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## LETTER: Return on Saving Everglades \$90 Billion

08/28/2010

Palm Beach Post

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Restoration of the Everglades is at a critical point. In a pending Florida Supreme Court appeal, litigants have argued against the purchase of the U.S. Sugar Corp. land on economic grounds. The newest deal calls for buying 26,800 acres that could be used to build reservoirs and treatment areas to restore water flows from Lake Okeechobee to the southern Everglades.

The litigants' main argument states that the high cost of the South Florida Water Management District issuing \$200 million in bonds does not serve the "public good." Litigants imply that restoring the land bought with bonds will cost still more and take away from other Everglades restoration projects. Those critics, who argue "sticker shock" from the price, have failed to consider the economic benefits that restoration will bring, or claim that these benefits are intangible or incalculable. However, there are objective, scientific methods of valuing the services provided to nature and society by restored ecosystems.

While the cost of buying the land is evident, the greater benefits from the land are less apparent. To assess these benefits, we have quantified the economic value of the services provided by ecosystems: flood protection, water supply, recreation, etc. We have used and modified the methodology for "valuing ecosystem services," first quantified by a group of international economists and biologists in 1997 and recommended for application by the National Academy of Sciences.

Our point is that natural systems and restoration provide economic value. Furthermore, we must recognize that the natural ecosystem has tangible economic value. We argue that it can be evaluated as an investment, and we calculated the return on the purchase of the U.S. Sugar land. Our assessment compared the costs to the ecological and economic benefits of the proposed plans for Everglades restoration. Costs include the purchase of land, building necessary reservoirs and storm water treatment areas, and ongoing operations and maintenance. Benefits include flood control, water regulation and the revitalization of the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries, which have been damaged by harmful discharges from Lake Okeechobee.

Investment in any of the proposed restoration plans would result in a substantial return within 10 years and contribute up to \$90 billion to the economy over 40 years. What the investors and taxpayers need to remember is that

restoration is not only a "feel good" environmental project, but also an economic investment with a huge return. With a benefit-to-cost ratio of at least 6 to 1 there is an astounding "sticker benefit" associated with the purchase and restoration of this land.

ANGELIQUE GIRAUD

ED PRITCHARD

DYLAN SCOTT

ADRIENNE SMITH

JIM WALLY

2010 summer interns

Arthur R. Marshall Foundation & Florida Environmental Institute, Inc.

West Palm Beach

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## OP-ED: Reduced U.S. Sugar land buy was wise move in tough times

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08/28/2010

News-Press

Eric Buermann

Much has changed in the two years since Gov. Charlie Crist stood on the edge of America's Everglades and called upon the South Florida Water Management District to negotiate a historic land acquisition with U.S. Sugar Corp. that would help restore this national treasure.

Since 2008, the economic impacts that have been felt across the nation have led to a decline of \$150 million in district revenues.

Legal challenges have drawn the acquisition out in the courts. And recent federal court rulings have changed the landscape of restoration planning.

In the midst of change, what has remained constant is the need for more land south of Lake Okeechobee — whether through this acquisition or from another willing seller — to achieve water quality improvements and restoration of the Everglades and its watersheds.

A second amended acquisition, recently approved by the SFWMD Governing Board and U.S. Sugar's Board of Directors, keeps that dream alive to provide near-term benefits for South Florida's ecosystems while addressing the new fiscal constraints and legal obligations that we face.

The modified contract calls for the district to utilize \$197 million in cash on-hand — already reserved for land acquisition and restoration projects — to initially purchase approximately 26,800 acres of land. The agency retains options over the next 10 years to acquire the corporation's remaining 153,200 acres should economic conditions allow. In crafting this new agreement, the district carefully evaluated its existing requirements and mandates to identify acreage that could significantly enhance restoration and water quality efforts already under way for key basins.

The acquisition consists of two strategically located parcels. One, lying just west of two of the agency's water treatment wetlands, is 17,900 acres of citrus land in Hendry County. This site will be used for projects to improve water quality in the C-139 agricultural basin, where phosphorus levels historically have been high. The second parcel is 8,900 acres of sugar cane land in Palm Beach County. This will be used to enhance existing treatment wetlands to help meet federally mandated water quality targets in the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.

Along with achieving some important water quality benefits, this latest version of the purchase fulfills the SFWMD Governing Board's pledge not to increase the burden on taxpayers or hamper the district's ability to carry out its core missions.

By paying for the initial acreage with a portion of cash saved during better economic times, the district eliminates the immediate need for financing with certificates of participation.

That approach saves taxpayers millions of dollars that would have been spent on annual debt service payments.

When the state and federal governments partnered more than a decade ago to restore the Everglades, no one

imagined vast areas of agricultural land south of the lake would ever be available for that purpose. The new realities of the last two years have forced the district to rethink how to approach the River of Grass acquisition in a fiscally responsible way.

However, the benefits of this rare opportunity remain as clear as ever.

— Eric Buermann is chairman of the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District.

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## **OP-ED: Destroy those waters and you destroy us**

08/28/2010

Cape Coral Daily Breeze

Sam Bailey

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As a concerned Florida citizen nearing 90 years of age, I have always been very conscious of the environment and the history of Lee County, as well as the sorry history of what man has done to disturb the beautiful system nature devised for the waters in our state.

Here in Southwest Florida, we are nothing and will have nothing without our precious water at the high quality we and our visitors have come to expect through the years.

I am just devastated by the lack of interest the government is taking in the Lake Okeechobee problem. It's just crazy to neglect a situation that can be solved.

Lake Okeechobee has too much fresh water, and the Everglades is crying for fresh water. If the lake water flows south through the "River of Grass," it will purify itself. That does not happen when it's released from the lake via man-made locks according to a man-made schedule down the Caloosahatchee, which once meandered with cleansing twists and turns of grasses but was long ago straightened to nothing more than a canal. The more lake water that comes down the Caloosahatchee, the more destruction is visited upon our river, our bays and estuaries. Destroy those waters and you destroy us. It's just ridiculous.

Can someone please explain to me why the government has seen fit to put water that's wanted and needed in the Everglades in a place it's not needed and not wanted (here); where in fact it is destructive?

Rebuilding the Herbert Hoover Dike to make it safe for the people who live there is the highest priority. I was around in the 1920s when so many people lost their lives as Lake Okeechobee overflowed its banks. Yet here it is, more than 82 years later, and the federal government is still fiddling around with that dike. The dike is still dangerous; the problem has not been solved.

There is a plan that would go a long way toward solving all of these problems, but the government's apparent lack of interest is causing it to dwindle away to almost nothing; that is the state's purchase of the maximum possible acreage from the U.S. Sugar Corp., including all the option lands available over the next few years. That land would eventually allow water to flow south through the Everglades, eliminate the dam problem, the polluted fresh water destroying estuaries on the west and east coasts, and keep the proper and natural amount of water flowing where it belongs to balance salinity levels as nature intended.

As it stands now, we're robbing Peter to pay Paul, especially when the water can be used somewhere else. As an old, hard-working, conscientious American and Floridian, I feel very strongly about this.

SAM BAILEY, Board Member  
PURRE Water Coalition

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## **Injunction denied for Everglades/US Sugar deal**

08/25/2010

Bradenton Herald

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The Associated Press

A federal judge has denied the request by the Miccosukee Indians to stop the state from purchasing agricultural land in the Everglades.

Judge Federico Moreno ruled Monday that the tribe's emergency motion, filed earlier this month in Miami federal court, was not actually emergency since the land deal would not close until Oct. 11.

The South Florida Water Management District has agreed to purchase 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, but the tribe has argued that the deal would stall other key restoration projects.

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.

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## Judge won't block Florida-U.S. Sugar land deal

08/25/2010

Miami Herald, The

BY ANDY REID

Sun-Sentinel

08.24.10

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A federal judge Monday refused to stop the downsized, \$197 million version of Gov. Charlie Crist's Everglades restoration land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp.

The Miccosukee Tribe earlier this month requested an emergency injunction to stop the South Florida Water Management District from approving a contract with U.S. Sugar for 26,800 acres that could be used to help restore water flows to the Everglades.

Environmental groups and district officials contend the deal offers a chance to buy strategically located farmland that was long off-limits to Everglades restoration.

But the Miccosukees argue that the district would be using money needed to restart an Everglades restoration reservoir project that was put on hold by the U.S. Sugar deal.

U.S. District Judge Federico Moreno in March ordered the district to revive plans for the unfinished reservoir in western Palm Beach County, which had already cost taxpayers about \$280 million.

Yet in his ruling released Monday, Moreno said the tribe's request did not qualify for an emergency injunction, saying the district could still pay for both projects.

``Enjoining a vote on the expenditure of funds may be beyond the court's power," Moreno wrote.

### FINAL DECISION

The Florida Supreme Court still is expected to weigh in on the U.S. Sugar deal.

The water management district approved the latest version of the land deal on Aug. 12 and, barring the courts stepping in, plans to close on the transaction Oct. 11.

The judge's ruling leaves one less ``cloud hanging over the project," said district board Chairman Eric Buermann. ``It really needs to be done," he said.

This is the latest scaled-down version of Crist's two-year-old bid to buy U.S. Sugar land for construction of reservoirs and treatment areas intended to replenish the Everglades and provide backup for South Florida's drinking-water supplies.

What started as a \$1.75 billion plan to buy all of U.S. Sugar's more than 180,000 acres has been scaled back three times due to the drop in property tax revenues amid the struggling economy.

It now calls for buying two pieces totaling 26,800 acres -- 17,900 acres of citrus land in Hendry County, beside a storm-water treatment area, and 8,900 acres of sugar cane land in Palm Beach County, east of Lake Okeechobee.

The deal also comes with a 10-year option for the district to purchase U.S. Sugar's remaining 153,200 acres, though declining tax revenues have limited the agency's ability to pay for such a large land acquisition.

#### LEGAL FIGHT

The Miccosukee Tribe and U.S. Sugar competitor Florida Crystals are waging a legal fight against the latest version of the land deal, arguing that it still costs South Florida taxpayers too much, takes away money from other needed Everglades projects and unfairly enriches U.S. Sugar.

Miccosukee attorney Sonia O'Donnell could not be reached for a comment Monday.

Everglades Foundation CEO Kirk Fordham praised Moreno's ruling, saying, "`continued delay is the greatest enemy of Everglades restoration. The sooner steps are taken to improve water quality, the better."

