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# Contract Vote Will Preserve Glades

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This month, we took a historic, monumental step toward reviving, restoring and preserving one of America's greatest natural treasures - the Everglades. The governing board of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board approved a \$1.34 billion contract to purchase a vast tract of land needed to restore the River of Grass and create unprecedented possibilities for our environment and our economy.

This acquisition, when completed, will provide the "missing link" connecting Lake Okeechobee and Everglades National Park through a managed system of water storage and treatment.

The land also will be used to safeguard the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers, and estuaries. I can envision no better gift to the Everglades, to the people of Florida, or to our country - than to place in public ownership this missing link that represents the key to true restoration.

Sixty years ago, President Harry Truman traveled to South Florida to dedicate Everglades National Park. The governing board's decision this month follows in his footsteps - and in the tradition of the great conservationist President Teddy Roosevelt. We continue their legacy of permanent preservation of the one of the most unique landscapes of our country and on the planet.

Any success toward restoring the Everglades hinges on the quantity, quality and the timing of delivery of water. Every Floridian can celebrate this historic vote and its significance in moving us closer toward acquiring the land that will provide the water essential to restoring the Everglades.

My administration is fully committed to making sure that we are making progress toward restoration and protecting our state's rivers, lakes and springs while also meeting public demand for resources.

My administration also is committed to pursuing economic-development opportunities for the communities around Lake Okeechobee. This land acquisition will serve as a catalyst for the diversification of the local economy, and our Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development will work tirelessly with these communities, Enterprise Florida and other agencies to ensure we seize this opportunity to facilitate greater

prosperity for the entire region. To begin this dialogue, Dale Brill, executive director of the Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development, visited Clewiston on Friday.

I am grateful to the members of the South Florida Water Management District governing board for their support, which came after thoughtful and deliberate consideration. This land contract reflects the courage and tenacity of so many people who, like the late Marjory Stoneman Douglas, have worked to protect this unique environmental treasure that makes our state so special.

We must realize that this land acquisition moves us closer to restoring the Everglades natural flow of water as our Creator intended. The courage of the governing board cannot be overstated, and its vision and foresight is to be commended by us all. This is a historic time for our Everglades, and I look forward to making this unique resource healthier and more wondrous than ever. It is a gift to present and future generations.

[ Charlie Crist is governor of Florida. ]

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