

Growers' sugar bias won't help repair Everglades

Posted: 11:09 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 25, 2009

I believe that George Wedgworth's bias in favor of Big Sugar over the environment showed in his letter criticizing the state's purchase of U.S. Sugar land (" 'Environmentalists' hinder Everglades restoration," Nov. 2).

Mr. Wedgworth, president of the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida, says "... U.S. Sugar will continue to farm the land for the next 20 years." Not true. U.S. Sugar has only a seven-year option to farm. The South Florida Water Management District has the rest of the 20-year option at its discretion, not U.S. Sugar's.

Regarding the inland port, he touts the Okeelanta site owned by Florida Crystals. Adding 3,500 acres of land to it, to be rezoned industrial from agricultural for the inland port, would put the project directly in the way of the "River of Grass." It would hamper Everglades restoration, as would any further development (rock mining, etc.) in the Everglades Agricultural Area. Mr. Wedgworth needs to acknowledge that nearly the entire EAA used to be the "River of Grass" before it was drained and depleted for sugar farming. Other, less environmentally damaging and more economically advantageous sites are available for the inland port, even in Palm Beach County.

Florida needs to declare the EAA an "Area of Critical State Concern" to continue the restoration effort we've already spent so much money on. Environmentalists simply want enough land back to restore the "River of Grass" and to repair (we know we can't fully restore) the Everglades. Without a flow way through the EAA, the Everglades and Florida Bay never will get enough fresh water to revive and survive, much less be restored. Get out of the way, Mr. Wedgworth.

TED GUY

Stuart