

Land sale will help restore Everglades ecological marvel

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From sea to shining sea, iconic American images include those purple Rocky Mountains and the spacious sky over the amber waves of grain. Swamps and marshes don't get top billing in patriotic songs, but they are incredible natural resources.

With that in mind, we welcome the recent announcement that U.S. Sugar Corporation is selling its 187,000 acres to the state of Florida when it bows out of the industry in six years.

The Everglades have suffered from human encroachment for more than a century, as settlers arrived and began dredging what they saw not as an incredible natural filtering system, but as useless swamplands.

Now, only about half of the marshy tip of Florida survives in its natural state. Runoff from surrounding agriculture and development has polluted the waters and threatened the water supply. The U.S. Sugar deal means a huge step forward in trying to heal the natural system.

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, part of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000, is no short-term solution to the woes of South Florida. The estimate is that it will take 30 years and cost \$7.8 billion. Its intent is to restore the ecosystem, ensure clean and reliable water supplies and provide flood protection.

The sour note in this sweet deal comes for the 1,700 workers who will lose their jobs. But the \$1.75 billion sale includes provisions to help them. The Associated Press reports hourly employees will get a year's pay and salaried workers two years' pay as well as retraining.

Plus, they will get to see an incredible effort to revive the one-of-a-kind ecosystem.

** Members of the Yakima Herald-Republic editorial board are Michael Shepard, Sarah Jenkins, Bill Lee and Karen Troianello.*