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### Buermann: South Florida Needs the Everglades Deal

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08/12/2009  
Tallahassee Democrat  
Eric Buermann: South Florida needs the Everglades deal

There is no mistaking the groundswell of support for the South Florida Water Management District's purchase of land from U.S. Sugar Corp. for Everglades restoration. Leaders in national, state and local governments have publicly endorsed the acquisition, calling it, in the words of the secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, a "historic turning point for the largest watershed restoration project in the world."

Environmental groups, the watchdogs of restoration progress, have proclaimed this an important step forward, a "priceless, breathtaking opportunity." And newspapers from Miami to Pensacola, as well as others across the nation, agree with our view: that this is "fresh hope" — in the opinion of the New York Times — for protecting and restoring America's Everglades.

This makes the legal challenge by a small minority of interests who oppose the land acquisition a frustrating step along the path to progress. To be clear, their challenge does not oppose environmental improvements. It does not question the need for more water storage and treatment. Instead, the challengers are using the procedural step of court validation of the district's bonds for financing the acquisition as an attempt to simply block the deal.

Let me remind the naysayers where this land purchase will take us. Owning vast acreage south of Lake Okeechobee presents an unprecedented opportunity for water storage and treatment — the very backbone of restoration success. More reservoirs will mean fewer freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and their fragile estuaries. More treatment marshes will improve delivery of cleaner water to the water conservation areas and Everglades National Park. And the practice of "backpumping" water into Lake Okeechobee will become a thing of the past.

These environmental benefits are important to South Florida's future, and we stand on the brink of acquiring the land to achieve them. At no other time in recent history — including when the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) was developed in the 1990s — has acreage of this magnitude been made available to the public to serve our collective needs. Indeed, if such acreage had been available when CERP was being designed, the framework of projects for Everglades restoration would have turned out very differently.

In negotiating this exceptional purchase, we at the district have prudently modified the contract terms to reflect changing fiscal realities. We have identified key parcels for the initial acquisition. And we have moved steadily forward with a public planning process to put the best project ideas on the table. When a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity like this arises, it takes resolve to move forward, despite attempts by a vocal minority to throw down roadblocks. I can assure you that we see the vision. And we are resolved to build a healthier environment for South Florida. Now is the time to make this happen.

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## Can Florida Bay Be Saved Before It's Too Late?

08/11/2009

Finding Dulcinea

Sarah Amandolare

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The ecology of Florida Bay is imperiled, and saving it depends largely on the health of the Florida Everglades. How can the bay be revitalized?

With its unique ecosystem supporting a range of flora and fauna, and fishing and tourism industries worth millions, Florida Bay is undeniably valuable. Yet the ecosystem of the bay, which covers an area almost three times the size of New York City, has been so abused that experts are now fearful of a total collapse, according to Brian Skoloff of The Associated Press.

Florida Bay used to be fed a mix of freshwater from the once formidable Florida Everglades, and saltwater pouring in from the Gulf of Mexico, Skoloff reports. But overdevelopment in South Florida, to the detriment of the Glades, is severely impacting the bay by cutting off the freshwater supply.

Florida has long struggled to restore the flow of the Everglades while attempting to cut down on runoff-induced pollution from nearby "sugar farms, cow pastures and urban sprawl," according to Skoloff. As for how the Everglades might be restored, sugar farms could be the answer.

Florida is trying to purchase \$536 million worth of Everglades land from U.S. Sugar Corp, which would allow the state to halt sugar production and build reservoirs and water treatment and storage facilities, according to Skoloff. The purchase faces opposition, however, from the Miccosukee tribe, whose ancestral home is in the Everglades, and from Florida Crystals, which produces organic and natural sweeteners and is U.S. Sugar's main rival.

A ruling on the case is expected later this month, according to the AP, which reports that Florida Crystals and the Miccosukee tribe claim the purchase "is an irresponsible use of taxpayer dollars and could further delay Everglades restoration efforts."

An editorial in The Miami Herald asserts that two key decisions by the South Florida Water Management District governing board could "begin to stem the Bay's collapse." First, the Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must settle an agreement on how to divvy up costs and responsibilities regarding "projects to replumb the Everglades." Secondly, once the court's decision is made regarding the purchase of U.S. Sugar Corp land, the board must vote in favor of the \$536 million purchase.

According to The Tampa Tribune, federal dollars are finally making their way to Everglades restoration efforts. President Obama has allocated \$360 million to the restoration efforts this fiscal year, and intends to push for an additional \$278 million next year. Federal funding will go toward building "large filtering reservoirs needed to cleanse agricultural runoff that flows into the Everglades."

Time is of the essence, however. According to a 2008 report by the National Academy of Sciences, slow restoration progress was increasing the cost of the project, and waiting too long could mean deterioration of the Everglades "beyond repair," The Tampa Tribune reported.

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan(CERP) was approved in 2000 and its "more than 60 elements" were predicted to take at least 30 years to build and were expected to cost more than \$10 billion. According to the CERP official Web site, the plan's goal "is to capture fresh water that now flows unused to the ocean and the gulf and redirect it to areas that need it most." Environmental restoration projects will receive most of the water, with the rest going to "cities and farmers" in south Florida.

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