



March 9, 2010

Governing Board
South Florida Water Management District
P.O. Box 24680
West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680

1450 Merrihue Drive

Naples, Florida 34102

RE: US Sugar Proposed Acquisition

239.262.0304

Dear Governing Board Members:

Fax 239.262.0672

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida, a non-profit environmental organization comprised of more than 6,000 members within Collier, Lee, Charlotte, Glades and Hendry counties, is writing to urge your support for continuing to the proposed acquisition of US Sugar Lands. www.conservancy.org

Proposed acquisition is essential for sustaining South Florida's environment and its growing population.

Restoring the Everglades is not only imperative from an environmental perspective, but for the storage and treatment of freshwater for human supply needs as well. Land acquisition is the precursor for the construction of additional retention and filter marsh areas to increase our water supply and restore the Everglades. A similar large-scale Everglades restoration project to acquire and restore 55,000 acres of wetlands in the Picayune Strand took decades. Though a lengthy and painstaking process, we now are witnessing an incredible rebound of the ecosystem which could have never been possible without the vision and persistence to acquire those thousands of parcels.

The scientific community widely agrees that large tracts of EAA lands are needed to store and clean water for saving the Everglades, protecting our water supply and preventing harmfully high releases to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers. This proposed acquisition is essential to providing the strategically located lands necessary to achieve this.

Proposed acquisition represents an invaluable and unique opportunity.

It took decades for a window of opportunity to open for purchasing these lands, and it is one that may never come again. If we fail to take advantage of this crucial opportunity to buy these lands that are essential for Everglades restoration, South Florida citizens will be left with only riskier and costlier options.

There are many other interests (rock miners, developers and other sugar companies) who could potentially purchase these lands should we defer our unique opportunity to do so, and those interests have no interest in providing these lands for Everglades restoration in the future. Properties developed or mined would be irreparably lost. With having a willing seller come forward offering land considered to be the "missing link" for Everglades restoration, and with South Florida's entire water supply and economic well-being at stake, we simply cannot afford to not seize this exceptional opportunity.

Proposed acquisition remains the most viable, cost-effective option available.

Storing billions of gallons of water underground in enormously expensive, energy-intensive ASR wells is scientifically unproven and economically unsustainable at the scale proposed. While a substantial investment, the purchase of these lands remains the most reliable, cost-effective option available for providing the freshwater storage and treatment at the location and extent needed. Additionally, the land acquisition has already been restructured to account for current economic realities. The current approach allows the state to buy only what it can afford, while holding the option to acquire additional tracts as Florida's economy recovers in the future.

Conclusion

The SFWMD Governing Board has had the foresight to support the U.S. Sugar Corp. land acquisition as a less expensive and more efficient approach than envisioned in the original Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan for addressing South Florida's challenging water supply and Everglades restoration needs. We urge your continued support, and respectfully request that you vote in support of the proposed acquisition of the US Sugar Lands accordingly this week. Please feel free to contact me at (239) 262-0304 x250 if you would like to discuss further. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Hecker
Natural Resources Policy Manager

cc: Governor Crist, State of Florida
Secretary Sole, FDEP
Carol Wehle, SFWMD