



HOT TOPICS

Home > News > Editorials

U.S. Sugar acquisition may not be such a sweet deal

THE ISSUE: Water managers decide on land deal.

August 11, 2010

Share
 Submit to digg

E-mail
 Print
 Share
 Text Size

Topics
 Mergers, Acquisitions and Takeovers
 Elections
 Everglades
[See more topics »](#)

It almost sounded too good to be true, and, in the end, it has turned out to be so.

The state of [Florida](#), in effect, would buy out U.S. Sugar Co. and use its vast tracts to help clean and preserve water. If it worked out, the agreement would go down in history as a really sweet deal for the region and its water supply.

Unfortunately, the deal isn't that succulent, even as the [South Florida Water Management District](#) considers spending \$197 million on 26,800 acres in a watered-down deal that remains problematic. Restoration, not land acquisition, should be the main focus. So, on Thursday, the water district board should vote this deal down.

Approval of the sugar deal would further complicate an already Byzantine effort to restore the Florida [Everglades](#). The purchase holds the promise of further land acquisition for storm water treatment and reservoirs — or left undeveloped as marshes — to store, treat and re-direct flowing water into the Everglades.

Get breaking news on your phone or sent directly to your inbox

But that decision would delay, or discard, some badly needed projects, like the unfinished reservoir in western [Palm Beach County](#) that has already cost taxpayers roughly \$280 million.

A federal judge has ordered the district to resume construction on that reservoir. The district is appealing that order. A decision is expected after the vote, which may tie up a significant portion of the district's budget needed for U.S. Sugar property. The pending court ruling is just one of the many "ifs," "ands" and "buts" worth of moving parts that makes this decision even more difficult.

A bad economy and dwindling tax revenue is one thing. The pending court rulings, plus the competing interests of three sugar companies, only further complicate matters.

Acquiring land makes sense, but further acquisition of U.S. Sugar property over the next 10 years won't be accomplished by hope and a prayer. The district could raise taxes to buy land and complete essential projects, but there's no real stomach for that.

Tougher water quality standards to clean up water flowing through the Everglades would help, but the state isn't interested, and that would offend agricultural interests, including Big Sugar.

All this leaves water managers with Thursday's vote, one they see as an incremental step. There are better ways to spend the limited money the state has.

BOTTOM LINE: District should commit to projects, not U.S. Sugar.

Why are we overweight? Take a look at the fattiest foods in the nation for your answer

Copyright © 2010, South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Related stories



From other South Florida sources

- [Cutbacks shrink Florida-U.S. Sugar land deal](#) | miamiherald.com

Access Denied