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## Dueling polls, differing results on Everglades deal

12/22/2009

Sun Sentinel - Online

Reid, Andy

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Opponents and supporters of a pending half-billion-dollar Everglades land deal now have dueling poll results to use as ammunition in the political fight over the blockbuster taxpayer-funded transaction.

Gov. Charlie Crist proposes paying \$536 million to buy 73,000 acres from U.S. Sugar Corp. that would be used to build reservoirs and treatment areas to restore water flows to the Everglades. South Florida property taxes would pay for the deal.

On Monday, the pro-business lobbying group Associated Industries of Florida released a poll indicating that 86 percent of the 800 likely voters questioned objected to the land deal.

This comes after the Everglades Foundation in October released a poll showing that 75 percent of 600 likely voters asked supported the governor's proposed land deal.

Supporters hail the deal as a historic chance to acquire strategically located land that could help reconnect Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades.

Opponents, led by U.S. Sugar rival Florida Crystals, counter that the deal costs taxpayers' too much and diverts money needed for other stalled Everglades projects.

"Florida is facing another lean budget year with a \$2 billion-plus shortfall," Barney Bishop III, president and CEO of AIF, said in a release issued Monday. "In these tough economic times, this magnitude of government spending could be better utilized for job creation or other economic stimulus measures."

Environmental groups on Monday criticized AIF's poll, arguing that the series of questions posed to participants was intended to produce lopsided, negative results.

"In the future we hope ... that AIF spends its vast resources helping attract funds for Everglades restoration and the jobs that it supports instead of drafting biased and meaningless poll questions attacking a project key to South Florida's environment, economy and a priceless treasure of our nation," said Thom Rumberger, chairman of the

Everglades Trust.

Everglades Foundation CEO Kirk Fordham said: "The Everglades Foundation and true supporters of Everglades restoration understand that land acquisition is necessary to clean and store water to rehabilitate the Everglades ecosystem. This is based on sound scientific principles, not scripted questions designed to produce a favorable outcome."

The pending deal, first announced in June 2008, is in the midst of a legal challenge expected to end up before the Florida Supreme Court.

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## **Poll vs poll: Floridians love-hate Crist's Everglades land deal with U.S. Sugar**

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12/22/2009

Palm Beach Post - Online

Quinlan, Paul

Floridians are apparently bipolar, judging from the last two polls concerning Gov. Charlie Crist's proposed Everglades restoration land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp.

Or maybe, as Sen. John Kerry might say, Floridians were simply for it before they were against it. At the very least, these two polls prove there is truth to the old saw: you can get a poll to say anything.

Associated Industries of Florida released a poll today suggesting that Floridians overwhelmingly oppose Gov. Charlie Crist's proposed land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp, a \$536 million bid on 73,000 acres of farmland near Lake Okeechobee. The deal is set to close next year, assuming it survives imminent litigation in the state Supreme Court from opponents Florida Crystals Corp. and the Miccosukee Indians.

According to the AIF poll, 86 percent of Floridians would rather see the state use the money used to build reservoirs and pollution-cleaning projects rather than to buy more land. The AIF poll also says 75 percent oppose the basic terms of the deal.

That's hardly the answer the Everglades Foundation got when they asked Floridians about the deal in October. Their poll showed 75 percent were in support.

The release of the AIF poll today triggered a predictable fusillade of press releases damning the methodology and results. U.S. Sugar said the results were "bought and paid for" by Florida Crystals. The Everglades Foundation accused AIF of asking "scripted questions designed to produce a favorable outcome." The Everglades Trust said AIF had "chosen to attack this purchase under the guise of 'informing the public.'" Similar denunciations flowed the opposite direction following the release of the Everglades Foundation poll.

Consider the phraseology of each poll. AIF asked: Do you support or oppose the state government spending \$536 million of taxpayer's money to buy 73,000 acres of farmland from US Sugar Corporation in the Everglades and then leasing it back to the same company? (75 percent opposed)

The Everglades Foundation asked: Governor Charlie Crist recently announced that the South Florida Water Management District will be purchasing seventy-three thousand acres of land from U.S. Sugar for the purpose of restoring the Everglades. Do you support this action? (75 percent either 'strongly' or 'somewhat' support)

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## **Floridians' support for Everglades land purchase could go either way, depending on who you believe**

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12/22/2009

Real Deal - Online, The

The vast majority of Floridians feel the state's purchase of 73,000 acres of Everglades land from U.S. Sugar is a \$536 million mistake, according to a recent poll, in direct contrast to a similar poll released in October. The latest poll, commissioned by Associated Industries of Florida and conducted by Zogby International showed that 75 percent of Floridians oppose the deal. That's the mirror opposite of research commissioned by the Everglades Foundation, whose October poll conducted by Maitland-based Kitchens Group indicated 75 percent support for the big land buy. In a lengthy process, Gov. Charlie Crist announced the land purchase deal, which was approved by the board of the South Florida Water Management District in August. AIF is a non-profit that opposed the purchase, while the Everglades Foundation was one of its primary supporters. [SFBJ]

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## **Poll: Floridians dislike Crist's Glades-Sugar deal**

12/21/2009

St. Petersburg Times - Online

Caputo, Marc

Associated Industries of Florida has posted results of a new Zogby International poll showing that Floridians largely oppose Gov. Charlie Crist's decision to buy 73,000 acres of U.S. Sugar land for \$536 million and then lease it back to the company.

Only 11 percent support it, with 86 percent are opposed. More here

The results would seem to conflict with a Florida Everglades Foundation survey of a few months back. There, 75 percent of Floridians seemed to support the deal compared with 18 percent who didn't.

But there's a big difference in the polls. The questions themselves. Here's what AIF asked: Do you support or oppose the state government spending \$536 million of taxpayer's money to buy 73,000 acres of farmland from US Sugar Corporation in the Everglades and then leasing it back to the same company?

Here's what the Everglades Foundation asked: Gov. Charlie Crist recently announced that the South Florida Water Management District will be purchasing 73,000 acres of land from U.S. Sugar for the purpose of restoring the Everglades.

Also, the Everglades Foundation poll question followed a number of other survey questions about the importance of protecting wildlife, the economy and drinking-water supplies. So by the time respondents were asked if they generally supported "restoring the Everglades" the placement of the previous questions (as well as the question itself) could have made a difference.

As for the AIF poll, it has a glaring omission. It doesn't point out that the Sugar buyout money is from property taxes in the 16-county South Florida Water Management District. It won't be paid by taxpayers statewide -- that is those who live north, east and west of Orange County (the northern-most border of the district).

