

The Everglades need human help

Published Friday, March 26, 2010

I appreciate professor Jack Davis' historic perspective of the Everglades. However, regardless of how important a historical perspective is, it does not replace sound science. Although Davis accurately points out that nature can be a great healer, there are times when human damages to an ecosystem are so great that nature cannot heal itself. Strip mines are one such example. The Everglades are another.

Lake Okeechobee is so polluted from agricultural practices that releasing lake water into the remaining Everglades would destroy them. The Everglades Agricultural Area, where Gov. Charlie Crist is moving forward on purchasing more than 70,000 acres of land for restoration, has, in some places, lost almost six feet of soil. It is estimated that it would take hundreds of years for nature to fix Lake Okeechobee, and thousands of years to replace the soil losses in the EAA.

The Everglades ecosystem is also crisscrossed by more than 1,000 miles of canals. These canals create artificial waterways that never existed prior to human intervention. The so called Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie "rivers" are man-made. These canals take dirty Lake Okeechobee water and dump it into the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, causing black water dead zones, fish lesions, and the destruction of oyster populations. In the far southern part of the peninsula canals whisk water away from Florida Bay, causing it to be saltier than the ocean during certain times of the year.

Unfortunately, humans have caused such major damage to the Everglades that humans must now intervene to restore the Everglades. The EAA land purchase will allow for the construction of reservoirs that will store excess water that is now destroying our coastlines. This stored water will be cleansed through man-made marshes, known as storm water treatment areas, which will remove the pollutants from the water, so that it can be used to replenish the Everglades and Florida Bay.

In addition, the Everglades restoration plan will protect water supply. South Florida averages 60 inches of rain annually. Can anyone remember the last time drought conditions didn't occur during our winter months? That is ludicrous. Water authorities in places like Reno, Nev., or Phoenix, Ariz., must find it incomprehensible that we experience drought conditions with such an abundance of water! The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration plan protects our water resources for humans and the environment.

Can the Everglades fix themselves? No. Can humans help restore the system? Yes.

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