres from U.S. Sugar. One of the stipulations was ridding the property of the rock mining lease.

The deal is to close by September, if the district secures financing. U.S. Sugar pushed for mining approvals even as it was in talks with the state about selling the land.

In April, the Palm Beach County Commission approved the Lake Harbor Quarry proposed by Florida Rock on U.S. Sugar land south of the lake.

Commissioners didn't know about the proposed deal before the vote.

Even if mining didn't move forward, winning county approval for the digging greatly increased the value of that land, according to appraisers.

The value of U.S. Sugar's cane fields ranged from \$4,500 to \$7,500 per acre, said two appraisers hired by the district.

Values shot up to \$20,000 and \$27,500 per acre for more than 12,000 acres of U.S. Sugar land planned for rock mining.

While U.S. Sugar said it ended the Florida Rock lease because it was "extremely unlikely" the company could obtain approvals within a reasonable time, Coker said that doesn't diminish the value of land for rock mining — meaning the \$1.34 billion price for taxpayers is not going down.

Andy Reid can be reached at abreid@SunSentinel.com or 561-228-5504.

Copyright © 2009, South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Many risks still could sour deal to purchase U.S. Sugar

01/04/2009

Palm Beach Post

[Return to Top](#)

The South Florida Water Management District says it won't raise taxes to pay for the U.S. Sugar land deal. It also can back out of the deal if the \$1.34 billion price tag jeopardizes the district's core mission.

Figures delivered to the district governing board before its Dec. 16 vote to buy 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar land reveal just how difficult it will be to come up with the money, continue meeting the needs of the 16-county district and avoid a tax hike.

First of all there's the bad economy. Property values are falling. Just two years ago, the district projected that taxes would bring in \$900 million by 2018. Now that figure is a third lower, at \$600 million. That's under the district's "more likely" scenario, as opposed to its "optimistic" and "pessimistic" scenarios.

The downturn could effect core operations, which already cost \$490 million a year. Under the "more likely" scenario, the U.S. Sugar buyout would cost the district an additional \$108 million a year. By 2010, the "more likely" scenario would spell an \$88 million deficit that would be resolved only if the free fall in property values becomes a steady rise.

But that's not all.

The Legislature meets in special session Monday to cut \$2.3 billion from the current-year budget. It will have to find more cuts during its regular session. Florida Forever financing and Everglades restoration cash, always the subject of legislative horse-trading, could be on the chopping block. If the district loses state money, it will have to generate more from its dwindling local supply.

That could mean cuts in core programs, which include flood control, permitting, water-supply research and Everglades restoration.

The district's share of property taxes won't be estimated until June, with final figures due July 1. Finally, the district won't know until it goes to the bond market, sometime before the land sale closes in September, how high a rate it will have to pay to borrow money in this moribund economy. The "more likely" interest rate is 7 percent. Just to have the court-sanctioned right to go to the bond market, the district has to overcome a challenge from rival sugar grower Florida Crystals, which argues the land buy does not have a public purpose.

The district has a realistic option to raise more money so it can keep up with its core needs and buy the land. It's called a tax increase. But Gov. Crist, who has engineered the land deal, doesn't want to be tagged as a tax-and-spend governor. Still, the district's current tax rate, at 62 cents per \$1,000 of taxable value, has room to rise. An increase to just 80 cents, which the district can do without legislative approval, would add \$36 to the tax bill on a \$200,000 home and raise about \$150 million.

The district has given itself a financial reason to back out of its deal with U.S. Sugar. But it has to weigh all of its options, including a tax increase, before taking that consequential step.

