

Editorial: Inclusion of Everglades National Park on 'in danger' list underscores need to restore this natural treasure

Editorial board

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Still worth the investment?

Nope. This is what Treasure Coast environmentalists who had supported the state's proposed acquisition of U.S. Sugar land for Everglades restoration are saying about the second, scaled-back proposal announced last week.

The governing board of the South Florida Water Management District is slated to meet Thursday to consider the revised plan, a far cry from the original 180,000-acre, \$1.75 billion proposal announced by Gov. Charlie Crist and district officials in June 2008.

The board will decide whether to acquire 26,800 acres for \$197 million — down from the already amended plan to buy 73,000 acres for \$536 million.

District officials should reject the new proposal, as suggested by the Rivers Coalition, a Treasure Coast environmentalist group fighting discharges from Lake Okeechobee that have devastated the ecosystem of the St. Lucie River. The proposal is nowhere near what is needed to recreate the flow-way into and through the Everglades, a plan that would stop the destructive discharges of polluted freshwater into the estuary. The district's continued failure to resolve the discharges is unconscionable. If nothing else, it must accelerate construction of additional reservoirs to clean and hold excess water from the lake.

If lovers of the Everglades have learned anything over the years, it's that restoring this vital natural treasure is a long-term, piecemeal operation, but the time has come for dramatic approaches as announced two years ago.

"The latest downsize would be one-sixth of the beginning plan and would not move forward at all toward connecting the Glades and lake," a Rivers Coalition release announced Wednesday. "The Rivers Coalition calls on the South Florida Water Management District to drop the mini-plan and work at full speed toward a meaningful program to help the estuaries as well as the overall Everglades. A firm timetable for real progress must be set.

"The latest purchase plan does include options for possible additional acquisitions and projected small reductions of phosphorous pollution, but these factors are woefully inadequate."

The latest proposal to purchase U.S. Sugar land comes at the same time the Everglades is making news on another front. After a three-year absence, Everglades National Park was returned recently to the United Nations list of most treasured but “in danger” sites.

The park was on the list from 1993 until 2007, when it was removed at the behest of the Bush administration.

The Obama administration, rightfully so, lobbied for — and gained — its return to the list.

For too long, the Everglades has been a political football, kicked hither and yon by politicians at all levels of government. This is disgraceful. Everglades National Park belongs on the “in danger” list thanks to decades of mismanagement by the water management district and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Hopefully, while it bears this dubious distinction, the park — and the area north of it — will attract both the attention and resources necessary to restore this national treasure.



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