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## Editorial: Score two big wins for Everglades

### *Editorial*

Everglades restoration is late, shriveled by recession and dogged with continuing challenges.

The way seems much clearer now, however, for the repair of South Florida's great natural water system - and for Lee County's Caloosahatchee River and estuary to stop serving as an agricultural sewer.

The remaining challenges are legion; it will take decades and many billions to make this vision real.

But this was a historic week for southern Florida and its hopes for abundant, clean water to nourish people, farms and the natural environment so critical to our economy.

First, the federal government finally started authorizing the money it promised almost a decade ago as its share of Everglades Restoration, which has languished despite \$2.2 billion in state spending.

Then the South Florida Water Management District voted to buy 73,000 acres of farmland for \$536 billion. It's part of a downsized but still massive plan to divert excess water from Lake Okeechobee south along its more natural southerly course, instead of dumping that polluted excess into the Caloosahatchee and the St. Lucie River.

That practice has triggered devastating algae blooms in the estuaries on both coasts, threatening the health of waters vital to tourism and recreation.

The addition of this purchase to the restoration scheme in the past year makes it far more meaningful, especially to Lee County.

There are plenty of financial and legal hurdles. For example, the creation of the southern flow way for lake overflow will require swapping some of the U.S. Sugar land for other farmland better positioned for the flow way project.

That land is owned by another sugar company, Florida Crystals, which is suing to block the U.S. Sugar buy.

Critics claim the heavy cost will rob money from the actual construction of the chain of reservoirs and filter marshes to store and clean water before it reaches the Everglades, the Caloosahatchee and other natural bodies.

Environmentalists, while still delighted with the downsized deal, believe considerably more land will be needed to realize the vision of abundant, clean water in a restored system linking Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades, the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers and the coastal estuaries.

But did anyone think it would be easy or cheap to restore a system this warped by water waste and pollution?

Federal money is finally flowing for Everglades restoration, where it can be used fairly readily because the state jumped in at its own risk to acquire land for marshes and reservoirs while the feds dithered.

It is vital for Congress to maintain support. For example, construction of a reservoir near the Caloosahatchee in Hendry County for storing and (if enhancements are funded) cleansing of excess water, was supposed to be complete by next year.

Instead, it is on hold and will remain so unless future federal money is authorized.

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