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Crist shouldn't cut Everglades funding

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When one thinks of the Everglades they tend to conjure imagery of nothing but giant swamps — unappealing and, honestly, a bit of a waste of space.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Among other things, the Everglades are a designated World Heritage Site, a haven for rare and endangered species and one of the few places in the world where one can see the stunning ghost lily.

Right, enough with the environmentalist pitch. Well I only urge all of you to go out and see the Everglades because the way things are looking, the opportunity may be gone some day.

Apparently, the economic crisis, which has been so much fun for all of us — which has lead to such fantastic pop-culture memes as Rock Santelli's Wall Street populism howl and Jon Stewart giving a healthy dose of fear, trembling and sickness unto Jim Cramer — has claimed another victim.

On Wednesday, Gov. Charlie Crist announced that, due to budgetary problems, Florida's long-overdue plan to buy 182,000 acres of Everglades land from the United States Sugar Corporation will be significantly scaled back. Instead, less than 73,000 acres will be purchased — less than half of the specified amount in the original proposal.

Don't think I don't see where the state is coming from. With people losing their jobs, we have to save money where we can. It's just something of a shame.

This is actually the second time the plan has been scaled back, and I'm not optimistic that there won't be more.

Things are looking bleak for the Everglades. Already under siege from industrial developers and environmental problems, the land has lately fallen victim to a series of invasive species — like the Burmese python, the outbreak of which was parodied on "The Daily Show" — and now it seems the cavalry has been delayed. "If we don't fight to create a future," writes Neil Gaiman in his charming story 'Strange Little Girls,' "there will not be a future for any of us."

This announcement, ironically coming just on the heels of Earth Hour, has set me to thinking about this place that I've always known about but so seldom had any interest in. It makes me wonder, as well, what will be next. Maybe the upkeep of Yellowstone will get too expensive. Maybe filling up the Grand Canyon will be the government's next shovel-ready project.

I feel the urge to get out and see these places while I have the chance. Ah, if only it weren't for finals.

There's a fantastic exhibit at the Florida Museum of Natural History that you should check out if you want to get a feel for the real beauty and majesty that the Everglades hold.

It consists of a series of large black and white photos by a talented photog named Clyde Butcher, and a series of color prints by his protégé, Jeff Ripple. Both men are extremely talented and capture the serenity of the unspoiled parts of this increasingly spoiled landscape. There's another section where you can learn about the things threatening the Everglades and how to help.

I know it sounds educational, but check it out. It might be the closest to the real thing you get.

Eric Chianese is an English junior. His column appears weekly.

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