

# Editorial: Crist wades into a swamp of Everglades muck

## Governor's Everglades deal needs help; it's time he stops hogging the limelight

By TCPalm Staff

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The U.S. Sugar deal got a sour reception on Capitol Hill last month, when members of the Florida congressional delegation complained they were left in the dark by Gov. Charlie Crist.

While lawmakers said they do not intend to scuttle the 187,000-acre purchase, there are concerns that federal agencies may now feel free to pull back on their financial commitments to the Everglades.

Crist's bold initiative was, of course, well intended. But the governor's propensity for secretly negotiated deals threatens, once again, to blow up in his face.

To pull off the Everglades venture, Crist will need plenty of partners. In addition to the Army Corps of Engineers, which was inexplicably kept out of the decision-making loop, the complex plan will ultimately need cooperation from neighboring landholders. Chief among them is the Fanjul family of Palm Beach County.

The Fanjuls' Florida Crystals operation isn't going anywhere. Recently, the family's 155,000-acre sugar spread was the subject of a New York Times feature that touted the Fanjuls' growing stature as a producer of biomass energy. And the Fanjuls are looking to acquire more land.

Among the projects backed by Florida Crystals is an "inland intermodal center" to hold containers for South Florida ports. The venture could add 32,000 jobs.

Contrary to earlier reports, Everglades restoration hinges on obtaining additional tracts. The need for more acreage will almost certainly boost the initial \$1.75 billion price tag. Within hours of Crist's announcement, the cost estimate climbed to \$2.25 billion.

For either amount, U.S. Rep. Allen Boyd, D-Monticello, calculates that Crist could have bought out the entire U.S. Sugar company, paying every stockholder 1 1/2 to two times the value of their stock.

Crist has been eerily vague about how Florida — already strapped for cash — will fund this Everglades venture. Clearly, the state needs all the financial partners it can get, and it must keep the federal government and the Army Corps on board. Secrecy isn't the way to go.

Crist's deal-now-and-get-the-money-later approach is especially troubling because he's done it before. His compact to grant Las Vegas-style gaming rights to the Seminole tribe also was negotiated unilaterally and in secret. When the governor reneged on his pledge to take the agreement to the Legislature for ratification, lawmakers hauled the governor into the state Supreme Court, where he lost.

Florida cannot afford more legal battles over the Everglades. The state needs leadership, not political grandstanding, and Crist must get serious about coalition building if the restoration of our threatened national treasure is going to be effective and affordable.

**Florida congressmen commenting on Gov. Charlie Crist's handling of the U.S. Sugar deal:**

**ALCEE HASTINGS, D-Miramar:** "If you want me on the landing, then you ought to

have me on the takeoff."

**TIM MAHONEY, D-Palm Beach Gardens:** "It's a sad state of affairs when I'm a federal representative and the people in the community call me to try to reach (the state)."

**ADAM PUTNAM, R-Bartow:** "It's clear this deal is now facing the consequences of the secrecy with which it was negotiated and the lack of impacted parties being part of the negotiation."

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