

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

Total Clips: 16

Headline	Date	Outlet	Reporter
<u>Tribe seeks halt to Everglades/US Sugar deal</u>	08/12/2010	Associated Press (AP)	
<u>Miccosukee ask judge to stop scaled-down Everglades land deal up for vote Thursday</u>	08/12/2010	Sun Sentinel - Deerfield Beach Bureau	Reid, Andy
<u>Half empty or half full</u>	08/12/2010	TCPalm.com	Mike Goforth
<u>Latest Everglades deal better than nothing?</u>	08/12/2010	Orlando Sentinel	Victor Schaffner
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>The incredible shrinking sugar deal</u>	08/12/2010	Palm Beach Post	
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Scaled-down deal on Everglades land should be approved</u>	08/12/2010	St. Petersburg Times	
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Statement by the Rivers Coalition Defense Fund</u>	08/12/2010	TCPalm.com	
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Tribe seeks halt to Everglades/US Sugar deal</u>	08/12/2010	WZVN-TV	
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>McCollum gets a helping hand from Big Sugar</u>	08/12/2010	Orlando Sentinel	Aaron Deslatte
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Tribe asks judge to stop scaled-down Everglades land deal up for vote Thursday</u>	08/12/2010	Kansas City Star	
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Water managers to vote on Everglades/US Sugar deal</u>	08/12/2010	Associated Press (AP)	
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Scott Wades into Big Sugar Fight and Finds a Tea Party Swamp</u>	08/12/2010	Sunshine State News	Ward, Kenric
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Tea Party leader questions Scott role in protest by other tea party group</u>	08/12/2010	Palm Beach Post	George Bennett
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Editorial: Inclusion of Everglades National Park on 'in danger' list underscores need to restore this natural treasure</u>	08/12/2010	Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers	Editorial Board
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Local environmentalists, tea party group oppose U.S. Sugar land deal</u>	08/12/2010	Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers	Treadway, Tyler

[EDITORIAL: Everglades needs sugar](#)



[land: Without it, restoration stalls, and there are no other sellers.](#)

08/12/2010 Palm Beach Post

Tribe seeks halt to Everglades/US Sugar deal

08/12/2010

[Return to Top](#)

Associated Press (AP)

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. -- The Miccosukee Indians are seeking to stop the state from purchasing agricultural land in the Everglades, arguing the deal will stall other key restoration projects.

The tribe this week filed an emergency motion in federal court in Miami. They want a judge to stop the South Florida Water Management District from purchasing 26,791 acres for about \$197.4 million from U.S. Sugar.

The state says the land will be used to help restore the Everglades, suffering from years of dikes and diversions to make way for homes and farms.

The initial deal announced in 2008 was to pay \$1.75 billion to buy all of U.S. Sugar's 180,000 acres, but it has been scaled back, in part, because of the economy. The water district board was set to vote Thursday on the revised version.

Miccosukee ask judge to stop scaled-down Everglades land deal up for vote Thursday

[Return to Top](#)

08/12/2010

Sun Sentinel - Deerfield Beach Bureau

Reid, Andy

Miccosukee ask judge to stop scaled-down Everglades land deal up for vote Thursday

A new legal fight could swamp Gov. Charlie Crist's Everglades restoration land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp., even before the recently-scaled-down version comes up for a vote on Thursday.

The Miccosukee Tribe has called for a federal judge to stop the latest version of a deal, two years in the making, to buy farmland that would be used to help restore water flows between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades.

The South Florida Water Management District, which leads Everglades restoration, is scheduled to vote Thursday on the deal, which now calls for paying U.S. Sugar \$197 million for 26,800 acres. That's down from a previously scaled-back plan to spend \$536 million for 73,000 acres of U.S. Sugar land.

On Tuesday, the Miccosukee Tribe filed a request for an injunction from U.S. District Judge Federico Moreno, arguing that the district would be using money needed to restart an Everglades restoration reservoir project that ended up getting shelved by the U.S. Sugar deal.

As of 5 p.m. on Wednesday, the judge had not responded to the Miccosukee's call to stop the deal and the vote was still scheduled for Thursday.

"I don't know exactly how we are going to deal with that," said Eric Buermann, chairman of the district board, who supports the land deal. "The [proposed] injunction is a major development."

The Miccosukee Tribe, along with U.S. Sugar rival Florida Crystals, have been waging a legal fight against the land deal that they say costs taxpayers too much, unfairly enriches U.S. Sugar and takes money away from other needed Everglades restoration projects.

The district last week proposed a new version of the U.S. Sugar deal, which due to the struggling economy, has now been downsized three times since Crist in June 2008 first proposed paying \$1.75 billion to buy more than 180,000 acres along with all of U.S. Sugar's mills, rail lines and other facilities.

The new version of the deal expires if not approved by the district's governing board on Thursday, unless U.S. Sugar and the district agree to extend the time period.

The Miccosukee's court filing argues that the new version of the proposed land deal shows that the district has "elected to abandon" the reservoir project, despite Moreno's ruling in March calling for the district to resume work on the reservoir.

The Miccosukee argue in the filing that abandoning the reservoir and other long-planned Everglades projects in favor of "pie-in-the sky scenarios for Everglades restoration will result in the destruction of the Everglades and the Tribe's land in the interim."

Concerns about possible Native American remains on some of the property still included in the deal, along with pollution from years of agricultural use, has also raised concerns from opponents.

"This is still a sweetheart deal for the U.S. Sugar Corp.," Marianne Moran, a Tea Party supporter, told district board members at their meeting Wednesday. "Don't rush through this deal."

Environmental groups, district officials and other supporters of the U.S. Sugar deal argue that even the scaled-down version is a historic opportunity to acquire strategically located land once considered off limits to Everglades restoration.

"The only way to get this done is to buy some land," said John Marshall, of the Arthur R. Marshall Foundation, and environmental group that advocates for Everglades restoration. "Buy the land, whatever is affordable, now and buy more later."

The new plan calls for closing on the transaction by Oct. 11. It would come with a \$10 million "termination fee" if the district approves the new version on Thursday and then backs out before closing. A court injunction would be an allowable exception to the termination fee, according to the district.

Judge Moreno on March 31 ordered construction to resume on a partially built reservoir shelved in 2008 as the district tried to finalize the still-pending land deal with U.S. Sugar. The unfinished reservoir in western Palm Beach County already cost taxpayers almost \$280 million.

District officials have said that the unfinished reservoir could be converted to a stormwater treatment area if Everglades restoration plans are reshaped by the U.S. Sugar deal.

Buermann says it would save taxpayers' money in the long run to buy the U.S. Sugar land to help address water storage and treatment needs. He contends that getting the U.S. Sugar provides room to build reservoirs and treatment areas to store and treat water that would help replenish the Everglades, boost South Florida's drinking water supplies and address water pollution concerns.

"The state will have to acquire more land somewhere south of the lake," Buermann said. "It is my hope and belief that this acquisition will be part of that plan."

Andy Reid can be reached at abreid@SunSentinel.com or 561-228-5504

Compiled by: South Florida Water Management District (For Internal Use Only)

Half empty or half full

08/12/2010
TCPalm.com
Mike Goforth

[Return to Top](#)

The Everglades land deal is certainly not what most environmentalists want.

But, they are for the most part supporting the deal because it is a step in the right direction. Put another way, it's better than nothing.

But, maybe not. By making the purchase, the South Florida Water Management District won't have any money to do anything with the land for the time being. That could stall improvements even more.

There is also, however, federal pressure to do something so the federal government do its part financially.

This is a frustrating situation that continues to drag on.

I would like to see the lawsuit objecting to the Lake O discharges be settled in favor of environmentalists. I'd also like to see the EPA implement and enforce pollution limits for the runoff from Lake O. Businesses are fighting the new regulations.

The St. Lucie Estuary is being destroyed by pollution coming from Lake O. The current situation is untenable. If the land deal is approved, maybe there will be some momentum for proceeding more rapidly. But, I'm not holding my breath.

Latest Everglades deal better than nothing?

08/12/2010

Orlando Sentinel

Victor Schaffner

[Return to Top](#)

Charlie Crist's ambitious plan in 2008 to restore the Everglades, which the governor called as "monumental as the creation of our nation's first national park," now thrills almost no one.

And no wonder. The original plan would have had the state purchase 187,000 acres from U.S. Sugar for nearly \$2 billion— effectively putting the notorious polluter of the River of Grass out of business — and use the land to help clean and rejuvenate the expanse running south from Lake Okeechobee.

Now, thanks to the bottom falling out of the economy, court rulings that went against the state and a backlash from critics who lambasted the original and subsequent, retooled deals for being way overpriced, here's what we might be getting:

The purchase of just 28,000 acres — which no one believes will restore the massive swamp — for what appears to be an inflated price of \$197 million. Meanwhile, environmentalists concede that about 120,000 acres — not 28,000 — are needed to properly build reservoirs and marshes on U.S. Sugar's land that could store and clean water before sending it south to the Everglades.

Backers of this deal — there are some — say the state still has the option to buy more U.S. Sugar land over the next 10 years. But the momentum for these approaches to restore the Everglades came from Mr. Crist. Once he's out of office, it's highly doubtful that his successors will feel compelled to complete his vision.

What then will we be getting if the South Florida Water Management District approves this deal tomorrow? For nearly \$200 million, an 18,000-acre citrus patch, and a 9,000-acre cane parcel — drops in the Everglades' polluted bucket.

The deal's apologists say that's better than nothing. "We're at the mercy of the process," said Eric Buermann, chairman of the district's governing board. Joanne Davis with 1000 Friend of Florida said what matters is that the deal move forward, "even if it's baby steps." And Audubon of Florida's Eric Draper said "I like this deal because it's doable."

Because it's doable. But the district has no money to build anything on the land to restore it, and it only has "conceptual" plans for what it plans to do with the land. And that's from the District's Buermann.

Hardly a compelling argument to pay out \$197 million.

The incredible shrinking sugar deal

08/12/2010

[Return to Top](#)

Palm Beach Post

The cost of the U.S. Sugar deal has been whittled from the original \$1.75 billion to \$197 million. The acreage has gone from 188,000 acres to 26,800. The South Florida Water Management District Governing Board votes at 11 a.m. on Thursday Aug. 12 as to whether to accept the incredible shrinking sugar deal.

The deal may be smaller but it still gives the district the option to buy the rest of the U.S. Sugar land for \$7,400 an acre over the next three years. After that, the district would hold an option at an undesignated price for another seven years.

And it's still an historic opportunity. Sugar growers have been notoriously reluctant to part with land, until U.S. Sugar announced its willingness to sell in June 2008. Since then, opponents – particularly rival sugar grower Florida Crystals – have sued, delaying the deal, and the water management district's revenues have declined. The district refused to raise its tax rate. Instead, it kept shrinking the deal.

Why do it? Because the Everglades is dying. The unique South Florida marsh system doesn't have enough water during dry times – thus the need for more storage – and the water it does get has too much phosphorous – thus the need for more filter marshes to cleanse the water.

In fact, the state in 1994 promised to nearly eliminate phosphorous by 2006 but ditched the promise in 2003 and federal officials went along. Even though phosphorous levels have dropped, they are nowhere near what's needed to stop the Everglades' demise. It took a lawsuit to reverse the political decisions of the Jeb Bush era. U.S. District Judge Alan Gold has demanded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency deliver a plan to him by Sept. 3 to show how phosphorous levels can be reduced. In October, the head of the EPA will have to appear in his Miami courtroom to explain why she shouldn't be held in contempt for the agency's decade-long failures.

The 26,600 acres of U.S. Sugar land – a 17,723-acre Hendry County citrus grove and an 8,900-acre cane field near Pahokee — will figure into that plan. The grove will be converted into a filter marsh to treat water. The cane fields will be traded with land needed to expand an existing filter marsh.

But they won't help meet the district's continuing storage needs. Buying more U.S. Sugar land will. But for now, it's off the table. If the district rejects the deal, it could be off the table for good.

Scaled-down deal on Everglades land should be approved

08/12/2010

[Return to Top](#)

St. Petersburg Times

The land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp. that goes before the governing board of the South Florida Water Management District today is a far cry from the ambitious Everglades restoration plan that Gov. Charlie Crist unveiled in 2008. But the scaled-down deal would still put tens of thousands of acres into reviving Florida's River of Grass, and the district should salvage what it can with its declining tax revenues. The move would buy the state time to act on its larger vision after the economy recovers.

Under the more modest deal, the district would buy 26,800 acres of land for \$197 million — 17,900 acres of citrus in Hendry County and 8,900 acres of sugarcane in Palm Beach County. That is a small fraction of the original deal Crist first proposed two years ago, which called for buying approximately 180,000 acres for \$1.75 billion. But the state could not even afford a proposal floated last year to buy less than half the property. The current deal provides the district with several options over the next 10 years to purchase the remaining 153,000 acres.

Scaling back is disappointing, but it is time to be practical. The state has no way to buy a major chunk without increasing taxes or jeopardizing water-use projects in the 16 South Florida counties the district covers. The deal has sat on the table for two years, and it is time to make a decision. The district would pay cash for the land, thereby avoiding financing costs. By not issuing new debt, the district saves its borrowing power to finance the optioned land later, when financing could be cheaper.

The tracts the district would buy immediately in Hendry and Palm Beach counties are small pieces of what will be required to revive the southerly flow of water from Lake Okeechobee into the Everglades basin. But they are important starts. The land could be used for water storage and treatment, improving the water quality flowing into the basin. They would help the state comply with two ongoing federal lawsuits that seek to improve water standards in South Florida. And the land buy would build on the federal government's recently announced plan to preserve some 26,000 acres north of the lake, the headwaters of the basin.

One challenge in this slow economy and anti-government climate is keeping long-term, costly projects like Everglades restoration on track. The district spent the summer examining how to acquire the one element essential to restoration — land — without breaking the bank. This scaled-down deal is a pragmatic way forward. It sends a message that the Everglades must remain a priority. The district should approve the deal and then work with the federal government on the next phase of restoration.

Statement by the Rivers Coalition Defense Fund

08/12/2010

TCPalm.com

[Return to Top](#)

Statement by the Rivers Coalition Defense Fund on the proposed U.S. Sugar Corp. land to be considered Thursday by the South Florida Water Management District Board of Governors:

The Rivers Coalition is greatly disappointed that the state's newly reduced plan to purchase two small properties in the Everglades Agricultural Area will not provide a place for a critically needed flowway to relieve destructive discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries.

The new mini-purchase totally fails to follow the governor's original plan to buy out some 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar lands to establish a "missing link" that would move water from Lake Okeechobee south into the Everglades.

Instead, the latest downsize would be one-sixth of the beginning plan and would not move forward at all toward connecting the Glades and lake.

The Rivers Coalition calls on the South Florida Water Management District to drop the mini-plan and work at full speed toward a meaningful program to help the estuaries as well as the overall Everglades. A firm timetable for real progress must be set.

We may now expect to face massive additional degradations as our political system fails once again to consider the public good over private profits for a relative few.

The latest purchase plan does include options for possible additional acquisitions and projected small reductions of phosphorous pollution, but these factors are woefully inadequate.

River advocates maintain that a flowway south from Lake Okeechobee instead of releases east and west is the only practical remedy to stop the estuary destruction as well as provide for restoration of the natural river of grass.

Meanwhile, the Rivers Coalition Defense Fund's federal lawsuit contesting the "alien" discharges continues with the filing of final briefs before a three-judge panel in Washington. The suit maintains that the discharges constitute a "taking" of riparian rights from property owners.

Leon Abood, Karl Wickstrom, Kevin Henderson, Mark Perry, Ted Guy

Tribe seeks halt to Everglades/US Sugar deal

08/12/2010

WZVN-TV

[Return to Top](#)

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) - The Miccosukee Indians are seeking to stop the state from purchasing agricultural land in the Everglades, arguing the deal will stall other key restoration projects.

The tribe this week filed an emergency motion in federal court in Miami. They want a judge to stop the South Florida Water Management District from purchasing 26,791 acres for about \$197.4 million from U.S. Sugar.

The state says the land will be used to help restore the Everglades, suffering from years of dikes and diversions to make way for homes and farms.

The initial deal announced in 2008 was to pay \$1.75 billion to buy all of U.S. Sugar's 180,000 acres, but it has been scaled back, in part, because of the economy. The water district board was set to vote Thursday on the revised version.

Copyright 2010 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

McCollum gets a helping hand from Big Sugar

08/12/2010

Orlando Sentinel

Aaron Deslatte

When Attorney General Bill McCollum started getting hammered by a blitz of television ads last April touting Republican gubernatorial primary foe Rick Scott, a powerful Capitol player came to his rescue.

Big Sugar.

The Clewiston-based U.S. Sugar Co. has steered in excess of \$680,000 — and likely much more — into ads helping McCollum blunt the wave of television advertising that Scott has financed with a \$35 million infusion of his personal wealth.

The cash infusion comes at a time when U.S. Sugar is struggling to find allies in Tallahassee for a land deal worked out with outgoing Gov. Charlie Crist that once promised to pay \$2 billion to the company to "buy out" its sugar-production facilities and land around Lake Okeechobee for Everglades restoration.

"We support people we think are going to be good leaders for Florida," said U.S. Sugar Vice President Robert Coker, who said he has known McCollum for 30 years and that the land deal wasn't a motivating factor for the company's political giving.

"McCollum is a longtime public servant who does what he thinks is right."

With election season in full bloom, Florida voters are being bombarded with television ads and leaflets designed and paid for by groups with vague, good-government-sounding names such as the Florida First Initiative, Floridians for Truth in Politics and Floridians for Effective Leadership.

These so-called "electioneering communications organizations" — which can accept checks of unlimited amount and were re-authorized by an elections bill lawmakers passed last spring — have spent more than \$18 million on TV ads, polling, voter-targeting, phone banks and mailers through last week, state campaign-finance data show.

Scott's own Let's Get to Work group, financed with \$11 million of his family's money, accounts for more than \$9 million in spending so far — a huge sum that has necessitated McCollum's own reliance on big checks from corporate donors, his campaign says. Through this week, Scott's campaign has spent a total of \$34.1 million on ads, and McCollum has countered with \$12.9 million — with \$7.6 million coming from four separate stealthy groups.

Who's picking up the tab?

With few exceptions, they are interest groups with an ax to grind or agenda to pursue in Tallahassee. McCollum's biggest backers are the business lobby, Republican insiders in the Legislature and companies with business in the state capital.

[Return to Top](#)

Progress Energy, a utility pushing for approval to raise utility rates, has given \$100,000 to keep McCollum on the air.

Lawmakers such as House Speaker-designate Dean Cannon, R-Winter Park, and Senate President-designate Mike Haridopolos, R-Merritt Island, have pitched in another \$1.4 million from three separate political groups called the Florida Liberty Fund, Citizens Speaking Out and Freedom First. The biggest givers to those groups? Developers, health-care companies, insurers, Realtors and U.S. Sugar.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce contributed \$500,000 to McCollum's so-called 527 political group, called The Florida First Initiative. Another national 501(c)4 nonprofit called the League of American Voters, headed by actor and former U.S. Sen. Fred Thompson of Tennessee, bought \$926,000 in ads for McCollum last month.

But Big Sugar has been the biggest individual player.

The company steered \$350,000 to McCollum's attack-ad group, and another \$330,000 through a political arm of the Florida Chamber of Commerce last month, the "bulk of those resources" devoted to McCollum, Coker said. The chamber, in turn, bought \$883,000 in TV ads last week for McCollum, mainly in the Orlando, Tampa, Palm Beach and Jacksonville markets.

Coker said U.S. Sugar also helped finance a \$1.8 million ad buy earlier this summer, launched by a Virginia-based group called Alliance for America, although he wouldn't say how much help the company provided. Like the League of American Voters, the alliance avoids public disclosure of its donors by incorporating itself as a nonprofit and avoids Florida's new electioneering law by not spending money on ads within 30 days of the Aug. 24 primary.

Nine days before the alliance ads went up May 27, U.S. Sugar withdrew \$1 million from four other electioneering committees controlled by lawmakers, and Coker said "some of those resources" were redirected to help McCollum.

"We participate in politics in a fairly large way and have for a while," Coker said.

During the past two years, Republicans from around the state have lined up to blast the now-\$536 million public purchase of 73,000 acres of sugar-cane fields from U.S. Sugar as a sweetheart deal for the politically powerful company.

The deal has been repeatedly scaled back as real-estate markets deflated. The deal could be further reduced today. The South Florida Water Management District will consider whether to spend \$197 million for 26,800 acres, though the Miccosukee Tribe has asked a federal judge to block the vote. A number of GOP legislators have pushed to scrap it completely.

But McCollum has refused to criticize the deal and says he'll review its merits if he's elected governor.

"I have told people that when I become governor, we will see how things go and at this point in time we'll determine ... how I feel and whether or not the particular deal is right," McCollum said Tuesday.

But McCollum appears to have taken a keen interest in the deal this summer. In the past week, he has had three briefings, including a meeting Tuesday with water-management district executive director Carol Ann Wehle and a phone conversation last week with board chairman Eric Buermann.

Although the Attorney General's Office has no formal role in the land deal and it would not go before the Florida Cabinet, McCollum's office said Cabinet members routinely get briefings from the water-management district "because it works closely with [the Department of Environmental Protection] and these proposals could affect state owned lands."

McCollum says the money he has received from U.S. Sugar won't affect his actions if he wins the race.

"I do not allow political contributions — never have — to affect any of my decision making," McCollum said.

But Scott's campaign says the money shows McCollum would be beholden to interest groups.

"That kind of contribution makes it clear that [McCollum] has cut a secret deal to support U.S. Sugar's land deal regardless of its cost," said Scott spokeswoman Jennifer Baker.

Aaron Deslatte can be reached at adeslatte@orlandosentinel.com or 850-222-5564.

Tribe asks judge to stop scaled-down Everglades land deal up for vote Thursday

[Return to Top](#)

08/12/2010

Kansas City Star

A new legal fight could swamp Florida Gov. Charlie Crist's Everglades restoration land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp., even before the recently scaled-down version comes up for a vote on Thursday.

The Miccosukee tribe has called for a federal judge to stop the latest version of a deal, two years in the making, to buy farmland that would be used to help restore water flows between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades.

The South Florida Water Management District, which leads Everglades restoration, is scheduled to vote Thursday on the deal, which now calls for paying U.S. Sugar \$197 million for 26,800 acres. That's down from a previously scaled-back plan to spend \$536 million for 73,000 acres of U.S. Sugar land.

On Tuesday, the Miccosukee tribe filed a request for an injunction from U.S. District Judge Federico Moreno, arguing that the district would be using money needed to restart an Everglades restoration reservoir project that ended up getting shelved by the U.S. Sugar deal.

As of 5 p.m. Wednesday, the judge had not responded to the tribe's call to stop the deal and the vote was still scheduled for Thursday.

"I don't know exactly how we are going to deal with that," said Eric Buermann, chairman of the district board, who supports the land deal. "The (proposed) injunction is a major development."

The Miccosukee tribe and U.S. Sugar rival Florida Crystals have been waging a legal fight against the land deal that they say costs taxpayers too much, unfairly enriches U.S. Sugar and takes money away from other needed Everglades restoration projects.

The district last week proposed a new version of the U.S. Sugar deal, which due to the struggling economy has been downsized three times since Crist in June 2008 first proposed paying \$1.75 billion to buy more than 180,000 acres along with all of U.S. Sugar's mills, rail lines and other facilities.

The new version of the deal expires if not approved by the district's governing board on Thursday, unless U.S. Sugar and the district agree to extend the time period.

The tribe's court filing argues that the new version of the proposed land deal shows that the district has "elected to abandon" the reservoir project, despite Moreno's ruling in March calling for the district to resume work on the reservoir.

The Miccosukee tribe argues in the filing that abandoning the reservoir and other long-planned Everglades projects in favor of "pie-in-the sky scenarios for Everglades restoration will result in the destruction of the Everglades and the tribe's land in the interim."

Concerns about possible Native American remains on some of the property still included in the deal, along with pollution from years of agricultural use, also has raised concerns from opponents.

"This is still a sweetheart deal for the U.S. Sugar Corp.," Marianne Moran, a tea party supporter, told district board members at their meeting Wednesday. "Don't rush through this deal."

Environmental groups, district officials and other supporters of the U.S. Sugar deal argue that even the scaled-down version is a historic opportunity to acquire strategically located land once considered off-limits to Everglades restoration.

"The only way to get this done is to buy some land," said John Marshall, of the Arthur R. Marshall Foundation, an environmental group that advocates for Everglades restoration. "Buy the land, whatever is affordable, now, and buy more later."

The new plan calls for closing on the transaction by Oct. 11. It would come with a \$10 million "termination fee" if the district approves the new version on Thursday and then backs out before closing. A court injunction would be an

allowable exception to the termination fee, according to the district.

Aside from the requested injunction, the U.S. Sugar land deal still could be affected by an awaited ruling from the Florida Supreme Court over another legal challenge filed by Florida Crystals and the Miccosukee tribe.

"Delay is the enemy of restoration, and opponents of this acquisition have been throwing everything they can think of into the fray to try to stop this acquisition," U.S. Sugar spokeswoman Judy Sanchez said.

Judge Moreno on March 31 ordered construction to resume on a partially built reservoir shelved in 2008 as the district tried to finalize the still-pending land deal with U.S. Sugar. The unfinished reservoir in western Palm Beach County already cost taxpayers almost \$280 million.

District officials have said that the unfinished reservoir could be converted to a stormwater treatment area if Everglades restoration plans are reshaped by the U.S. Sugar deal.

Buermann said it would save taxpayers' money in the long run to buy the U.S. Sugar land to help address water storage and treatment needs. He contends that getting the U.S. Sugar land provides room to build reservoirs and treatment areas to store and treat water that would help replenish the Everglades, boost South Florida's drinking water supplies and address water pollution concerns.

"The state will have to acquire more land somewhere south of the lake," Buermann said. "It is my hope and belief that this acquisition will be part of that plan."

Water managers to vote on Everglades/US Sugar deal

08/12/2010

Associated Press (AP)

[Return to Top](#)

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. -- A historic effort to restore Florida's Everglades is set to go before water managers for a vote on whether to proceed with the deal.

The South Florida Water Management District board was set to vote Thursday on whether to approve a state plan to buy 26,791 acres for about \$197.4 million from U.S. Sugar. State officials say the land will be used to help restore the Everglades, suffering from years of dikes and diversions to make way for homes and farms.

Opponents claim the deal will only stall other key restoration projects. The Miccosukee Indians, who live in the Everglades, are asking a federal judge in Miami to stop the deal.

The original plan, announced in 2008, was to pay \$1.75 billion for all U.S. Sugar's 180,000 acres, but it has now been scaled back.

Scott Wades into Big Sugar Fight and Finds a Tea Party Swamp

08/12/2010

Sunshine State News

Ward, Kenric

[Return to Top](#)

Republican gubernatorial candidate Rick Scott will join Tea Party activists this morning (Thursday) in West Palm Beach to protest the so-called "Big Sugar Bailout" by the South Florida Water Management District.

SFWMD's board is considering a 28,000-acre, \$197 million purchase of U.S. Sugar lands as part of Everglades restoration. Opponents contend that the purchase is politically driven and environmentally questionable.

But Scott is entering a political swamp himself as various tea groups bicker over their respective agendas and authenticity.

South Florida Tea Party Director Everett Wilkinson said, "Tea Party activists have been protesting the U.S. Sugar land deal for several months. However, they question the recent appearance of non-Tea Party groups such as the Republican Majority PAC, 'The Tea Party In Action' and now Rick Scott."

Wilkinson, who supports GOP gubernatorial candidate Bill McCollum and who also calls himself chairman of the "Florida Tea Party," is currently suing yet another tea party, the Florida TEA (Taxed Enough Already) Party, over use of the tea name.

McCollum, by the way, has benefited from six-figure contributions by U.S. Sugar to campaign committees, which are airing TV ads on his behalf.

Tea Party leader questions Scott role in protest by other tea party group

[Return to Top](#)

08/12/2010

Palm Beach Post

George Bennett

Republican governor candidate Rick Scott announced late Wednesday that he'll be outside the South Florida Water Management District headquarters in West Palm Beach this morning with a group called Tea Party in Action to protest the proposed U.S. Sugar buyout.

That prompted an e-mail blast in the wee hours of this morning from South Florida Tea Party Chairman Everett Wilkinson questioning the Tea Party in Action group and Scott's involvement.

Wilkinson, it should be noted, is personally supporting Bill McCollum in the GOP governor primary, though he says his endorsement has nothing to do with the South Florida Tea Party.

Says Tea Party in Action leader Marianne Moran: "Everett Wilkinson spends a lot of time telling reporters who he says are 'real' tea party members as if he's the sole authority. He spends the rest of his time endorsing career politician Bill McCollum. Tea Party in Action wants to kill this corporate bailout of US Sugar. We welcome Rick Scott and any political candidates willing to join this cause."

Read Scott's announcement and Wilkinson's statement after the jump.....

From the Rick Scott campaign:

Rick Scott To Stand With TEA Party in Action Against the Big Sugar Bailout In West Palm Beach on Thursday, August 12

Fort Lauderdale – On Wednesday (sic), August 12th at 10:30 am, Rick Scott will stand with TEA Party activist in opposition to the Big Sugar bailout at the South Florida Water Management District in West Palm Beach

WHAT: Press Conference with the TEA Party in Action

WHEN: Thursday, August 12th, 2010 10:30 am

WHERE: South Florida Water Management District, 3301 Gun Club Road West Palm Beach, Florida 33406

From South Florida Tea Party Chairman Everett Wilkinson:

Immediate Release: Tea Party Activists Question Rick Scott's Actions and Demand the Release of Scott's Lawsuit

Deposition

(West Palm Beach) Rick Scott is scheduled to show up for a protest of US Sugar on Thursday with a group called "EndCharliesBailout.com." Tea party activists have recently heard of this group formed by Marianne Moran. Marianne Moran is the former clerk of Sen. Jeff Atwater who is responsible for setting up Sen. Atwater's website, BalanceOurBudgetNow.com.

Tea party activists have been protesting the US Sugar Land Deal for several months. However, they question the recent appearance of non-tea party groups such as the Republican Majority Pac, YAF, "The Tea Party In Action" and now Governor Candidate Rick Scott.

"This deal leaves a bad taste in both the mouths of taxpayers and environmentalists," said Everett Wilkinson, both the Chairman of the Florida Tea Party and South Florida Tea Party. However, tea party activists are quick to point out they are not connected to groups or candidates that are using this debate for political gain.

Wilkinson went on to say, "I find it funny that Rick Scott is coming down here and protesting the US Sugar Land Deal when Mr. Scott won't release a deposition on a fraud case he is involved in. Maybe we will be protesting him when the information [deposition] comes out."

Tea party activists have set up a website called "SugarLandDeal.com" to provide information and action items to the public.

Editorial: Inclusion of Everglades National Park on 'in danger' list underscores need to restore this natural treasure

[Return to Top](#)

08/12/2010

Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers

Editorial Board

Editorial: Inclusion of Everglades National Park on 'in danger' list underscores need to restore this natural treasure

Editorial board

TCPalm

Posted August 12, 2010 at 1 a.m.

Still worth the investment?

Nope. This is what Treasure Coast environmentalists who had supported the state's proposed acquisition of U.S. Sugar land for Everglades restoration are saying about the second, scaled-back proposal announced last week.

The governing board of the South Florida Water Management District is slated to meet Thursday to consider the revised plan, a far cry from the original 180,000-acre, \$1.75 billion proposal announced by Gov. Charlie Crist and district officials in June 2008.

The board will decide whether to acquire 26,800 acres for \$197 million — down from the already amended plan to buy 73,000 acres for \$536 million.

District officials should reject the new proposal, as suggested by the Rivers Coalition, a Treasure Coast environmentalist group fighting discharges from Lake Okeechobee that have devastated the ecosystem of the St. Lucie River. The proposal is nowhere near what is needed to recreate the flow-way into and through the Everglades, a plan that would stop the destructive discharges of polluted freshwater into the estuary. The district's continued failure to resolve the discharges is unconscionable. If nothing else, it must accelerate construction of additional reservoirs to clean and hold excess water from the lake.

If lovers of the Everglades have learned anything over the years, it's that restoring this vital natural treasure is a long-term, piecemeal operation, but the time has come for dramatic approaches as announced two years ago.

"The latest downsize would be one-sixth of the beginning plan and would not move forward at all toward connecting the Glades and lake," a Rivers Coalition release announced Wednesday. "The Rivers Coalition calls on the South Florida Water Management District to drop the mini-plan and work at full speed toward a meaningful program to help the estuaries as well as the overall Everglades. A firm timetable for real progress must be set.

"The latest purchase plan does include options for possible additional acquisitions and projected small reductions of phosphorous pollution, but these factors are woefully inadequate."

The latest proposal to purchase U.S. Sugar land comes at the same time the Everglades is making news on another front. After a three-year absence, Everglades National Park was returned recently to the United Nations list of most treasured but "in danger" sites.

The park was on the list from 1993 until 2007, when it was removed at the behest of the Bush administration.

The Obama administration, rightfully so, lobbied for — and gained — its return to the list.

For too long, the Everglades has been a political football, kicked hither and yon by politicians at all levels of government. This is disgraceful. Everglades National Park belongs on the "in danger" list thanks to decades of mismanagement by the water management district and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Hopefully, while it bears this dubious distinction, the park — and the area north of it — will attract both the attention and resources necessary to restore this national treasure.

Local environmentalists, tea party group oppose U.S. Sugar land deal

08/12/2010

Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers

Treadway, Tyler

[Return to Top](#)

In an example of politics making strange bedfellows, local environmentalists and a right-wing tea party group have come out against a proposed land purchase from U.S. Sugar Corp. to be voted on Thursday by the South Florida Water Management District Board of Governors.

The groups have vastly different reasons for opposing the plan to buy 26,800 acres for \$197 million for Everglades restoration:

The Rivers Coalition Defense Fund, a Treasure Coast environmentalist group, announced Wednesday it won't support the whittled-down Everglades land deal because they say it doesn't address stopping discharges of nutrient-rich fresh water from Lake Okeechobee into the brackish St. Lucie Estuary.

The Martin 912 Tea Party Committee says the plan costs too much.

In June 2008, Gov. Charlie Crist and water district officials first proposed a 180,000-acre, \$1.75 billion deal with U.S. Sugar to recreate the natural flow of water from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades. Last year, the proposal first was cut back to a deal to buy about 73,000 acres for \$536 million. The proposal before the district board Thursday calls for another reduction to 26,800 acres for \$197 million.

"As we look at it from an admittedly myopic view, this (latest) version of the land deal does nothing to help protect and preserve the St. Lucie River. Nothing," said Leon Abood, Rivers Coalition chairman.

Kevin Henderson, a Rivers Coalition Board member, called the new purchase plan "a fig (leaf) to cover politicians who promised real restoration and now will not deliver. It's a huge bonus for U.S. Sugar, which will sell two parcels of land they no longer want, and (the water district) does not need. This is a bad deal."

In a prepared statement, the coalition's legal defense fund members called on the water district board to "drop the mini-plan and work at full speed toward a meaningful program to help the estuaries as well as the overall Everglades."

Cindy Lucas of Sewall's Point, coordinator of the Martin County tea party group, called spending any money during the current economic atmosphere "foolish. We're broke. (The district board) should be cutting costs instead of spending any money."

Lucas said the district should hang onto the money earmarked for the purchase "in case there's an emergency when we really need it, like a hurricane. ... I'm not against the environment. I like turtles and that kind of stuff, but I care more about people. People come first, and people are suffering."

EDITORIAL: Everglades needs sugar land: Without it, restoration stalls, and there are no other sellers.

[Return to Top](#)

08/12/2010

Palm Beach Post

The U.S. Sugar land deal, whittled to one-seventh of its original size, deserves the support today of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board. But it no longer is the game-changing deal once touted by environmentalists and Gov. Crist.

The new deal to buy 26,800 acres for \$197 million, however, makes sense for two reasons. It would provide land to satisfy a 2008 federal court ruling that the federal and state governments have failed to clean water entering the Everglades, breaking a promise in the 1994 Everglades Forever Act. It also would give the water district a chance, when the economy improves, to buy more of U.S. Sugar's 180,000 acres in Palm Beach and Hendry counties. That land in the rich farming belt bordering Lake Okeechobee will be needed to store water for the Everglades. And sellers in that area don't come along often.

Unfortunately, this sale - the fourth in a succession of ever-smaller deals from the \$1.75 billion proposal to buy all of U.S. Sugar's assets - requires the district to apply a single price of \$7,400 per acre to all of the land, including the less-valuable 17,723-acre Southern Gardens grove in Hendry County. The result: The district would pay \$35 million over appraised value for the grove.

But the district argues it would pay that same \$7,400 per acre for sugar cane land east of Pahokee that could be worth as much as \$12,000 per acre, a saving of \$40 million. The district would retain its option to pay \$7,400 per acre for an added 153,000 acres over three years, and at market rate over the following seven years.

That 8,900-acre cane field is far from the ideal site for water storage: 25,000 acres of U.S. Sugar land south of Lake Okeechobee. The district chose the 8,900 acres because of that court ruling, and U.S. Sugar, as spokeswoman Judy Sanchez said, would not sell its best land knowing that the district "might not be buying the rest of the land."

The option to buy more land remains important. District tax revenues have been shrinking because of falling property values and the board's refusal to increase the tax rate. A new governor could mean a new board and that could mean no land buys at all.

The problem from U.S. District Judge Alan Gold's ruling dates to the 2003 decision by a previous district board and the Legislature to delay until 2016 the deadline for the district to meet water quality standards for runoff entering the Everglades. While the water is much cleaner, it remains polluted.

In 2008, Judge Gold exposed a devious and complicated effort to get around the old December 2006 deadline and eliminate real standards. It was a calculated political favor to farmers decried by this newspaper and environmentalists. In April, Judge Gold condemned the half-hearted federal response to his 2008 order. He gave the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency until September to draft a real plan and ordered the EPA secretary to appear in his Miami courtroom on Oct. 7 to show why she should not be held in contempt.

This small purchase won't be enough to make Judge Gold or the public happy. Because of what happened in 2003, Florida must shift for a while from water quantity for the Everglades to water quality. But as Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann noted, correctly, restoring the Everglades means buying land. This land is available, and the water district should buy it.

- Joel Engelhardt,
for The Palm Beach Post Editorial Board

