



Compiled by: South Florida Water Management District
(for internal use only)

Total Clips: 4

Headline	Date	Outlet	Reporter
Tea Parties Boiling Over Crist's U.S. Sugar Deal	07/14/2010	Sunshine State News	
Blog: South Florida water managers try to make a splash before Tea Party protest	07/14/2010	Sun Sentinel - Deerfield Beach Bureau	Reid, Andy
Jeff Greene Bashes Charlie Crist on U.S. Sugar Deal	07/12/2010	Sunshine State News	Lane Right
'Glades restoration: Acquisition of sugar land a must	07/11/2010	Sun Sentinel	Ray Judah

Tea Parties Boiling Over Crist's U.S. Sugar Deal

07/14/2010

Sunshine State News

[Return to Top](#)

Tea partiers and a Republican political action committee say they will descend on South Florida Water Management District headquarters today to protest the agency's purchase of U.S. Sugar property for Everglades restoration.

"We want to end the bailout," said Daniel Diaz, director of the Republican Majority Campaign PAC, based in Pompano Beach.

GOP and tea opposition to the U.S. Sugar-Everglades deal has galvanized since Gov. Charlie Crist -- the prime proponent of the land purchase -- bolted the Republican Party and took his U.S. Senate bid "independent."

Diaz said his group is part of a conservative coalition whose website -- EndCharliesBailout.com -- is helping to organize today's protest.

"On Thursday evening, the coalition successfully hosted a teleconference that included 54,000-plus calls made to citizens in Florida," Diaz related.

Some 200 protesters are expected to rally at the water district's West Palm Beach office at 11:30 a.m. A similar number could address the SFWMD board when it convenes a workshop at noon.

The district's plan to pay \$536 million for 73,000 acres of U.S. Sugar property has fractured Floridians environmentally, economically and politically.

Unveiled with much fanfare by Crist in 2008, the project was subsequently downsized from the original \$1.75 billion deal. The revised plan contains an option for 107,000 more acres.

The sale of the U.S. Sugar tracts purportedly will "save" the Everglades through the restoration of a southbound flow way. Critics, including Florida Crystals, a rival sugar concern with large land holdings of its own, have called the proposed purchase scientifically unproven. Others have deemed it a political payoff for one of Crist's biggest corporate supporters.

Wilkinson

Everett Wilkinson. Credit: Colin HackleyHide

Opponents have challenged the SFWMD's proposed method of financing, which involves a potential tax increase without a vote of the public. The funding vehicle -- bond-type instruments called certificates of participation -- is under review by the Florida Supreme Court.

Everett Wilkinson, state director of the South Florida Tea Party, said representatives from 15 tea groups and a dozen "patriot" organizations plan to be on hand Wednesday.

From his group's site -- sugarlanddeal.com -- Wilkinson said 4,000 e-mails have been sent to SFWMD board members and 1,800 petitions have been gathered during the past two weeks in opposition to the U.S. Sugar purchase.

The fight against the Big Sugar deal has, for the time being, unified feuding tea factions. The Orlando-based Florida Taxed Enough Already (TEA) Party, which has been sued by Wilkinson's group over appropriation of the name, has also declared its opposition to the water district's scheme.

"This is a bad deal, but we're minimizing Charlie's impact. We're against all kinds of bailouts. This one happens to be local," said Wilkinson, who is based in Palm Beach Gardens.

Rosa Durando, a longtime Palm Beach County activist, is no fan of the tea party movement. "They're ignorant, self-serving bastards," she fumes. Still, Durando agrees that the land deal is badly overpriced.

"It's highway robbery," she said.

Durando, who says she favors sound restoration projects for the endangered River of Grass, complains that the U.S. Sugar acquisition was "mishandled from the beginning."

"If (the water district) had come out with dimensions and paths for a flow way, they would have gotten more public support and less cynicism," Durando said. "The (state and district) agencies have not acted properly and the (SFWMD) board is totally ignorant. They're political appointments."

The nine-member board, all appointed by Crist, has taken heat from fiscal conservatives and even some environmentalists who fear that politics has polluted the latest effort to restore the Everglades.

Board chairman Eric Buermann stands by the purchase.

"Benefits of this acquisition to the Everglades and Florida's coastal estuaries are immense, providing us the opportunity to restore a unique and treasured ecosystem in ways not previously envisioned," Buermann said in a statement.

"By approving this revised acquisition, the board has balanced its duty to both the environment and the taxpayers, embracing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity while protecting the agency's mission responsibilities."

Blog: South Florida water managers try to make a splash before Tea Party protest

[Return to Top](#)

07/14/2010

Sun Sentinel - Deerfield Beach Bureau

Reid, Andy

Taking a pre-emptive PR strike against Wednesday's planned Tea Party protest, South Florida Water Management District officials this week have been trying to spread the word that they don't propose raising property taxes to pay for a half-billion-dollar land deal.

Tea Party groups from across South Florida are expected to converge on the water management district board meeting at noon Wednesday in West Palm Beach. The planned protest takes aim at a proposed \$536 million, 73,000-acre Everglades restoration land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp.

Gov. Charlie Crist for two years has been pushing for a deal that calls for using U.S. Sugar's land to build reservoirs and treatment areas to restore water flows to the Everglades.

The district plans to borrow the money to pay for the land deal, with South Florida property taxpayers paying off the long-term debt.

Opponents, led by U.S. Sugar rival Florida Crystals, contend that the deal costs taxpayers' too much money and could end up taking funding away from other overdue Everglades restoration projects. Tea Party leaders have dubbed the deal a bail out for U.S. Sugar.

Environmental groups and other supporters call the blockbuster deal a historic opportunity to acquire former Everglades land drained through the decades to make way for agriculture.

District officials have long maintained that they would not increase property tax rates to pay for the U.S. Sugar deal.

The current proposed \$1 billion district budget plan would keep the same tax rate that agency has had since 1998.

"The District consistently takes a fiscally conservative approach to budgeting, which enables the agency to meet its core functions — even during periods of economic downturns," district Budget Director Mike Smykowski said in statement released Monday.

The district's nine-member board, appointed by the governor, on Thursday will be asked to approve a maximum tax rate for the budget year that begins in October. Final approval of the district's tax rate and \$1 billion budget comes in September.

Jeff Greene Bashes Charlie Crist on U.S. Sugar Deal

07/12/2010

Sunshine State News

Lane Right

You wouldn't normally think Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Jeff Greene and ultra-conservative tea partiers would have a lot in common, but the billionaire Democrat is among the chorus of critics who believe Gov. Charlie Crist's land acquisition deal with U.S. Sugar Corporation is bad for Florida.

Greene had just completed an airboat tour of the Everglades Friday when he explained to Sunshine State News the "wrong way to do it, Charlie" summary of the governor's deal with U.S. Sugar.

Greene might have been in considerable agreement with the Republican Majority Campaign PAC (RMCPAC), a coalition member of the EndCharliesBailout.com organization, when the coalition hosted a massive conference call Thursday night that included 54,000-plus calls to Floridians. The goal? To energize tea partiers and to "attract, inform and mobilize citizens" to attend a protest on Wednesday at SFWMD headquarters of what they have branded Charlie Crist's bailout of U.S. Sugar Corporation.

Check back with Sunshine State News throughout the week for more coverage of the citizen protest.

Reach Lane Wright at lane@sunshinestatenews.com, or at (561) 247-1063.

[Return to Top](#)

'Glades restoration: Acquisition of sugar land a must

07/11/2010

Sun Sentinel

Ray Judah

[Return to Top](#)

Everglades restoration has been ongoing for nearly 20 years, and there is not one project among the billions of dollars worth of state and federal projects currently on books that will provide enough water storage and treatment to stop the devastating releases to our coastal estuaries every time it rains heavily or water levels in Lake Okeechobee rise before during or after hurricane season.

However, we now have an opportunity to change this untenable situation by moving forward with the proposed acquisition of U.S. Sugar's property south of Lake Okeechobee.

It's no secret that, over the last 50-plus years, water has been stored in Lake Okeechobee or drained from the system based on what is best for the Florida sugar industry. Sugar farmers are currently occupying and farming much of the historic flood plains of the Everglades, where water from Lake Okeechobee naturally overflowed and traveled south during wet times.

Sugar farmers south of Lake Okeechobee had refused to relinquish land needed to provide this vital storage and natural connectivity of the natural Everglades system — forcing engineers and scientists to rely on the politically expedient, but highly questionable, aquifer storage and recovery wells and rock pits to provide the massive storage needed to restore the system.

Have your say. Be sure to comment on this story below.

In the absence of adequate land for storage and treatment or the ability to send large amounts of water south to the Everglades, the current water regime will continue to devastate our coastal estuaries. Flushing polluted lake water to the estuaries also wastes large freshwater supplies that could be utilized by both residents and agriculture during drought.

The massive amounts of water that must be managed on a regular basis during South Florida's frequent wet cycles were not truly taken into consideration under previously anticipated restoration plans. Without willing sellers of land to build sufficient water storage south of Lake Okeechobee, there is literally no chance of meeting the current stringent water quality standards in the Everglades much less of meeting the far more stringent standards now being set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

U.S. Sugar has finally offered to sell 180,000 acres of land south of Lake Okeechobee that can be used to store and clean huge amounts of water. At long last, we can restore the historic southern flowway that will actually prevent further damage to the estuaries and send cleaner water south.

But, money-driven politics and powerful competing sugar interests threaten this critical opportunity by claiming this acquisition will bankrupt restoration. That is simply not true because this land will allow much more efficient restoration project planning and more natural and cost-efficient water storage and treatment options.

Most experts agree the system needs an additional million acre-feet of storage. Planned projects provide only a fraction of the storage and treatment needed to meet current water quality standards, much less the more stringent standards and deadlines that the federal courts and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are demanding.

From every economic, environmental, and scientific perspective, a combination of storage, treatment and flow in the Everglades Agricultural Area makes the most sense. Whether shallow water conveyances or interconnecting reservoirs and storm water treatment areas, the U.S. Sugar property provides the most efficient means of storing and treating water because:

Removing large sugarcane fields greatly reduces the fertilization and drainage in the EAA and increases water availability for people and the environment.

Water can be conveyed south through existing pumps that move agricultural water today, providing the desperately needed hydrological connection between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades.

Large land acquisition will enable sufficient water quality treatment marshes.

It will provide enough storage to reduce harmful discharges to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers.

Public safety concerns over dike integrity would be solved by releasing large amounts of water south when high-water levels threaten the dike.

Large problems require large solutions and completing this large land acquisition is the only solution to the problems facing not only the coastal estuaries but the entire Everglades ecosystem from Orlando to Florida Bay.

Ray Judah is a Lee County commissioner.

