

Karl Wickstrom: New sugar deal too bitter of a pill to swallow, as it won't help east, west coast estuaries

BY Karl Wickstrom

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Very sadly, the grand sugar buyout, heralded worldwide two years ago, has turned so bitter it's indigestible.

We've been baited and switched. Again.

Now, with no flowway through Big Sugar anywhere in sight, our great St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries will continue to be pummeled with nasty farm discharges laden with phosphorous and other indignities.

As you probably know, if you've been able to tolerate all the switcheroos and political spin, the announced purchase of U.S. Sugar's 180,000 acres for Glades restoration was cut back to 75,000 acres and now to only 26,800 acres not connected to Lake Okeehobee and of dubious value unless you're a U.S. Sugar shareholder expecting to split up \$200 million.

Desperate for some kind of good cheer after so many losses, some environmental groups are doing their best to paint a happy face on the new acquisition. They point to supposed clean-ups of some phosphorous from ag country.

I'm afraid that our own face is anything but happy about the downsize, or evisceration.

Millions of people who enjoy fishing, boating, canoeing, swimming, birding and just plain enjoyment of the outdoors suffer from the degradation of the coastal estuaries and nursery areas along the coasts.

Caving in to the pollution establishment, our ever-so-friendly politicians allow the ruination of estuarine life even as they promise new long studies and make bogus claims that help is on the way.

"This new purchase plan (U.S. Sugar property) is but a fig leaf to cover politicians who promised real action and now will not deliver," said hydrologist-engineer Kevin Henderson of the Rivers Coalition in Stuart.

Henderson knows as well as anyone how the St. Lucie has been inundated by agricultural discharges over the three decades he has fought for help. Sure, it's a bit awkward to oppose this new mini-purchase after so strongly supporting the original deal that could have provided the flowway south. But, we have no choice. They're

different proposals.

“The truth is we have been baited and switched again,” Henderson stated. “This is a bad deal. Unfortunately, many environmental advocacy groups have trouble switching from support to damnation as quickly as private and political interests can change the deal, especially when those interests always have a head start behind closed doors.

“In this case, opposition is the only right thing to do. Kill this deal and start fresh. And do it quickly.”

It’s long past time that our elected and appointed office holders show at least a semblance of interest in the public good.

Let’s put it this way:

“We’ll have the flowway south, pretty please, or send you flowing, forthwith.”

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