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## The Everglades Restoration Project: Trusting government on the environment?

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10/17/2010  
Examiner.com  
Dickey,Karl

Karl Dickey  
West Palm Beach Libertarian Examiner.

The Everglades Restoration Project: Trusting government on the environment?  
October 17th, 2010 12:08 pm ET.Do you like this story?

In another move toward the supposed "restoration" of the Everglades, the State of Florida and US Sugar has completed a land acquisition deal at a cost to taxpayers of \$197 million. I suppose we should be somewhat relieved as it is far less than the much larger proposed land deal which would have costs taxpayers over \$1.5 billion.

This is small fraction of the overall \$8 billion of Federal taxpayer money promised in 2002 by then President George W, Bush and then Florida Governor Jeb Bush to, at least partially, restore the natural flow back to the Everglades before the government damaged the flow in the first place.

Trusting the U.S. Government, the largest polluter in the United States, is an absurdity which makes one wonder why so many well meaning environmentalist often turn to the government to help the environment. A better idea may be to put organizations with a positive track record of being good stewards to the environment in charge and not the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Everglades has been a trading pawn of both state and federal politicians to boost their coffers with campaign

contributions from the mid-1800's and really ramped up in the early-mid 1900's. It was through the Internal Improvement Fund the Florida legislature used public tax dollars to tempt real estate speculators to develop the submerged land of the Everglades which ultimately turned out to be a bad bet for the speculators and taxpayers. Not to be deterred, the Florida legislature brought in Federal taxpayer dollars and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to drain the Everglades to expand Florida government's tax base. Subsequent acts of Congress and the Florida legislature further attempted to keep flooding in mid-southern Florida under control from Lake Okeechobee and to expand sugar-growing operations.

The attempts by the government to "manage" flooding has been boondoggle after boondoggle resulting in massive amounts of deer, hogs, raccoons and other small animals drowning due to government's incompetence to manage the flooding even after spending billions of taxpayer dollars.

The result of government's involvement in the destruction of the Everglades has been a highly altered landscape, poor water management, taxpayer money going to subsidize corporations and severely harming estuaries. It is a wonder why some environmental organizations continue to praise and trust the government's effort to "fix" what they broke, when the government has continued to show their incompetence to effectively manage the Everglades. Perhaps it is time to hand it over to The Audubon Society and/or the Nature Conservancy who have shown great competence to manage natural areas.

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## **EDITORIAL: Thumb down: Land purchase does little to stop pollution from Lake O**

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10/16/2010

Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers

RIVER OF WASTE: The South Florida Water Management District this week finalized its purchase of 26,791 acres from U.S. Sugar as part of the Everglades cleanup program.

While some have hailed the purchase as an important step for the project, the \$197 million being spent does little to halt the pollution of the St. Lucie River caused by discharges from Lake Okeechobee and actually could delay improvements needed.

The original deal proposed by Gov. Charlie Crist, which would have involved the purchase of 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar property for \$1.75 billion, was drastically scaled back as a result of economic concerns.

To resolve the ongoing pollution of Treasure Coast waterways, the district needed to take bold steps with a serious timetable for the work. The step taken this week was a baby step, and the money being spent would have been far better spent as part of a more significant project.

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## **Decision will help cleanse Florida's Everglades**

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10/15/2010

Mother Nature Network

Earthjustice

Earthjustice won a key victory at summer's end in our long-running fight to restore the Florida Everglades. A court-appointed Special Master recommended that the state be allowed to abandon a \$700 million reservoir project in the southern Everglades Agricultural Area.

Why is this good news? The reservoir was once an important part of Everglades restoration, but the giant public works project was mothballed—and rightly so—when Florida negotiated a deal to buy large swaths of Everglades land from the U.S. Sugar Company. The U.S. Sugar land holdings are a better alternative to store and filter polluted runoff as it runs down the peninsula into Everglades National Park and Florida Bay.

Back when the reservoir was first planned, there was no possibility that Florida could get more Everglades land into public ownership. So the plan was to engineer around the vast sugar company holdings. The reservoir project then became, essentially, a giant water supply project for Big Agriculture—and the ag interests weren't ready to let it go.

One of U.S. Sugar's competitors, along with the Miccosukee Tribe, filed a motion earlier this year to keep the reservoir project alive. They waged a fierce legal and lobbying war to derail the U.S. Sugar land deal altogether.

The legal case has had its ups and downs. Initially, U.S. District Court Judge Frederico Moreno granted our opponents' motion to force the South Florida Water Management District to build the \$700 million reservoir. Then, he appointed a Special Master to review the case.

Special Master John Barkett came down on our side when he released his report August 30. He recommended that the reservoir project be abandoned now that the state has struck its land deal with U.S. Sugar.

Under the land deal (pared down from its initial scope due to the recession,) the South Florida Water Management District will acquire 26,790 acres from U.S. Sugar for \$197 million.

The Special Master's conclusion is a good decision for Florida. Chances are, we'll end up with a better restoration plan in the long run—and maybe one day our grandkids won't have to worry about dirty water from industrial agriculture trashing Everglades National Park—one of the most unique places on the planet.

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## After U.S. Sugar deal, next governor will influence Everglades restoration

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10/15/2010

Florida Independent, The

Luke Johnson

On Tuesday, the South Florida Water Management District bought nearly 27,000 acres of Everglades wetlands from U.S. Sugar for \$197 million. The deal was much scaled back from an original proposal by Gov. Charlie Crist to buy all of U.S. Sugar's 180,000 acres for \$1.75 billion to be financed with bonds.

All but \$3 million was wired to U.S. Sugar, and the South Florida Water Management District has the option of buying back the rest of the land over the next 10 years, and within the next three years at the same price of \$7,350 per acre.

Crist supported the U.S. Sugar deal, and the next Florida governor will have influence over future purchases. Governors appoint members to the 16-member governing board of the South Florida Water Management District, which makes decisions on buying back parcels. Kirk Fordham, CEO of the Everglades Foundation, said, "The role the next governor ought to play is to sit down with all of the owners and decide the future of the Everglades."

The U.S. Sugar deal was a large issue in the Republican gubernatorial primary, as U.S. Sugar endorsed and supported Attorney General Bill McCollum. His opponent who ended up winning the primary, former health care executive Rick Scott, railed against the sugar deal. At a press conference outside SFWMD's offices in West Palm Beach with members of the tea party at his side, Scott said, "The South Florida Water Management District is voting on whether or not to spend hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars for the sole benefit of one company. The South Florida Water Management District cannot afford to purchase this land."

He added, "Voting in favor of this sweetheart deal for U.S. Sugar places the interests of one company above those of the 7.5 million people who will end up being taxed to pay for this political favor."

His campaign website now simply says, "Rick is committed to conserving Florida's natural resources. Rick is committed

to preserving the Everglades." His campaign did not respond to requests for comment.

Scott's 527, Let's Get to Work, has received \$100,000 from Florida Crystals, a competitor of U.S. Sugar that opposes the deal. The group also indirectly received money from U.S. Sugar, as U.S. Sugar donated \$350,000 to the Florida Liberty Fund on Sept. 15 and 16. Then, on Sept. 16, Florida Liberty Fund transferred \$250,000 to Let's Get to Work. The News Service of Florida also reported that U.S. Sugar gave \$2 million to Scott's campaign.

Florida CFO and Democratic nominee for governor Alex Sink supports Everglades restoration. Her campaign writes, "Because funding at the federal level has been woefully inadequate in past years, Alex will provide the strong leadership that's needed to expedite federal approval of restoration projects and to ensure more federal funding which was part of the 50/50 state/federal partnership." Her campaign also did not respond to a request for comment on the U.S. Sugar deal.

Though this particular deal with U.S. Sugar is all but done for the 27,000 acres, the next governor will have influence — as Gov. Crist did — over how much land will be restored.

Luke Johnson reports on Florida for The American Independent.

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## Everglades land deal celebrated, but restoration hurdles loom large

10/15/2010

Sun Sentinel - Deerfield Beach Bureau

Reid, Andy

Sheet cake and the ceremonial handing off of deeds for 26,800 acres of farmland marked the celebration Thursday of a newly completed Everglades restoration land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp.

The South Florida Water Management District on Tuesday finalized the \$197 million deal that was more than two years in the making.

Two days later, the agency's leaders at their monthly meeting acknowledged both the significance of the land purchase and the hurdles that remain to putting the land to use.

How to pay for the stormwater storage and treatment areas envisioned for the land remains the biggest obstacle to using the land to restore water flows to the Everglades.

"Tomorrow we begin the planning. Taking this property and putting it to work for the Everglades," district board Chairman Eric Buermann said Thursday.

What started in June 2008 as a \$1.75 billion deal for more than 180,000 acres proposed by Gov. Charlie Crist was whittled down by the slumping economy to 26,800 acres for \$197 million.

The watered-down deal still gives the district large swaths of land to use to help clean and store stormwater needed to replenish the Everglades.

The acreage covers 42 square miles, an area larger than Fort Lauderdale.

"These acres are going to be really critical to (addressing) water quality issues," district land acquisitions director Ruth Clements said. "We did this without raising taxes or incurring debt."

The deal, paid for by South Florida property taxpayers, gives the district 17,900 acres of citrus land in Hendry County, beside existing stormwater treatment areas, and 8,900 acres of sugar cane land in Palm Beach County, east of Lake Okechobee.

The deal also provides the district a 10-year option to buy U.S. Sugar's remaining 153,000 acres.

Before putting the land to use for Everglades restoration, the district has to clean up pollutants left on the land from decades of farming. That is estimated to cost \$7 million, with U.S. Sugar contributing \$3 million to that expense.

The terms of the land deal don't allow the district to take possession of the 17,900 acres until June 2012 at the earliest. The district can't use the 8,900 acres of sugar cane land until May 2013.

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Until the district is ready to start construction, U.S. Sugar can keep using the citrus land rent free. U.S. Sugar pays \$150 per acre per year to lease the sugar cane property. The company can keep leasing the property for up to 20 years.

On Wednesday, U.S. Sugar paid the district \$295,823 for the first two and a half months of rent on the sugar cane land. The annual lease payments are expected to total \$1.3 million.

But lease revenue on the land won't come close to covering the construction costs anticipated for putting the properties to use for Everglades restoration.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in September called for a revised Everglades cleanup effort that the district estimates would include \$1.5 billion in costs – money that district officials say they don't have.

District officials contend they will need more help from the federal government paying for Everglades restoration construction and potentially to buy more U.S. Sugar land.

"This is a really big moment (but) we are not at the end of the road," district Board Member Shannon Estenoz said. "I consider this step one, but I won't start that conversation yet."

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## **New reservoir could mean more water for Broward and Palm Beach counties**

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10/14/2010

Sun Sentinel

Reid, Andy

A reservoir and water-sharing plan for Broward and Palm Beach counties could get new life thanks to support on Wednesday from South Florida water managers.

Utilities in Broward and Palm Beach counties for the past few years have suggested building a new reservoir west of Royal Palm Beach that could be used to boost water supplies all the way down to Broward County.

But the estimated cost of more than \$300 million, scandals from a previous reservoir deal and the political minefield of determining how to divvy up water supplies left the project in limbo.

Now, a task force of Broward County government officials has made the reservoir one of their top priorities in a newly released report.

On Wednesday, South Florida Water Management District officials called for giving the project another look. District officials plan to explore the logistics of how to get it done and start meeting with environmentalists and utilities.

"I have had an attitude of ... caution about this project," said district board member Shannon Estenoz, who also led Broward County Water Resources Taskforce. "We need to understand what benefits it has."

The new reservoir would capture some of the stormwater that gets drained out to sea by the C-51 canal, which stretches from western Palm Beach County through West Palm Beach.

That canal dumps an average of 270 million gallons of water a day out to sea, more than the 232 million gallons per day utilities in Palm Beach County are permitted to provide.

The idea is to store some of that wasted stormwater and use it to bolster drinking water supplies for communities as far south as Broward County.

The logistics of sharing the water has been a big stumbling block.

Physically moving water from that reservoir through a series of canals or other structures faces costly roadblocks as well as political hurdles.

Palm Beach County commissioners a year ago said they would consider supporting the new reservoir, but not if it committed them to sending water south to Broward.

Another idea involves Broward utilities helping pay for the new reservoir and in return getting "offsets," or credit from the South Florida Water Management District to use more water from the Everglades than otherwise allowed to boost local supplies.

One potential location for building the reservoir comes with some political baggage.

Pits at the Palm Beach Aggregates mining company west of Royal Palm Beach have already been converted into a reservoir and the company has room — and the right geography, supporters say — for more.

The water management district spent \$217 million to turn old Palm Beach Aggregates rock pits into a 15 billion-gallon reservoir that was completed in 2008, with plans to use the water to replenish the Loxahatchee River and help supplement community water supplies.

Yet costly pumps have not been built to get that water to the Loxahatchee River. Some of the water has been used to boost local supplies, but water quality problems from leaving the water stagnant raises concerns about its future usefulness.

In addition, the reservoir deal and Palm Beach Aggregates' past development efforts were linked to corruption scandals that led two Palm Beach County commissioners to resign and go to prison amid a federal corruption investigation. Palm Beach Aggregates owners were not charged.

The idea of exploring a new reservoir project also comes as an Everglades restoration reservoir in western Palm Beach County remains unfinished. Taxpayers have already invested about \$280 million in the unfinished reservoir that was shelved due to Everglades restoration plans getting reworked by a newly approved land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp.

Water Management District Executive Director Carol Wehle acknowledged on Wednesday that the agency has "resisted" the new C-51 reservoir idea, but will now bring "all the players to the table" to explore the possibilities.

Longtime Palm Beach County environmental advocate Rosa Durando warned that the Broward County water resources plan was an "oversimplification" of the water supply problems facing the region.

Durando also warned against trying to send "dirty water" from the reservoir south by moving it through the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.

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