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### U.S. Sugar's land purchase will be historical landmark

By David Guest

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The Feb. 11 *Sun Sentinel* story on a state senator's attempt to derail Florida's purchase of U.S. Sugar lands for Everglades restoration detailed the latest controversy surrounding this conservation land buy.

Readers may find themselves asking : Is it worth the headaches and the cost to buy this huge chunk of South Florida land? I believe it is cheaper, faster and smarter to buy U.S. Sugar's land than it is to spend taxpayer money on what engineers have been planning: giant pumps and pipes and waterworks to carry water around the industrial farm fields. Buying this vast tract between Lake Okeechobee and Everglades National Park is a better deal for taxpayers and a preferable way to put the Everglades back to rights. And, as naysayers come out of the woodwork, it is worth once again asking: Why are we restoring the Everglades?

First, because it's the right thing to do, we're in the middle of doing it, and we've already committed billions to make it happen. Second, because it will protect something priceless: South Florida's future clean drinking water supplies.

Are some people queasy about doing business with Big Sugar? Yes. But the fact is, U.S. Sugar has the land, in the right location, and the company is willing to sell the whole chunk at a price Florida is willing to pay. There are no comparable sales because there has never been a deal this big in state history. Whenever leaders make a big, bold leap, critics follow, as they should in a democracy. But I think it's worth looking back to 1867, when the United States purchased the Alaska territory from Russia.

Secretary of State William Seward had pushed for the deal, even though critics called it "Seward's Folly" and complained that the United States had foolishly bought a wasteland that would be difficult to defend against America's enemies. The *New York Tribune* called it "a frozen wilderness," and others derisively called it a "Polar Bear Garden" unsuitable for raising food and livestock.

In the last year of his life, someone asked Seward which of his public acts he believed would live longest in the memory of the American people. "The purchase of Alaska," he said. "But it will take another generation to find it out." Seward's Day is now celebrated as a holiday in Alaska on the last Monday of March in honor of the purchase.

As someone who has been involved in protecting Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades for 25 years, I believe the purchase of U.S. Sugar's land will be seen as a historical landmark.

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