

Letter: Purchasing U.S. Sugar better option than aquifer storage

By TCPalm Staff

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The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan of 2000 has 68 construction features at an estimated cost of \$7.8 billion. It is now estimated at more than \$15 billion. In the plan the largest storage component for Lake Okeechobee water is aquifer storage and recovery — pumping water from the lake down 200 wells into the 1,000-foot aquifer and hoping it stays there to be “recovered” later.

This was estimated to cost \$1.16 billion. It's now estimated at \$2.26 billion and \$50 million a year in operation and maintenance (lots of pumping), and all scientist know it won't work.

We need to replace this component of the plan with the state purchase of 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar's farmland for \$1.34 billion, which would give us land in the Everglades Agricultural Area to make that hydrologic connection from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades.

Even with creating natural water storage treatment and conveyance, it will be saving taxpayers millions and may qualify for federal 50/50 match funds when it comes.

The revival of the River of Grass also will eliminate the unnatural flows from the lake to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee River estuaries, which is killing these coastal ecosystems and wasting Florida's freshwater resources.

It would take the 200 aquifer-storage-and-recovery wells 400 days — pumping 24 hours a day, seven days a week — to lower the lake by three feet, while the River of Grass project would take only about 80 days.

It is the better project for the Everglades plan, costing a lot less and providing more natural storage options. It also will let nature help store the water, with 84 percent going to evapotranspiration, and recharge the aquifers south of the lake. This is sure better than pumping it into many holes, at great expense, only to lose it forever.

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