

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

Total Clips: 6

Headline	Date	Outlet	Reporter
Surprise departure from water board could shift voting margin for Crist's U.S. Sugar deal	04/23/2009	Palm Beach Post	Quinlan, Paul
State's buyout of U.S. Sugar makes Miami attorney's role on water board untenable	04/23/2009	Miami Herald	Morgan, Curtis
Sweet Deal? Everglades Restoration Hinges on Approved Land Deal	04/22/2009	Shallow Water Angler	
U.S. Sugar Completes Sugarcane Harvesting and Processing Season	04/21/2009	Science Letter	
Dockery Fighting to Keep Program to Buy Up Land	04/18/2009	Ledger, The	Rufty, Bill
Fort Myers Center Hosts Water Restoration Workshop	04/17/2009	Fort Myers Beach Bulletin	

Surprise departure from water board could shift voting margin for Crist's U. S. Sugar deal

04/23/2009
Palm Beach Post
Quinlan, Paul

[Return to Top](#)

WEST PALM BEACH — Gov. Charlie Crist's proposed half-billion-dollar land purchase from U.S. Sugar Corp. will not be affected by a recent resignation from the regional water board that must sign off on the deal.

Or will it?

Paul C. Huck Jr., a former top legal adviser to Crist, stepped down from the board of the South Florida Water Management District on March 23, citing his inability to vote on the purchase.

That leaves two open seats on the nine-member board of the district, the state agency that Crist expects to pay for the state's costliest conservation land deal ever.

Crist recently scaled back the purchase in light of the sagging economy - cutting the price from \$1.34 billion to \$533 million but setting it up for an uncertain vote by the board.

The deal's older, pricier version squeaked by with a 4-3 board vote in December, even though all but one board member was a Crist appointee. Huck, 42, recused himself because his law firm is suing U.S. Sugar on behalf of shareholders.

It helped that Crist had not filled the board's vacant seat representing the Glades, where farmers and local leaders despise the deal. That seat remains empty, nearly 10 months after ex-board member Malcolm "Bubba" Wade Jr., a U.S. Sugar senior vice president, stepped down.

"We've gone to the meetings, and we see the empty seat," said Clewiston Mayor Mali Chamness. "Not to have a voice on that board, I think you know, has brought concern from our community."

Appointing a Glades representative risked dooming the new U.S. Sugar deal in a 4-4 stalemate. Appointing two new board members might not.

Huck said Wednesday that nobody asked him to step down. He said he did so because he realized the debate over the deal would stretch months longer than originally expected.

"I think it's incumbent on me to give the governor the opportunity to have someone on the board who can participate in that fully," Huck said.

Like most of the current water board, Huck has close ties to Crist. In 2007, a then-newly elected Crist named Huck his general counsel. Huck held the job for more than a year.

Huck also attended Crist's December wedding. The Harvard Law School graduate previously worked for Crist in the attorney general's office, working his way up to become deputy.

Huck's work under Crist at that time has drawn criticism. Huck signed off on a \$70 surcharge that Carnival Cruise Lines wanted to charge its customers. Days later, Carnival delivered a \$250,000 donation to the state Republican Party.

Water board turnover

Gov. Charlie Crist must replace three former and current board members of the South Florida Water Management District. The board has nine seats:

Malcolm 'Bubba' Wade Jr.: The U.S. Sugar Corp. executive left the board in June, citing a potential conflict of interest after Crist announced the land deal.

Paul C. Huck Jr.: The Coral Gables lawyer quietly resigned March 23, months after he recused himself from all U.S. Sugar votes because of a conflict involving his law firm.

Melissa Meeker: The Stuart environmental consultant's term expired last month. Crist's office says she will continue to serve for now.

State's buyout of U.S. Sugar makes Miami attorney's role on water board untenable

04/23/2009

Miami Herald

Morgan, Curtis

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

State's buyout of U.S. Sugar makes Miami attorney's role on water board untenable

The governor's bid to buy land from U.S. Sugar made Paul Huck's role on the South Florida water board untenable.

BY CURTIS MORGAN
cmorgan@MiamiHerald.com

Two months after naming Miami attorney Paul Huck Jr. to an influential post with the South Florida Water Management District, Gov. Charlie Crist announced a landmark deal to buy out U.S. Sugar.

The governor's surprise announcement had one unintended consequence. It effectively ended Huck's tenure on the water board just as it started -- a reality Huck has made official by resigning. Previously, Huck served as Crist's general counsel.

With his law firm, Colson Hicks Eidson, representing U.S. Sugar employees in a suit alleging the company undervalued their shares, Huck was forced to recuse himself from debating a deal that has dominated water board business for 10 months. It is likely to remain an issue for the next year as well.

"The district has a lot of important things on its agenda, but it's the big issue now," Huck said. "The board needs somebody on there who can participate in full."

Huck's resignation, which he submitted last month, could give Crist an opening to shore up or at least maintain shaky board support for the deal. Huck previously served as Crist's general counsel.

The district has nine governing board members but only seven have been able to vote on the deal, narrowly approving an earlier \$1.34 billion version by a 4-3 vote.

Another board member, Malcolm "Bubba" Wade Jr., a U.S. Sugar vice president, resigned when the deal was announced last June.

Crist has not filled a seat reserved for Everglades agricultural interests -- much to the frustration of community leaders who oppose the deal.

Sterling Ivey, Crist's press secretary, said the governor's office was accepting applications for Huck's post and finishing background reviews for the Glades seat.

"Hopefully, that appointment will be out very soon, but probably not until after the [legislative] session," said Ivey. The session is scheduled to end May 1.

Sweet Deal? Everglades Restoration Hinges on Approved Land Deal

04/22/2009

Shallow Water Angler

[Return to
Top](#)

Since Florida Governor Charlie Crist announced plans to buy 186,000 acres of the 700,000-acre Everglades Agricultural Area south of Lake Okeechobee, there have been bumps in the negotiations, haggling over the cost of the land, and some doubts that the deal would actually get done.

Well, it just may be time to strike up the band thanks to an amended deal with landowner U.S. Sugar, passed by a majority of South Florida Water Management District members on December 16, 2008.

This conservation purchase, the biggest in Florida's history, would finally restore the heart of the Everglades by reconnecting Lake Okeechobee to the River of Grass by means of a flowway through original Everglades marsh artificially drained since the 1960s to grow sugar. Quite simply, it will put water back where it belongs, as nature intended.

The sale price is \$1.34 billion, and in fact is a counter-offer intended to provide more cost protections for taxpayers, who ultimately pay for the District's operations. The approved deal allows the District to back out before the planned September 2009 closing date if it is determined that financing costs end up requiring deep cuts to the District's day-to-day operating costs.

A prime benefit of a flowway is to eliminate or greatly reduce diversion of polluted fresh water to coastal estuaries in wet years.

For over half a century, the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee river estuaries have been treated as relief valves for pumped, tainted lake runoff during the wet season, degrading world-class

recreational fisheries and coastal economies. Many are now convinced that only a flowway south from the lake will save the coastal estuaries and restore the sheet flow of fresh water that historically reached Everglades National Park and Florida Bay.

Another benefit of the land purchase is the potential for increased public recreation in a publicly owned Everglades. Just imagine the benefit of increased access for duck hunting and freshwater fishing, birding, canoeing and kayaking, and just the opportunity for millions to again enjoy restored Everglades lands long held captive by private owners.

Though the price tag seems high to some, the returns are well worth it. (For more information and updates, visit www.riverscoalition.org or www.sfwmd.gov.)

U.S. Sugar Completes Sugarcane Harvesting and Processing Season

04/21/2009

Science Letter

[Return to
Top](#)

U.S. Sugar Corporation completed its annual sugarcane harvest operations today and the Clewiston Sugar Factory expects to grind out the last cane on Tuesday, bringing to a close the second season of its automated, consolidated sugar manufacturing facility (see also).

The Company harvested 162,725 acres of sugarcane, producing an estimated 5.65 million tons of cane. The Clewiston Refinery, which continues to operate year-round, will produce an estimated 12.35 million cwt. of refined sugar products.

"We have successfully harvested and ground our whole cane crop a little earlier than we anticipated, and the mill operated very well this year," said Robert Coker, senior vice president, public affairs.

Coker said that like the rest of the Florida industry, U.S. Sugar's cane crop was almost 700,000 tons smaller than expected due to the combined effects of drought, freeze and lack of irrigation water. The company's citrus crop is similarly tracking under estimate by the same percentage for the same reasons.

"With the Clewiston Refinery continuing to break production records, we intend to import sugar to feed the Refinery for the second consecutive year," Coker said.

"That's the advantage of our modern, automated and fully-integrated sugar operation," Coker said. "The low cost efficiency of our sugar manufacturing operations enables us to import raw sugar and refine it at a profit," Coker said.

Due to the Refinery's record pace last year, U.S. Sugar became the only Florida sugar processing facility to import sugar when it imported 46,000 tons of "estandar" sugar from Mexico to refine and sell.

Dockery Fighting to Keep Program to Buy Up Land

04/18/2009

Ledger, The

Rufty, Bill

[Return to
Top](#)

TALLAHASSEE | Sen. Paula Dockery is working to save Florida Forever, the state program to purchase and protect environmentally sensitive lands, and her efforts appeared to be succeeding Friday thanks to a little help from her friends.

The Senate Ways and Means Committee chaired by Sen. J.D. Alexander, R-Lake Wales, voted unanimously Friday to close a loophole used by some large corporations to avoid paying a tax on land transactions.

The preservation program gets money to buy land from bonds that are backed by a documentary stamp tax on such transactions. The tax is charged each time land is bought and sold in Florida, but with the slump in the Florida real estate market, the land transactions, and therefore the collection of documentary stamp money, are down drastically.

Dockery, a Lakeland Republican, was one of the creators of the Florida Forever program.

With the rest of the state budget also suffering, there was fear that the land preservation program was doomed.

But supportive senators found a way. They closed the loophole that developed two years ago that allowed larger corporations to become something called limited liability corporations when moving land from one owner to another. That allowed them to avoid paying the tax.

Recouping that money could add \$50 million to \$400 million to state coffers, a portion which would be used to sell bonds to provide \$50 million in the new state budget for Florida Forever.

That's a long way from better budget years, when the program had \$300 million, but it at least keeps the program alive, Alexander said.

"I wish we could do more, but this keeps us going, and when the (real estate) market gets better, we can get back on track," he said.

The new bill also would provide \$50 million for an Everglades purchase program.

Supporters assured some concerned committee members that the Everglades portion of the bill was to meet existing plans for buying land there and not a controversial purchase of sugar company land that is being pushed by Gov. Charlie Crist.

The bill also allows Miami Dade County to extend a tax it charges on documentary stamps to support its Affordable Housing program.

The bill now goes to the full Senate, with the backing of Senate President Jeff Atwater, who promised Dockery on the floor of the Senate that the program will be saved.

"We worked really hard, many people did, to keep Florida Forever going," Dockery said.

Similar legislation is in the House, but Senate supporters say it still has a bit of a loophole in it. Alexander said he is committed to saving Florida Forever in the final state budget.

[Ledger Political Editor Bill Rufty can be reached at bill.rufty@theledger.com or 863-802-7523.]

Fort Myers Center Hosts Water Restoration Workshop

04/17/2009

Fort Myers Beach Bulletin

[Return to
Top](#)

Fort Myers center hosts water restoration workshop
POSTED: April 14, 2009

The first phase of the River of Grass restoration project planning is under way with a series of Issues Workshops being conducted at various locations throughout the South Florida Water Management District.

The Phase 1 planning process will determine viable configurations for constructing a managed system of water storage and treatment to support ecosystem restoration efforts.

On April 16 and 17, workshops will be held at the Lower West Coast Service Center in Ft. Myers to solicit input from the public. Information generated through these planning workshops will be utilized by the governing board to support decision making related to the land acquisition and will provide the basis for more detailed future planning phases.

For the most up-to-date information on the acquisition, the SFWMD has a dedicated Web site at www.sfwmd.gov/riverofgrass. This site is a comprehensive repository for acquisition-related materials including: news releases, fact sheets, presentations, photos and videos, Q & A's, news, articles, resolutions, letters and proposals.

