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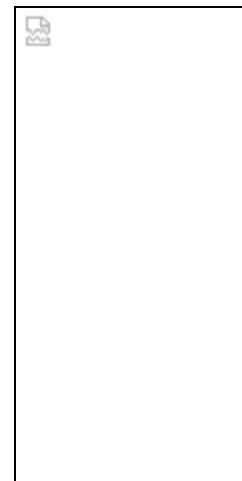
'Environmentalists' hinder Everglades restoration

Palm Beach Post Letters to the Editor

Monday, November 02, 2009

The Everglades Foundation's rhetoric in its Oct. 26 letter to the editor regarding the foundation's desire to develop a collaborative relationship with "other" growers in the Everglades Agricultural Area to protect the Everglades cannot be taken seriously.

What they mean is that they support taking as much land in the EAA out of private ownership and limiting any land use through bogus buyouts, regulatory restrictions or land-use decisions.



All the farmers in the EAA have implemented best management practices that have resulted in a 68 percent reduction in phosphorus leaving the farming region in the 2008-09 water year. The long-term average reduction is above 50 percent, or twice what's mandated.

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Additionally, all farmers pay a special tax of \$25 per acre, or more than \$200 million, to help pay for construction and operation of the regional treatment system. Under this program, according to the South Florida Water Management District's 2009 Environmental Report, more than 2,848 metric tons of phosphorus have been removed. This is the only significant project operational and providing benefits to the Everglades ecosystem.

Backed by the Everglades Foundation, the water district's efforts to accelerate key Everglades projects have been stalled or abandoned in favor of buying some of U.S. Sugar's land. Adding insult to injury, after wasting a half-billion dollars to "buy" 72,000 acres of scattered parcels and paying \$1.5 billion in interest, U.S. Sugar will continue to farm the land for the next 20 years.

How does this advance Everglades restoration? In fact, it hampers restoration by virtually pledging all of the district's financial resources to implement a bogus land purchase deal cloaked as "restoration." Our tax dollars would be better spent completing the state's legislatively endorsed Acceler8 Program and the Northern Everglades Plan.

As the debate over where Palm Beach County should site an inland port continues, one message seems to be overlooked: The facility should be in Palm Beach County. It's the Port of Palm Beach's facility and it should

benefit Palm Beach County, not Martin, not Hendry and not Glades.

The Palm Beach County Commission and Planning and Zoning Commission have determined that the site adjacent to Florida Crystals' Okeelanta industrial complex would be a compatible land use. The jobs and taxes would benefit Palm Beach County. Since the Okeelanta site is already industrial, the idea that a co-located inland port would hamper Everglades restoration is nothing more than a red herring. Don't be fooled by environmental activists' rhetoric.

GEORGE H. WEDGWORTH

Belle Glade

Editor's note: George Wedgworth is president and CEO of the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida.

