



EVERGLADES *Action!*

EVERGLADES ACTION! IS OUR QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER PROVIDING ARTICLES OF INTEREST TO FOUNDATION STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT RESTORATION DEVELOPMENTS, WATER MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND OTHER ECOSYSTEM ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH AMERICA'S EVERGLADES ~ NOVEMBER 2008

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Managing Water ~ U.S. Sugar Land Acquisition is Critical

It sounds absurd that rain events typical to our tropical climate are now threatening public safety, jeopardizing the health of our waterways and estuaries, and causing significant economic losses. But this is precisely why Governor Crist's proposal to purchase the U.S. Sugar land south of Lake Okeechobee is so critical.

In the aftermath of Tropical Storm Fay, Hurricane Hanna, and the usual rain patterns associated with the region's summer wet season, Lake Okeechobee's water levels rose to heights that threatened the stability of the Herbert Hoover Dike encircling the lake.

Because the dike is weak and in need of rehabilitation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is required to maintain lake elevations at a "safe range" of between 12.5 and 15.5 feet throughout the year. Because there is no where to store the rainwater that accumulates in the lake—water that the region will inevitably need when the dry season is upon us—the Corps is forced to release the lake's polluted water into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers.

When the nutrient-laden freshwater from Lake Okeechobee is discharged into these two estuaries, the ecosystem is severely damaged. Algae blooms erupt, and the economic impact is devastating. Fishing, boating, and tourism industries suffer; real estate values drop; and, coastal communities lose millions of dollars in lost revenues.

By storing excess water south of the lake on former sugar cane fields, lake communities can be protected from the massive flooding caused by a breach of the dike. The ability to store water south of the lake will also help to minimize the risk of harmful releases into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers.

Without the U.S. Sugar land acquisition, there would be virtually no way to prevent these harmful lake water releases from occurring every time we have an especially heavy "wet" season. In addition to minimizing impacts on coastal ecosystems, we should be storing that water for use during the dry winter season.

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Environmental Aspirations for the EAA



The Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) south of Lake Okeechobee encompasses 700,000 acres of farmland. The state of Florida is expected to submit plans this Fall to purchase 187,000 acres of strategically located agricultural land from U.S. Sugar for Everglades restoration—an achievement of breathtaking significance and priceless value.



Everglades Foundation's Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) Partners

- 1000 FRIENDS OF FLORIDA * AUDUBON * AUDUBON OF FLORIDA * BONEFISH & TARPON UNLIMITED
 CLEAN WATER ACTION * COLLIER COUNTY AUDUBON SOCIETY * CONSERVANCY OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
 DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE * EVERGLADES COALITION * EVERGLADES LAW CENTER
 EVERGLADES TRUST * FLORIDA OCEANOGRAPHIC SOCIETY * FLORIDA WILDLIFE FEDERATION
 NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION * NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION
 NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL * RIVERS COALITION * SANIBEL-CAPTIVA CONSERVATION FOUNDATION
 SIERRA CLUB * TROPICAL AUDUBON SOCIETY * WORLD WILDLIFE FUND

(continued from cover)

The state must close the deal on the U.S. Sugar land acquisition and accelerate the restoration of America's Everglades.

Failure to acquire these much-needed lands and begin the restoration process will continue to compromise the safety of lakeside residents due to flood risks, jeopardize the health of our rivers and estuaries, waste our precious supply of freshwater, and cause untold economic harm to our already weakened economy.

INLAND PORT ~ Florida Crystals Site Threatens Everglades

With all of the changes envisioned for the Everglades Agricultural Area, communities south of Lake Okeechobee believe an Inland Port would help stimulate the region's economic development. Residents, elected officials, and community activists are anticipating that a proposed intermodal port—and the new business expected to cluster around the site—could create jobs, and expand the state and local tax base.

Typically located in a rural setting where land costs and land uses are less restrictive, an Inland Port facility would house warehouses and a large-scale distribution center. The facility would accommodate intermodal transfers between ship, rail, truck, and possibly air operations.

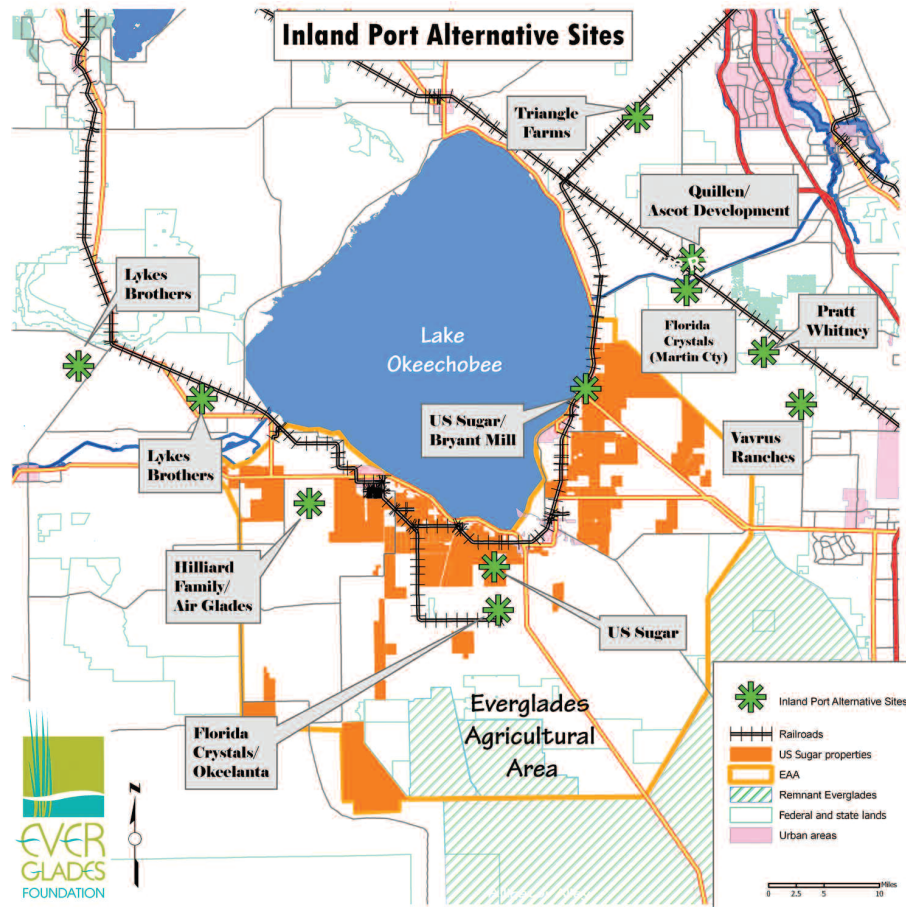
There are currently 12 sites for an Inland Port being considered in five different counties. While the Everglades Foundation is opposed to the establishment of the Inland Port on a site that would compromise Everglades restoration, there are other alternatives that would not compromise the restoration.

The site for the Inland Port proposed by sugar growing giant Florida Crystals is located in the middle of the Everglades Agricultural Area and would clearly compromise the restoration, disrupting efforts to restore water flow to the southern Everglades. Worse yet, forcing the state to engineer Everglades restoration projects around the site would waste billions of taxpayer dollars. Like the ill-fated attempt to locate the Scripps Research Park on an environmentally sensitive property in Palm Beach County, heavy-handed maneuvering to choose the Florida Crystals site over more sensible locations would result in years of lawsuits. Choosing the Florida Crystals site would not only cost taxpayers millions in the litigation, it would also delay the creation of jobs that are needed now.

The rural lake communities in both Glades and Hendry counties are in the most need of an economic boost. The Florida Crystals site in Palm Beach County is removed from these communities.



Burning sugar cane fields near Clewiston can be seen across Stormwater Treatment Area 5 south of Lake Okeechobee in the EAA.



SAVE THE DATE!

2009 ForEverglades Benefit

February 13, 2009
with special guest Carl Hiaasen

On Friday the 13th, who would be better to socialize with at the Everglades Foundation's fourth Annual ForEverglades Benefit than the originator of the beloved Florida "environmental thriller"—author, columnist, fisherman, environmentalist, and champion of the *real* Florida, Carl Hiaasen.

The event will be held in Palm Beach and will highlight Hiaasen's dedication to Florida's environment and commitment to Everglades restoration. Stay tuned for announcements on the world-class entertainment that will also be featured at the event.



Fenia and Carl Hiaasen at the 2006 ForEverglades Benefit

Protecting the Cocohatchee Slough

It wasn't that long ago when shallow, seasonal wetlands dominated the Southwest Florida landscape, providing rich habitat and foraging grounds for wildlife. But that was before Collier County and Las Vegas were running neck and neck to respectively claim the title of the fastest-growing metropolitan area in the country.

Today, the Cocohatchee Slough is one of the few remaining natural flow ways left in the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. The slough's swamp-like hydrology creates a specialized wetland habitat that countless species depend on including the Florida panther and the endangered wood stork.

Located in North Naples between Immokalee and Bonita Beach Roads, the slough carries water from Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) lands and Lake Trafford southwest to the Cocohatchee Canal and into the Cocohatchee River. From there, the river continues to carry water out through the Wiggins Pass Estuary system and into the Gulf.

Both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District have identified the area as one of the highest priorities for Everglades restoration in the entire Southwest Florida region.

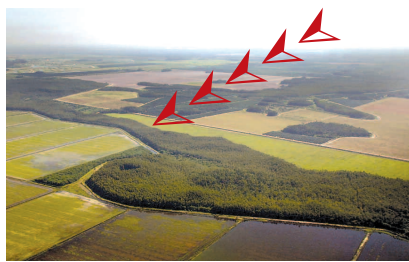
Despite this distinction, the long-term health of the slough continues to be jeopardized by large-scale developments threatening to cover the landscape including the Mirasol; Parklands; and Saturnia Falls (Terafina) developments.

If all of these proposed developments are permitted, Southwest Florida will lose 1,150 acres of wetlands to golf courses and residential development.

This kind of development is making its way through the permitting process because developers are allowed to assume that areas infested with the exotic *Melaleuca* tree have no environmental value—and that wetlands are more polluting than commercial development. All three developments have been targeted for construction on areas covered with the Australian "paper bark" tree. The mindset of regulatory agencies that are quick to write off the value of wetlands infested with exotic species is a significant environmental challenge, but also at issue is the agencies' failure to recognize and evaluate the cumulative effect of these large-scale real estate developments.

The Everglades Foundation, along with the Cocohatchee Slough Coalition that includes the National Wildlife Federation, Audubon of Florida/National Audubon Society, the Collier County Audubon Society, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and the Florida Wildlife Federation are mounting a legal challenge against issuing permits that allow these developments.

Jennifer Hecker from the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, pilot Bruce McGregor, and Everglades Foundation CEO, Kirk Fordham, were granted a flyover tour of Southwest Florida's Cocohatchee Slough from Light Hawk this summer. Light Hawk is the largest and oldest volunteer-based environmental aviation organization in North America. The group grants tours to environmental organizations enabling them to gain aerial perspectives on the issues they consider critical, and provides them with data and documentation for campaigns.



Cocohatchee Slough stretches 18 miles through Collier County. The slough—identified in this photograph by the dark green vegetation—is seen here at its narrowest point and is threatened by Developments of Regional Impact (DRI).



An endangered wood stork



Everglades National Park preserves one of the largest stands of pine rockland habitat in the world. Within the Everglades ecosystem lies the largest continuous expanse of sawgrass prairie and the most significant breeding grounds for wading birds in North America, as well as the largest mangrove ecosystem in the western hemisphere.

'Tis the Season to enjoy the Everglades

Say goodbye to the obtrusive sun, persistent rain showers, nagging insects and the stifling humidity of the wet season—and welcome the dry winter season that South Florida is famous for! The cool air is on its way and now is the perfect time to get out and explore the largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi.

Rent bikes, ride the tram, climb the tower, and hike Everglades National Park at Shark Valley... The Shark Valley Visitor Center is located on Highway 41 (Tamiami Trail / SW 8th St.) about 25 miles west of the Florida Turnpike, and approximately 70 miles east of the Naples area.

Camp, tour Florida Bay, hike, and fish at Everglades National Park on the edge of the continent... To get there, take the Florida Turnpike (Route 821) south until it ends and merges with U.S. 1 at Florida City. Turn right at the first traffic light onto Palm Drive (State Road 9336/SW 344th St) and follow the signs to the Park. Recent hurricanes have limited the variety of visitor amenities, but visitors can still expect educational displays, informational brochures, campground facilities, a marina store, and a public boat ramp. There are several breathtaking hiking and canoeing trails in the area. (Call ahead for information on the scenic boat tours of Florida Bay at 305.221.8776.)



The Flamingo Visitor Center lies roughly 38 miles south of the Park entrance. **Visitors should expect a glorious one-hour drive through the Park before arriving at Flamingo...** But stop on your way into the Park at the **Ernest Coe Visitor Center** to catch educational displays, orientation films, art exhibits, and a popular book store. Make sure to ask about memorable walking trails that begin only a short drive from the Visitor Center.



Check out the colorful characters and Old Florida appeal of Everglades City and Chokoloskee at The Gulf Coast Visitor Center—the gateway to the maze of mangrove islands and waterways known as the Ten Thousand Islands. The National Park Service's Visitor Center offers educational displays, orientation films, informational brochures, and backcountry camping permits. Boat tours and canoe rentals are available; and restaurants, stores, lodging and campgrounds are located nearby. The Gulf Coast Visitor Center is located in Everglades City on Highway 29, five miles south of Highway 41 (Tamiami Trail).



For more information, please go to: <http://www.nps.gov/ever/>

The BENEFITS of the U.S. Sugar Land Acquisition

PROTECTING COASTAL ESTUARIES

Better control of Lake Okeechobee releases of freshwater to the coasts will permit the estuaries to be restored and maintained as productive marine ecosystems with healthy salinity gradients and nutrient levels.

WATER MANAGEMENT

Much of the benefit of the purchase will come from the ability to store more water and hold it longer than currently possible. The operation of storage reservoirs in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) would be coordinated with additional storage reservoirs north of Lake Okeechobee and the management of lake level stages. This will significantly improve the volume, frequency, and duration of water deliveries to the Everglades which will benefit the plants and animals within the ecosystem. Additional storage capability will also facilitate the movement of water south to the Everglades which will reduce the severity, frequency, and duration of excessively high and low stages of the lake.

Ecological benefits can also be expected upstream by eliminating the damage caused to Lake Okeechobee by extreme fluctuations in water levels. With the land acquisition, water managers will be able to manage lake levels within a narrower range of depths to promote healthy vegetation around the lake that will benefit the fish and wildlife that rely on this habitat.

SAFETY

The Herbert Hoover Dike encircling Lake Okeechobee is managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a dam because of its “permanent pool,” and its potential to cause catastrophic safety, economic and environmental consequences should a breach occur. The opportunity to store lake water outside of the dike will reduce the hydraulic pressure on the dike and thereby reduce the threat to public health, safety, and property.

ECONOMICS

The acquisition of US Sugar will virtually eliminate the harmful discharges from the lake to coastal estuaries that adversely impact property values, marine industries, and recreational opportunities.

COMPREHENSIVE EVERGLADES RESTORATION PLAN (CERP)

Comprehensive restoration requires comprehensive storage. The purchase will facilitate additional surface water storage south of Lake Okeechobee above and beyond that contemplated in the federal-state plan for restoration—potentially improving the CERP’s ability to meet its goals and objectives.

MANAGING NUTRIENTS

Because the existing system of Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) is constrained by available land, the real strength of the acquisition is a strong synergy of water storage and water treatment. The purchase will help address nutrient loading to the Everglades by diverting phosphorus laden runoff and Lake Okeechobee releases to constructed wetland treatment areas in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) south of the lake. Treatment wetlands must have a reliable source of water, and the reservoir system that can be accommodated by the purchase will provide operational flexibility needed in the existing Stormwater Treatment Areas.

Converting existing agricultural land to reservoirs and treatment wetlands also reduces the amount of nutrients entering the regional watershed.

Water will be stored and cleansed before being routed to where it is needed, when it is needed. Improved water quality will move the restoration effort one step closer to being able to reconnect the Everglades to its watershed.

Additional reservoirs in the EAA will ease the load of existing treatment areas—improving the overall treatment efficiency of the systems by allowing them to hold excess stormwater long enough to minimize high-flow damage.

Broward County Commissioner, Kristin Jacobs, (left), Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (middle), and the Everglades Foundation’s Vice President, Peg McPherson (right), spent an October day touring the Everglades in Water Conservation Area 3 where water levels from recent storms were alarmingly high. The flooding underscores the need to purchase U.S. Sugar land south of Lake Okeechobee to provide additional water storage and treatment.



Staff from the Everglades Foundation and the Lake Okeechobee Regional Economic (LORE) Alliance of Palm Beach County joined Audubon of Florida for an airboat tour of Lake Okeechobee.

(LORE) is a 501(c)3 regional economic development organization comprised of business owners, community leaders and citizens. The mission of LORE is to promote high quality economic development in the Lake Okeechobee region of Palm Beach County.

From left to right: LORE President Ashley Tripp with Dr. Paul Grey and Jacqueline Weisblum of Audubon of Florida.



Everglades Foundation CEO, Kirk Fordham, met with former U.S. Senator and Everglades enthusiast Bob Graham to discuss future restoration initiatives and possible collaborations with the Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida.

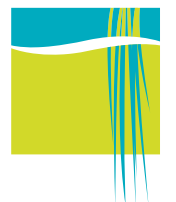


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The Everglades Foundation is dedicated to ensuring a restored Everglades by creating relevant and creative solutions to complex restoration issues.

www.evergladesfoundation.org

EVERGLADES FOUNDATION



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