

SFWMD

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

Total Clips: 12

Headline	Date	Outlet	Reporter
 Could Pepper Ranch, U.S. Sugar land preservation deals go bust in 2009?	01/11/2009	Naples Daily News	Staats, Eric
THE ENVIRONMENT Obama seen as hope for Glades restoration	01/10/2009	Miami Herald	Morgan, Curtis
 Down on the Bayou	01/10/2009	Florida Travel & Life	The Everglades can be a difficult place to love.
 Everglades backers seek \$1 billion from U.S.	01/10/2009	Palm Beach Post - Online	PAUL QUINLAN
Fresh Hope for the Everglades	01/10/2009	New York Times	
 Congresswoman promises to jump-start Washington's commitment to Everglades restoration	01/10/2009	Palm Beach Post - Online	PAUL QUINLAN
Florida officials seek \$1-billion for Everglades	01/09/2009	St. Petersburg Times	Pittman, Craig
2008 great year for Lake O	01/09/2009	Caloosa Belle	Murphy, Charles
Florida Farm Bureau Opposes SFWMD Acquisition of U.S. Sugar Lands	01/09/2009	Caloosa Belle	
SFWMD Recognized for Everglades Restoration Efforts	01/09/2009	Caloosa Belle	
Governor Crist to Receive Everglades Legacy Award	01/09/2009	Foster Folly News	
 Environmental groups tout job creation	01/09/2009	South Florida Business Journal	

Could Pepper Ranch, U.S. Sugar land preservation deals go bust in 2009?

01/11/2009

Naples Daily News
Staats, Eric

[Return to
Top](#)

NAPLES Floridas giant plan to buy out U.S. Sugar land south of Lake Okeechobee for Everglades restoration faces big deadlines.

And an unfulfilled pledge to find a site for off-road riders is entering its fourth year.

Big conservation land deals, meet 2009, starting this week with the Pepper Ranch.

A last-minute hitch over adjacent landowner Barron Collier Investments Ltd.s claim of access rights torpedoed Conservation Colliers scheduled year-end closing of a \$32.5 million deal for the 2,500-acre ranch.

A new closing date hasnt been set, and attorneys are working to resolve the issue, they said last week.

The Conservation Collier advisory board is expected to discuss the matter Monday, and county commissioners are set to weigh in Tuesday. We hope its not a big issue, Barron Collier Cos. Chief Financial Officer Brad Boaz said Friday.

In a memo to county commissioners, County Attorney Jeff Klatzkow wrote that an option under discussion involves Barron Collier buying an access easement from Pepper Ranch owners, which would then reduce the purchase price to the county accordingly.

Because the ranch would be considered conservation lands in county hands, Barron Colliers access would have to be expressly limited with respect to type and frequency. Barron Collier would have to agree not to seek an expansion of the access rights, Klatzkow wrote.

Klatzkow lays out several other options, ranging from scrubbing the deal to proceeding with the closing and dealing with the access claim later.

The county already has closed on \$13.2 million in bank bonds to borrow money to pay for the ranch and incurred \$44,000 in fees and closing costs. The money plus \$1.5 million in interest is scheduled to be repaid through January 2013.

If the county decides not to buy Pepper Ranch, it could pay off the bond early to avoid future interest payments but would have to pay a \$397,000 pre-payment penalty, according to the memo.

The county also could use the bond proceeds to buy other land through the Conservation Collier program if it met arbitrage requirements and commissioners amended their financing resolution, according to the memo.

Besides that, the Pepper Ranch contract provides that the county pay \$100,000 to the ranch owners if the county doesnt close on the purchase.

Klatzkow writes in his memo that the county might have a claim for damages against ranch owners if the owners knew of the access claim but did not disclose it.

Barron Collier Investments Ltd. raised the issue in a Dec. 17 letter to Pepper Ranch co-owner Tom Taylor, also president of engineering firm Hole Montes.

The letter states that the company and ranch owners had discussed access through the Pepper Ranch over the last several years, but that an easement has not been formally recorded. Our hope is that we can quickly resolve this matter by the recording of an access easement without the need for Barron Collier to take any action to involve Collier County, Barron Collier official Lee Treadwell writes in the letter.

The road through the Pepper Ranch is Barron Colliers only practicable access to its lands west of Lake Trafford and is of vital importance, Treadwell writes. Attorney Richard Grant, representing Pepper Ranch owners Lake Trafford Ranch LLLP, said ranch owners thought the access question was a closed subject and notified the county of the Barron Collier letter the minute we got it. Taylor was out of town when the letter arrived at his office, delaying a notification to the county until days before Christmas, Grant said. Lake Trafford (Ranch LLLP) was very surprised to get this and clearly was not happy, Grant said. The timing could not have been worse. In his memo to county commissioners, Klatzkow wrote that county attorneys became aware of the access claim on or about Dec. 24. A closing was set for Dec. 29.

After a meeting early that morning among Klatzkow, Conservation Collier coordinator Alex Sulecki and ranch owners representatives, the county asked that Barron Collier sign a letter withdrawing their access claim as a precondition to the county closing on the purchase Dec. 31, Klatzkow writes in his memo.

Barron Collier and the ranch owners were unable to resolve the issue and all the parties agreed to seek county commissioners direction on how to proceed, Klatzkow writes.

Everglades Foundation CEO Kirk Fordham is hoping for smoother sailing this year for what could be the biggest conservation land deal in Floridas history. As 2008 wound down, the South Florida Water Management District governing board voted 4-3 to enter into a contract with U.S. Sugar Corp. to buy more than 180,000 acres of agricultural land for Everglades restoration for \$1.34 billion.

The deal faces a closing deadline of Sept. 25, subject to financing in a bond market on shaky ground as the year begins. We are fairly optimistic that this transaction will take place in 2009, Everglades Foundation CEO Kirk Fordham said.

Water managers could use the vast holdings to store water that now has to be discharged in polluted pulses down the Caloosahatchee River in Hendry and Lee counties and the St. Lucie River on Floridas east coast. A deal with sugar grower Florida Crystals to buy or swap land water managers dont need

for the restoration could lower the price to the state.

Small towns along Lake Okeechobee that depend on U.S. Sugar to survive are being left in the lurch by the buyout, opponents of the deal say.

Southwest Florida off-road and all-terrain vehicle riders know how they feel. But off-roaders wait for a place to ride could come to an end in 2009, said Clarence Tears, director of the Big Cypress Basin, the local arm of the water management district. Im pretty optimistic, Tears said. Attention has turned to a site owned by the water management district in Hendry County as a temporary riding site to meet the requirements of a 2003 deal.

Under that deal, Collier County agreed to turn over roads in Southern Golden Gate Estates for an environmental restoration project in return for \$20 million and 640 acres for riders by October 2005.

Water managers first eyed the muck disposal site for a dredging project at Lake Trafford, but a two-year drought delayed completion of the project and tests have found high arsenic levels and unstable soils at the site.

The search for a temporary site has been beset by environmental concerns, including the discovery of a crested caracara, an endangered bird, nesting at a site north of Immokalee near the Hendry-Collier line.

A permanent site still could be two to three years away, Tears said last week.

He said he hopes to complete the delayed dredging project in 2009 but then the muck disposal site will have to be readied for riders. That cant happen until the site has dried out and steps are taken to lower arsenic levels to state standards. Its like moving soup, Tears said.

THE ENVIRONMENT Obama seen as hope for Glades restoration

01/10/2009

Miami Herald

Morgan, Curtis

[Return to](#)
[Top](#)

Everglades projects are running years behind, cost estimates have ballooned by billions and political support has deeply eroded.

But leaders of the Everglades Coalition, having its 24th annual conference in Miami, are as hopeful as they've been in years.

The stagnant effort to revive the River of Grass is on the cusp of getting two massive and essential infusions: A lot more land in the form of sprawling sugar fields -- if Gov. Charlie Crist's landmark \$1.34 billion land buy holds together. And a lot more federal dollars -- if President-elect Barack Obama delivers on his campaign pledge.

The coalition gave Crist, keynote speaker Friday evening for the largest annual gathering of conservation groups in the state, an award for championing the purchase of 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar Corp. farms. But it's the second guy they're now really banking on.

Without federal money, which has trickled in under the George W. Bush administration, activists and South Florida water managers warn that already sluggish restoration work is likely to grind to a halt.

"We need it," said Shannon Estenoz, vice chairwoman of the South Florida Water Management District. "Badly."

Since the state-federal plan was approved by Congress in 2000, Florida has outspent its partner 6 to 1. Environmentalists have formally pitched 10 projects to the Obama transition team as candidates for economic stimulus money, including overhauls of the Tamiami Trail and C-111 and L-31 canals in Miami-Dade County -- with a target of \$300 million this year, \$550 million next year and \$3 billion overall.

"Now is the time for the federal partner to step up," said April Gromnicki Smith, a lobbyist for the National Audubon Society in Washington, D.C. "The state has done all it can do."

How much a new administration facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression can do is unclear. In two months of meetings with members of the Obama transition team, coalition leaders, managers of federal agencies and congressional staffers say they've heard no promises and no dollar figures.

And with thousands of potential projects, from highways to hospitals, under consideration, there will be intense competition for a cut of an Obama economic program that some observers expect will approach \$1 trillion.

Transition team members reached would not comment.

Still, activists remain optimistic, saying Everglades projects fit perfectly with Obama's agenda: "Green jobs" that are "shovel-ready," meaning they're planned, permitted and authorized by Congress.

"We're armed with everything we need except for the cash," said Susie Pereze Quinn, an aide to U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Melbourne, who has been pushing the Glades as a priority.

A recommendation that national environmental groups presented

in November to the transition team estimated that the first \$300 million in Glades projects would create nearly 3,000 jobs -- and that number could quadruple with more funding.

During a campaign swing through Florida in October, Obama pledged to make restoration "a top environmental priority" and to start paying the federal share of a project now expected to run as much as three times its original \$8 billion price tag.

There is a lot of catching up to do.

Last year, the U.S. Government Accountability Office calculated that Florida had spent \$2 billion on 68 restoration projects approved in 2000, six times more than the federal government. It also has spent \$4.8 billion on related Glades efforts, double the federal share.

And that doesn't include the \$1.34 billion U.S. Sugar land deal, a proposal that faces some uncertainty of its own in the form of legislative criticism, lawsuits and financing challenges.

Crist, after a 20-minute talk praising Estenoz, water board chairman Eric Buermann, environmental secretary Michael Sole and others for backing the purchase, said he always expected backlash.

"Whenever you try to do something great, there are more critics than supporters," he said.

After his speech, he called the criticism from some lawmakers and lobbyists for rival growers "heartbreaking."

But Crist said he didn't expect the Legislature to try to undermine the deal.

Copyright © 2009 The Miami Herald

Down on the Bayou

01/10/2009

Florida Travel & Life

The Everglades can be a difficult place to love.

[Return to
Top](#)

The Everglades has been logged, plucked and drained, yet it endures as home to the sublime and the wonderfully weird. On the 30th anniversary of the park's designation as a World Heritage Site, FT+L explores the mangrove-lined waterways and roadside stands to find out what keeps this area so beguiling ...

The Everglades can be a difficult place to love.

The heat can be stifling; the mud, copious; the mosquitoes, ravenous. Unlike the wilderness areas of the American West, the Everglades aren't equipped with punctual geysers and red-rock towers. It's also mind-bendingly vast: a 60- by 100-mile swath of flat wetland that stretches from Lake Okeechobee to Florida Bay. (Everglades National Park, which covers 1.5 million acres, protects just a fraction of this sprawling environment.) In some parts, the landscape is more land than water mile after mile of open saw-grass marsh punctuated by clusters of hardwood trees. In others, it's more water than land, a webbed network of shallow waterways where fishermen congregate to hook tarpon and snook.

Humans have spent the better part of the past 200 years trying to change the Everglades, dredging, draining and filling it in. In fact, a good portion of the Everglades today isn't really Everglades. It's an only-in-Florida amalgam of frontier towns, sugar-cane fields, Indian villages and roadside stands, the latter of which provide an outstanding opportunity to watch a grown man put his head between the jaws of an exasperated alligator.

Despite the scars, the Everglades, in its finest moments, provides magnificent serenity. On a bright afternoon in September, just days after Hurricane Ike had grazed the Florida coast, I find myself off Route 29, near Copeland, hip deep in swamp and coated in mosquito repellent, making my way into a tangled cypress forest. It is low season, and I am in the company of a kindly manager of a local B&B, whom I've roped into being an impromptu guide. He has brought me to the Fakahatchee, a state preserve known for harboring almost four dozen native orchid species, including the endangered ghost orchid, a translucent, white flower with dangling tendrils that resembles origami. Though we are only a few hundred feet away from the road, civilization seems far behind. We're enveloped by a watery, green riot of ferns, strangler figs and lily pads. A subtropical soundtrack of drips and splashes accompanies each deliberate step through liquid ground. Swamp walking is a downright meditative act; it cannot be rushed.

Unfortunately, I didn't see any rare orchids. (Trying to find blooming epiphytes in the wake of a hurricane is rather impractical.) But I did discover a sense of stillness, far away from twittering BlackBerries and the ping of e-mail. It's a tranquility I find throughout my week-long trip. 'The Everglades is my temple,' says Ray Becerra, a garrulous nature-lover who leads wildlife excursions at Billie Swamp Safari on the Seminole reservation at Big Cypress. He's now parked in a swamp buggy amid a cluster of cabbage palms, watching a late-summer rain bounce off the leaves. 'You come out here and can't help but feel spiritual.' It's a point of view echoed throughout the 'glades, a wilderness that still offers plenty of room for rugged introspection. 'The Everglades is for people who want to be with themselves,' explains national

park ranger Tony Terry as he surveys Flamingo station, the far-flung ranger outpost where he has lived and worked for 16 years. 'I love it here.'

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Everglades as a World Heritage Site. And though the area retains its outdoorsy charisma, it hasn't always been well treated by human hands. In the early days of the 20th century, overzealous plume hunters emptied avian rookeries for the sake of ladies' hats. In the 1920s, the construction of the Tamiami Trail dammed the natural flow of water that slowly rippled from the southern lip of Lake Okeechobee all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, nourishing more than a half-dozen ecosystems that served as home to creatures both perilous (black bear) and placid (manatees). In the past half-century, thousands of acres of industrial agriculture sugar and citrus have also had their impact, as have countless water management and drainage schemes, many of which flushed thousands of gallons of fresh water out to sea.

As a result, a large portion of the South Florida landscape, which once lay under a slow-moving sheet of water, has dried up. Mary Tigertail, a Seminole Indian who grew up in Big Cypress, recalls a time when things were different. 'The water was high when I was young because they didn't have all those canals,' she remembers. 'But now it's dry land, more brown stuff.'

Elected officials, biologists and environmental activists at both the state and federal level are spending a lot of time trying to figure out how to 'restore' the Everglades. One proposal is to demolish an 11-mile section of the Tamiami Trail and replace it with an elevated skyway that would allow for the free flow of water underneath. (The project is currently in need of funding.) In a separate action last summer, Gov. Charlie Crist announced a proposed \$1.8 billion buyout of nearly 200,000 acres of farmland belonging to the United States Sugar Corporation for the purpose of water management. The land, most of which lies south of Lake Okeechobee, is key to restoring the Everglades' historic flow.

But even if the buyout is approved (a process that will likely take years), it will not be a matter of just turning on the tap. Towns like Clewiston and Belle Glade stand in the way, as do the Seminole lands at Big Cypress. Any water traveling south will have to be regulated by a network of canals and locks. 'This would be a managed flow system,' says Dan Kimball, a hydrologist who has served as the superintendent of Everglades National Park for more than four years. 'It has to be. Fifty percent of the Everglades have been paved over.' The idea, however, is to re-create some semblance of the old north-to-south flow. And for the Everglades' more pristine areas to the south, which includes the national park, this is darn good news. Water is key to the survival of the hammocks, sloughs and rivers that feed and shelter the area's wildlife. And that wildlife is plentiful.

It's dawn and I'm at the national park's ranger station in Everglades City, pushing my kayak into the glassy water of Chokoloskee Bay. I'm headed into the Ten Thousand Islands to paddle around the patchwork of uninhabited mangrove clusters that make up Florida's southernmost fringe. Within 30 seconds, I've been treated to the sight of an alligator gliding nonchalantly across the bay. Within an hour, I've seen a manatee bobbing about one of the channels. By the end of the day, I've had a pair

of bottlenose dolphins swim playfully within arm's reach of my kayak. In between, there's the spectacle of a roseate spoonbill wading around in search of breakfast and an aningha drying its wings. This is what's most awe-inspiring about the Everglades: Despite man's best efforts to drain the place and turn it into something it's not, it has stubbornly held on. 'The Everglades is resilient,' says Kimball. 'It's imperiled, but resilient.'

The Everglades is a breathtaking blend of the resplendent and the preposterous. On the same stretch of road (Tamiami Trail), you'll find Clyde Butcher's photographic art gallery as well as Skunk Ape Research Headquarters, a stand devoted to cultivating the legend of Florida's very own Big Foot. One minute you can gaze upon photographs of Everglades landscapes. The next, you can stock up on shot glasses featuring an animal that curiously only the shop owner has ever seen. (The one available photo of the Skunk Ape reveals a creature that looks suspiciously like a guy in a Chewbacca outfit jogging through a marsh.)

Ultimately, Everglades culture is one that combines an I-can-wrestle-gators swagger with a sincere admiration of the great outdoors an ethos inherited from the hardy pioneers who settled this forbidding area in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the even harder Seminoles, who spent much of the 1800s successfully outwitting the U.S. Army in its swamps.

Butch Wilson is from Clewiston, the sugar-company town in the shadow of Lake Okeechobee, where the Everglades begin. He is the sixth generation of his family to live in Florida and the third generation to live within sight of Okeechobee. He grew up bass fishing and frog hunting and worked for U.S. Sugar for 32 years. He is now curator of the Clewiston Museum, a regional history gallery attached to the local chamber of commerce. The untamed nature of the landscape is something that remains close to Wilson's heart. 'That world came right up to us; you didn't have to go far to be in the Everglades the saw grass was in your backyard,' he recalls.

Gary Thompson, a third-generation charter fisherman from Everglades City, says the landscape is something he never grows tired of admiring during his regular excursions around the Ten Thousand Islands. 'How many people can say they've watched a gator build a nest? And then watched that gator lay its eggs? And then watched the baby gators pulled out by the mama? Well, I've seen it a dozen times. There's nothing else like it.'

For the area's inhabitants whether their families have been here for 10 years or 500 it's not just a general appreciation of the outdoors; it's an infatuation with the Everglades themselves. Mary Tigertail, who works at Billie Swamp Safari, loves the Everglades best during the summer when the downpours are torrential and the water is high around the clusters of cypress trees. This reminds her of her youth when her family lived in chickees and bathed in the bracing water of an outdoor hand pump. 'It's peace and quiet,' she says of life on the Big Cypress reservation. 'If you respect [the gators and snakes], they don't mess with you.' She adds with a chuckle: 'Besides, no alligator is ever going to rob you. In the city, though, you never know.'

Ranger Tony Terry has barely left the area in his 16 years here. 'I got into the park service for this park,' he says proudly. As part of the job, he has chased down poachers of endangered species and

detained fishermen smuggling drugs. He once helped relocate a gator that decided to take regular naps in campground bathrooms, much to the dismay of visitors. For Terry, the job is an opportunity to help look after an environment he holds in high esteem. On his days off, he doesn't leave the Everglades; he goes in deeper. 'I get into my canoe and go fishing.'

And that's where he finds himself, in the 'glades, where mangrove islets hover just above a watery horizon. 'This place has survived so much,' he says thoughtfully as he observes a crocodile bobbing gently under the ranger station's dock. 'It's survived [developer] Henry Flagler; it's survived road-building; it's survived the recent real-estate boom. The Everglades has a lot to say.' Listen closely. You may find that you can't help but love it too.

To help preserve the 'River of Grass,' join the Friends of the Everglades (everglades.org), the Save Our Everglades Trust (saveourevergladestrust.org) or the South Florida National Parks Trust (southfloridaparks.org).

Everglades backers seek \$1 billion from U.S.

01/10/2009

Palm Beach Post - Online

PAUL QUINLAN

[Return to
Top](#)

MIAMI The long-running fight to save the Everglades is a story of grand plans and elaborate proposals stymied by a lack of money. But Gov. Charlie Crist and environmentalists see potential to change that within President-elect Obama's economic recovery plan. Crist and environmentalists are pressing Obama to make room for \$1.16 billion in Everglades-related projects within the economic stimulus package proposed to create jobs and jump-start the nation's economy. 'We could get projects going and put people to work in 90 days,' said Shannon Estenoz, governing board member for the South Florida Water Management District.

Crist submitted a list of 10 Everglades projects that are part of a package Congress approved in 2000 but never funded, including rehabilitation to the Herbert Hoover Dike around Lake Okeechobee and projects along the Caloosahatchee River and Indian River Lagoon.

Crist said he previously spoke with Obama and met with former President Clinton in Miami on Friday about the plan and remains 'very hopeful.' 'Anybody who will listen, we'll talk to them about helping our beautiful Florida,' Crist said. Proponents say such funding would make good on the federal government's 2000 commitment to split Everglades restoration costs 50-50, a pledge on which Washington has fallen far short. 'This isn't going out, dreaming stuff up to do to make work for people,' said Eric Buermann, chairman of the water district board. 'This is stuff that needs to get done that's all tied up and waiting for money.' Crist was in Miami at the Everglades Coalition's annual conference to receive an award for his proposed \$1.34 billion purchase of U.S.

Sugar Corp.

The award comes six months after Crist announced his plan to buy the sugar giant and use its more than 180,000 acres of cane fields to restore the Everglades.

Last month, the South Florida Water Management District agreed to a modified, land-only deal for \$1.34 billion that's set to close in September.

Tentative plans call for re-creating the historic, flowing connection between Lake Okeechobee and the southern Everglades that was lost when 700,000 acres of swamp south of Lake Okeechobee were drained to create an empire of rich, muck-soil farmland.

Critics have blasted the purchase as a bailout for the sugar company.

But Crist brushed off concerns about the hefty price tag, saying they were outweighed by the historic opportunity to reclaim such a vast and critical piece of former Everglades.

Of the \$1.34 billion price, Crist said: 'For some that's hard for people to stomach, and I understand that. But I also understand that time moves, and how many times do you have the opportunity to seize the moment that we have before us now? Not very often.'

Fresh Hope for the Everglades

01/10/2009

New York Times

[Return to
Top](#)

People who care about the Everglades have had little to cheer about over the last eight years. An \$11 billion federal-state plan signed by President Bill Clinton in 2000 to rescue this once vibrant ecosystem has made almost no progress, not least because Washington has failed to keep its part of what was supposed to be a 50-50 deal.

Even so, those attending this week's annual meeting in Miami of the Everglades Coalition -- the group of activists and political leaders who have led the restoration fight for the last quarter-century -- found two very good reasons for optimism. A Florida state agency has approved Gov. Charlie Crist's audacious plan to buy and retire from production 180,000 acres of sugar cane fields near Lake Okeechobee. The \$1.34 billion deal would eliminate a major source of phosphorous pollution and provide room for huge reservoirs to store water that could later be released to the Everglades during the dry season -- a critical point in any ecosystem's lifecycle.

The bigger reason for optimism -- bigger than any single project or group of projects could ever be -- is the change in leadership in Washington. President-elect Barack Obama pledged to help the Everglades during his campaign, and his top adviser on environmental matters, Carol Browner, has long been a fierce

advocate for the Everglades.

Ms. Browner grew up in Florida and -- first as a state official, later as administrator of the federal Environmental Protection Agency -- she fought the sugar barons and developers whose thirst for water and land has impoverished Florida's natural environment. She also has experience dealing with the notoriously dysfunctional Army Corps of Engineers, which is charged with reconstructing the spider web of canals and levees that impede freshwater flows into the Everglades.

Everglades restoration is a project that does not get done unless somebody powerful wants it done. Former Vice President Al Gore wanted it done, as did the former interior secretary, Bruce Babbitt. Mr. Bush and his team did not champion it. As a result, Congress has contributed only about \$500 million to a project on which Florida, with far fewer resources, has contributed \$2.5 billion.

Ms. Browner has a lot on her mind these days, but reviving this noble initiative should remain on her radar. It deserves Washington's full support.

Copyright © 2009 The New York Times Company

Congresswoman promises to jump-start Washington's commitment to Everglades restoration

01/10/2009

Palm Beach Post - Online

PAUL QUINLAN

[Return to
Top](#)

MIAMI Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman-Schultz pledged to make jump-starting Washington's floundering commitment to restore the Everglades her 'personal responsibility' as she takes hold of Congressional purse strings for the second year in a row.

Wasserman-Schultz, D-Weston, whom House leaders tapped to return to her post as House Appropriations subcommittee chair, called on ending the 'cycle of delay' that has bogged down the \$11 billion Everglades restoration plan which the state and federal government committed to in 2000. 'Make no mistake, more funding is needed and quickly, because delay is not an option,' Wasserman-Schultz said in a speech Saturday at the Everglades Coalition's annual conference. 'I will not rest until we win,' she said. The speech added to the jubilant mood among Everglades advocates at this year's conference, who see President-elect Barack Obama's incoming administration, Democratic gains in Congress and the promise of a massive federal economic stimulus package as boons to the Everglades.

The stimulus, envisioned as a massive package of public works projects that could cost as much as \$775 billion, aims to restore millions of jobs lost across the economy while rehabilitating the nation's crumbling infrastructure. Gov. Charlie Crist has asked

Obama, whose campaign pledged to renew Washington's commitment to the Everglades, to devote about \$1.2 billion of any stimulus package to a list of 'shovel-ready' Everglades restoration projects that have languished for lack of funds.

Wasserman-Schultz echoed that commitment, saying the fixing the economy and the Everglades 'are not as mutually exclusive as you would think' and that Everglades restoration projects are 'exactly the kind of projects we need to revitalize our economy and get back to work.' Conference-goers are also cheering Obama's appointment of Carol Browner, a Miami native and Environmental Protection Agency head under the Clinton Administration, as Assistant to the President for Energy and Climate Change.

Crist received an award from the Coalition Friday night for leading the \$1.34 billion state buyout of 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar Corp. farmland to be used to restore flows from Lake Okeechobee south through the ecosystem.

Environmentalists cheer the buyout, set to close in September, as a landmark step forward in returning the Everglades to something resembling its natural state, even as critics have derided it as a bailout to a sugar giant suffering from slumping profits and massive debt.

Still, the buyout seemed a signal of the Everglades changing fortunes and shifted environmentalists' perceptions of U.S. Sugar from spoiler to partner in Everglades restoration. Wasserman-Schultz marveled at turnaround. 'Today we have an opportunity to purchase 181,000 acres for Everglades restoration - and they're willing to sell it to us,' she said. 'It's unbelievable.'

Florida officials seek \$1-billion for Everglades

01/09/2009

St. Petersburg Times
Pittman, Craig

[Return to
Top](#)

MIAMI — Florida officials are seeking more than \$1-billion for Everglades restoration from President-elect Obama's economic stimulus plan, contending they could create hundreds of jobs and start work within 90 days.

Republican Gov. Charlie Crist and Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., said Friday they have been talking to officials in the incoming administration about using the stimulus money to get the delayed restoration project back on track.

Crist said he will attend the Jan. 20 inauguration and hopes to talk to Obama about steering federal money to what has been called the biggest ecosystem restoration project in history.

"It's time to start turning some dirt," Nelson told a luncheon gathering of environmental activists, politicians, planners and regulators meeting in Miami.

Meanwhile, Crist's other initiative to revive the Everglades project, the proposed \$1.34-billion buyout of U.S. Sugar's 180,000 acres of land south of Lake Okeechobee, has run into potential trouble in Tallahassee. Opponents have hired high-powered lobbyists to try to talk the Legislature into halting the buyout, according to Eric Draper of Audubon of Florida.

"The halls (of Tallahassee) have been tense," agreed state Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Mike Sole. He expressed hope that opposition would die down once state officials can figure out how much of the land they really need and how much they can sell off or swap.

In comments to reporters at the annual conference of the Everglades Coalition on Friday, Crist said "it breaks my heart" that anyone would object to turning sugar land back into something that helps nature. In his speech to the conference he defended the purchase, noting "it's easy to attack things that are rather grand."

While the price tag is "hard for some to stomach, and I understand that," Crist said he sees it as his duty to pursue the purchase.

Crist and Nelson are focused on getting an infusion of federal money for the Everglades project. Nelson said he has already talked to Obama's new environmental adviser, Carol Browner, a Miami native and once the state's top environmental regulator.

The South Florida Water Management District has requested \$1.2-billion for the Everglades be made part of the economic stimulus package, which, if passed by Congress, could total \$775-billion over two years.

The money would go toward building a pair of reservoirs for holding water that is now flushed out to sea, as well as repairing the crack-prone dike around Lake Okeechobee, said Carol Wehle, executive director of the water district, the state agency in charge of Everglades restoration.

Those projects, if funded, would produce hundreds of new construction jobs in places like Hendry County, she said, and once the money is in hand construction could start in 90 days.

Wehle noted that Obama had emphasized his interest in using the stimulus money to promote alternative energy sources such as solar power and wind power. The Everglades restoration projects don't exactly fit that bill, she conceded.

"They may not be green energy, but they're green projects," she said.

[Last modified: Jan 09, 2009 10:28 PM]

2008 great year for Lake O

01/09/2009

Caloosa Belle
Murphy, Charles

[Return to
Top](#)

12-25-08

2008 great year for Lake O

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

Officials with the US Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District both agree, 2008 was a great year for Lake Okeechobee and environmental enhancement projects.

The County Coalition for Responsible Management of Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries, and the Lake Worth Lagoon heard from the heads of those two agencies Friday during their annual policy meeting at Okeechobee's Shrine Club.

Carol Wehle, Executive Director of the South Florida Water Management District gave an up-date on work done during 2008. Weather challenges, restoration opportunities, and the drought, were three of the main obstacles this year.

Ms. Wehle said the agency had to respond to a water shortage and a flood in the same year. They initiated water restrictions which for the most part were very well received.

"Water is more at the forefront of the public now than it was before, that's a positive," she noted. Ms. Wehle said they continued to improve the health of Lake Okeechobee with removal of invasive plants, additional tree planting, the removal of 5,000 discarded tires (50 tons) in the Lake, cultivated apple snails in new trees to provide snail kites with food, and treated torpedo grass.

"We don't necessarily want Lake Okeechobee to be nine feet, but if that's what Mother Nature provides, we try to make a positive difference," she said.

Tropical Storm Fay was the biggest storm of the year. It provided to be a good drill for the Districts Emergency Preparedness. Some areas of the district saw up to 15 inches of rain. Lake Okeechobee raised their level to close to 15.5 feet. The levels of the Lake have declined since then and the forecast for the dry season in 2009 is less rainfall than normal.

Another big project this year is the state's purchase of U.S. Sugar. Ms. Wehle said a lot of work has been done since June 30. She noted they have received a tremendous amount of input from the public on this purchase. Governing Board meetings are planned on December 15-16th to decide on the direction of this purchase.

Wehle was asked about the contamination present on US Sugar property. She noted the district conducted an exhaustive environmental study. The District has required US Sugar to spend the money for the cleanup. U.S. Sugar will pay the district 130 per-cent of the estimated cost to do the cleanup. She also defended the appraisals on the property.

Martin County Commissioner Sarah Heard said they must get the price right because they are using taxpayers' dollars and will

resell part of the property. She noted they must get the taxpayers money back. She said she wants to see more restoration projects. She noted Martin County gave the District \$27 million in taxpayer money and haven't seen any projects.

Federal dollars earmarked for stimulus projects could be used for permit ready projects in Martin and other counties.

Hendry County Commissioner Kevin McCarthy said there is no good plan for what they will use the land for. He said more projects need to be located north of the lake to clean up the water in the Lake. He noted money spent in the lake should mean fewer dollars spent south of the Lake. " We've got to protect the estuaries, but you do it with a plan. We are doing this backward."

" We are all going to be sorry down the road. The sugar industry is going away anyway," he added.

Palm Beach County Commissioner Jess Santamaria said he was concerned about the loss of jobs in the Glades due to the U.S. Sugar purchase. He noted he has not seen a plan to offset the loss of jobs.

"I do hope there is a real serious effort to look into this potential problem. The people of the Glades are already hungry for jobs," he noted. He said unemployment in the Glades and Hendry County are close to 20 percent.

Commissioner Donna Storter of Glades County agreed with Hendry County. She said they need to be cautious with this purchase. She also said she was disappointed the Governor's office and his staff have not provided a plan for the economic impacts.

The District has also moved ahead with more land purchases to protect the Everglades and provide more water storage. The District purchased 22,607 acres in 2008 at a cost of \$196 million. The district also completed designs for a C-43 reservoir, and Lakeside Ranch near Okeechobee.

They completed the Chandler Slough trailhead in Okeechobee and installed equestrian and hunter trailheads at Allapattah in western Martin County.

The district also completed the purchase of the Brady Ranch.

The district also constructed a weir to protect the S-65 E structure. It was completed two weeks before Fay hit. Wehle said if the work hadn't been done the structure would have failed and significant flooding would have occurred in the Kissimmee Valley.

Colonel Paul Grosskruger, head of the US Army Corps of Engineers office in Jacksonville, said his department continued to work on Lake Okeechobee, the Kissimmee River restoration and the Herbert Hoover dike in 2008.

He said they have focused on the worst sections of the dike first. A 22-mile section between Port Mayaca and Belle Glade is due to be repaired. 11 miles of the dike are under construction.

Colonel Grosskruger said the new lake regulation schedule has worked better and has helped prevent damaging releases of lake water into the estuaries.

The Department of Agriculture Rich Budell said budget cuts have impacted money available for best management practices for ranchers.

Dr. Paul Gray of the Audubon Society urged the Coalition to support more water storage projects north of Lake Okeechobee.

Lee County thanked the South Florida Water Management District for their work on the Caloosahatchee River protection plan.

Storter thanked the District and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for work done on the Pearce Canal in Buckhead Ridge.

Florida Farm Bureau Opposes SFWMD Acquisition of U.S. Sugar Lands

01/09/2009

Caloosa Belle

[Return to
Top](#)

01-08-09

Florida Farm Bureau opposes SFWMD acquisition of U.S. Sugar lands

Florida Farm Bureau President John L. Hoblick issued the following statement on Friday, Dec. 12: At its meeting on Dec. 10, the board of directors of the Florida Farm Bureau Federation (FFBF), the state's largest general interest agricultural organization, declared its opposition to the acquisition of U.S. Sugar Corp. lands by the South Florida Water Management District. The Federation firmly supports the rights of private property owners to acquire, use and sell property but opposes the unnecessary acquisition of more land by government.

The Federation is also concerned that the proposed purchase would drain funding and focus away from implementation of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and other initiatives in which much time and funding have been invested. The purchase of U.S. Sugar's land would likely cause thousands of acres of productive agricultural land to be removed from local tax rolls, leaving local communities struggling to make up for the loss of ad valorem tax revenues and endangering their future. Further, the plan for the SFWMD to purchase U.S. Sugar's land, then to lease it back to the company over a seven-year period at a bargain rate would create unfair competitive advantages over other South Florida agricultural producers.

SFWMD Recognized for Everglades Restoration Efforts

01/09/2009

Caloosa Belle

[Return to
Top](#)

01-08-09

SFWMD recognized for Everglades Restoration efforts
West Palm Beach, FL —The Arthur R. Marshall Foundation, an advocate for the restoration and preservation of the greater Everglades ecosystem, awarded one of its first Everglades Champion Awards to the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD).

"On behalf of the District's employees, we are honored to be the first organization chosen by the Marshall Foundation for this award," said Eric Buermann, chairman of the SFWMD Governing Board. " This distinction speaks to the District's ongoing commitment to protecting and restoring America's Everglades." As part of its 10th Anniversary Celebration, the Foundation created the Everglades Champion Awards to recognize organizations, elected officials and individuals for their environmental leadership efforts. The other inaugural winners are: Elected Official: Florida Governor Charlie Crist Individual: Mary Barley, vice chairwoman of the Everglades Foundation The Awards Selection Committee unanimously picked the District as the first organizational award winner because of its long-time support for the Foundation. The committee also cited the District's continuing leadership role in negotiating with United States Sugar Corporation to purchase more than 180,000 acres of land for Everglades restoration.

Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann and board members Melissa L. Meeker and Patrick J. Rooney Jr. accepted the award for the District at the Foundation's 4th Annual River of Grass Gala on Saturday night.

For more information on the Arthur R. Marshall Foundation and the River of Grass Gala, visit www.artmarshall.org.

Governor Crist to Receive Everglades Legacy Award

01/09/2009

Foster Folly News

[Return to Top](#)

Everglades Coalition recognizes Governor Crist's environmental leadership in restoration of River of Grass.
Friday January 9th, 2009

MIAMI – Governor Charlie Crist today will address the Everglades Coalition Conference in Miami. The conference is the organization's annual forum for discussion of Everglades conservation and restoration.

"We are closer than ever before to acquiring the land necessary to restore the natural flow of water from Lake Okeechobee, through Everglades National Park, and to the estuaries of Florida Bay," Governor Crist said. "Together with great organizations like the Everglades Coalition, we are establishing a legacy of protection for the Everglades, for Florida and for generations to come."

Co-chairs of the coalition Mark Perry, executive director of the

Florida Oceanographic Society, and Sara Fain, Everglades restoration program manager with the National Parks Conservation Association, will present Governor Crist with the Everglades Legacy Award. Never given before, the award recognizes Governor Crist for his leadership in environmental conservation, including his role in encouraging the South Florida Water Management District's recent approval of the historic land purchase deal, in which the district will buy 182,000 acres of land from United States Sugar Corporation.

"Governor Charlie Crist has demonstrated a clear commitment to restore the Everglades ecosystem," said Mark Perry, Everglades Coalition co-chair. "His bold actions will result in a true legacy for the Everglades, Florida and its people."

Governor Crist announced the goal to purchase this land during the 2008 Serve to Preserve Florida Summit on Global Climate in Miami. The Everglades land acquisition represents one of the largest environmental land acquisitions in the nation's history. The vast acreage is the "missing link" that the South Florida Water Management District needs to reconnect Lake Okeechobee and Everglades National Park and to protect Florida's coastal estuaries and better revive, restore and preserve one of America's greatest natural treasures – the Everglades. U.S. Sugar will remain on the land for a seven-year timeframe, subject to a final closing of the current contract.

In October 2008, Audubon of Florida, a member organization of the Everglades Coalition, presented Governor Crist with the "Champion of the Everglades" Award for his leadership in encouraging the South Florida Water Management District to negotiate for the purchase of land owned by the United States Sugar Corporation.

Highlights of Governor Crist's Leadership in Everglades Restoration

In 2008-09, the tightest budget year in Florida history, \$50 million has been dedicated for Everglades restoration to continue the state's partnership with the federal government to restore America's River of Grass. In addition, Governor Crist has signed legislation expanding for another decade Florida Forever, Florida's land conservation program and the largest conservation effort in the nation. Through Florida Forever and its predecessor, Preservation 2000, Florida has invested \$5 billion to place more than two million acres throughout the state in public ownership, conserving environmentally sensitive land, restoring water resources and preserving important cultural and historical sites.

In 2007, Governor Crist signed legislation that expands the restoration of the famed River of Grass to include Lake Okeechobee and the farthest northern reaches of the Everglades ecosystem, highlighting the connectivity of the entire ecosystem from the Kissimmee headwaters to the Florida Keys. This legislation requires the development of technical plans, schedules and provides dedicated funding to improve and protect the Northern Everglades, including Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee coastal estuaries. Also in 2007, the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund was extended for 10 years through 2020 and expands its purpose, underscoring Florida's

commitment to Everglades restoration.

Environmental groups tout job creation

01/09/2009

South Florida Business Journal

[Return to
Top](#)

Banks got TARP funds. Detroit automakers got billions of dollars in loans.

Now, some environmental groups are saying the Everglades restoration projects are worthy of funding to create jobs.

The message at the annual meeting of the Everglades Coalition, held in Miami on Friday, focused on the opportunity to provide jobs and economic stimulus by plowing ahead with Everglades projects.

Building reservoirs and stormwater treatment areas could produce more than 3,000 jobs in the next few years, according to the coalition. And it could all happen relatively quickly.

The coalition is calling on Congress and President-elect Barack Obama to include funding for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program and other projects in the 2009 economic stimulus package. Compared to what other people are asking for, its not a lot of money, said Sara Fain, co-chairwoman of the coalition, at a press conference. We could put a shovel in the ground right now on half a dozen projects. The coalition also is touting the benefits of the states planned \$1.34 billion buyout of 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar Corp.s cane fields. Fain and others acknowledge that the Everglades projects carry a big price tag for public funding during an economic crisis. But, that could be an opportunity, they say. Just remember what the CCC and WPA did during the Great Depression. They built things in national parks to create improvements and jobs, said John Adornato, regional director for the National Parks Conservation Association, referring to the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Work Projects Administration.

The groups also are gearing up to lobby the state Legislature for support of the U.S. Sugar buyout, which was first arranged by Gov. Charlie Crist, then approved by the South Florida Water Management District.

Eric Draper, policy director for Audubon of Florida, said the nonprofit watchdog group Everglades Trust is coordinating state lobbying efforts.

The Everglades restoration program was first authorized in 2000 with a price tag of \$8 billion, but Congress and the Bush administration failed to fund it as originally intended.

The coalition also called on Congress to fund another long-delayed project building bridges along the Tamiami Trail to allow more water to flow into the southern Everglades. Currently, the

highway from Miami to Floridas west coast acts like a dam,
blocking vital fresh water from reaching Florida Bay.

The coalition said its job numbers were compiled from U.S. Army
Corps of Engineers and water management district estimates.

