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07/09/2009

Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers

ANDY REID Sun-Sentinel

Updated 01:54 p.m., July 9, 2009

South Florida water managers are calling out the Obama administration over long-stalled Everglades restoration and are threatening to scrap a state and federal partnership aimed at saving the famed River of Grass.

The South Florida Water Management District's board on Wednesday reacted angrily to another delay in a seven-year negotiation between the agency and federal government over a plan to split the multibillion-dollar costs for restoring water flows to the Everglades.

The district blames federal bureaucrats for new delays in a 50-50 cost sharing plan that district officials thought was close to completion last month.

Instead, the district learned that federal agencies loaded the proposed agreement with a slew of new changes that threaten to create added delays in getting money flowing to planned water storage and treatment areas.

The alternative could be ending the partnership, District Chairman Eric Buermann said.

"Nothing seems to have worked," he said. "We got the seven-year itch."

Though President Obama and congressional leaders have signaled support for Everglades restoration, federal agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers and the federal Office of Management and Budget continue to slow down the cost-sharing deal, district officials said.

"Some nameless, faceless person can stop the whole thing," said a "furious" district Board Member Shannon Estenoz. "The effect of it is to bring restoration to a halt. ... Do I need to chain myself to a tree?"

The time has come to discuss ending the partnership with the federal government and "get it done on our own," Board Member Michael Collins said.

"This is one of those line in the sand times," he said. "I no longer believe [federal officials] are going to come along."

The struggling Everglades restoration plan called for the state to buy land needed to restore the Everglades, with the federal government paying for the reservoirs and other structures needed to store, treat and direct water to what remains of the Everglades.

The state has purchased more than 200,000 acres and appropriated more than \$2 billion for Everglades restoration, but the federal government has been slow to deliver its share of the money to get projects built.

Still unresolved is an agreement for the federal government to credit the state for land expenses already incurred. Without that agreement, the district — which leads Everglades restoration for the state — may not be able to move forward with projects, district officials said. It also threatens the ability to use federal money Congress has approved for Everglades work.

While still trying to work out an agreement with the federal government, the district is embarking on an additional \$536 million land deal to buy another 73,000 acres. The U.S. Sugar Corp. farmland, which is not included in the original restoration deal, is expected to reshape plans for storing and cleaning water for the Everglades.

The Army Corps of Engineers plans to set up a meeting with federal officials and district representatives to try to address the concerns, corps liaison Kim Taplin said.

While applauding the Obama administration's environmental efforts so far, the latest Everglades restoration delay leaves Audubon of Florida "alarmed," group spokeswoman Jacquie Weisblum said.

"The environment can no longer endure these types of delays," she said.

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

Working to preserve, enhance water resources

07/08/2009

Miami Herald

MICHAEL W. SOLE

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On June 30, Gov. Charlie Crist signed into law Senate bill 2080, relating to water resources. Although the bill is not perfect, it provides many benefits to the environment and people of Florida.

The new law requires the governing boards of the state's five water-management districts to delegate authority to approve permits to their executive directors, but each of the water-management districts have been -- and will continue to be -- committed to open government and transparency.

Nothing in Senate bill 2080 diminishes, alters or limits the ability of the public from inquiring or obtaining information about a permit application or objecting to an application.

While much attention has focused on this permitting delegation, many other aspects of the bill offer greater protection for Florida's water resources that have gone largely unnoticed. These changes will help ensure the protection and conservation of Florida's water resources. They include:

- Revisions to Florida law regarding environmentally friendly landscaping. The use of Florida-friendly landscaping and other measures by homeowners is an effort to conserve water resources.
- Expansion of lands eligible to receive compensation to local governments. This provision puts into law a commitment of the South Florida Water Management District to ensure that smaller Glades communities are not adversely affected by the U.S. Sugar land acquisition.
- Streamlining government and saving taxpayer dollars; allowing meetings to be conducted via technology and authorizing the use of certain long-term permits.
- Providing fiscally sound policies that ensure the water-management districts do not overextend their financial commitments.

Every drop of water makes a difference to Florida's future, and we must continue to protect and wisely manage our water resources. There is no doubt that Florida's environment is better protected when all stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process.

As a result, I am committed to preserving the public process throughout this next year. I will continue working with the executive directors of the state's five water-management districts to ensure openness and transparency.

In addition, I look forward to working with the 2010 Legislature to develop a process that sustains transparency and stakeholder participation.

MICHAEL W. SOLE, secretary, Department of Environmental Protection, Tallahassee

Michael Sole comments on water-resources bill

07/08/2009

West Orange Times, The

Michael W. Sole

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Editor,

On June 30, Gov. Charlie Crist signed Senate Bill 2080, relating to water resources, into law. Although the bill is not perfect, it is my firm belief a belief that I expressed to the governor that this bill should be signed for the many benefits it provides to both the environment and the people of Florida.

Although the new law requires the governing boards of the states five water management districts to delegate authority to approve permits to their executive directors, each of the water management districts has been and will continue to be committed to open government and transparency.

The simple fact is nothing in Senate Bill 2080 diminishes, alters or limits the ability of the public from inquiring or obtaining information about a permit application or objecting to an application.

While much attention has focused on delegation, many other aspects of the bill offer greater protection for Floridas water resources that have gone largely unnoticed. However, these changes will help ensure the protection and conservation of Floridas water resources. They include:

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Florida Department of Environmental Protection

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07/08/2009

Sun Sentinel

Reid, Andy

PALM BEACH COUNTY - South Florida water managers are calling out the Obama administration over long-stalled Everglades restoration and are threatening to scrap a state and federal partnership aimed at saving the famed River of Grass.

The South Florida Water Management District's board on Wednesday reacted angrily to another delay in a seven-year negotiation between the agency and federal government over a plan to split the multibillion-dollar costs for restoring water flows to the Everglades.

The district blames federal bureaucrats for new delays in a 50-50 cost sharing plan that district officials thought was close to completion last month.

Instead, the district learned that federal agencies loaded the proposed agreement with a slew of new changes that threaten to create added delays in getting money flowing to planned water storage and treatment areas.

On Thursday, the board is expected to vote on a resolution laying out the concerns and appealing to President Obama's administration to get the deal he inherited done. The alternative could be ending the partnership, District Chairman Eric Buermann said.

"Nothing seems to have worked," he said. "We got the seven-year itch."

Though President Obama and congressional leaders have signaled support for Everglades restoration, federal agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers and the federal Office of Management and Budget continue to slow down the cost-sharing deal, district officials said.

"Some nameless, faceless person can stop the whole thing," said a "furious" District Board Member Shannon Estenoz. "The effect of it is to bring restoration to a halt. ... Do I need to chain myself to a tree?"

The time has come to discuss ending the partnership with the federal government and "get it done on our own," Board Member Michael Collins said.

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Florida Times-Union

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