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Water legislation is beneficial

Gov. Charlie Crist has signed into law Senate Bill 2080, relating to water resources. Although the bill is not perfect, it is my firm belief — a belief that I expressed to the governor — that this bill should be signed for the many benefits it provides to both to the environment and the people of Florida.

Although the new law requires the governing boards of the state's five water management districts to delegate authority to approve permits to their executive directors, each of the water management districts have been — and will continue to be — committed to open government and transparency. There is nothing in SB 2080 that limits the ability of the public from obtaining information about a permit application through a public records request.

While much attention has focused on delegation of authority, many other aspects of the bill offer greater protection for Florida's water resources that have gone largely unnoticed. However, these changes will help ensure the protection and conservation of Florida's water resources. They include:

- Changes to Florida law regarding environmentally friendly landscaping. The use of Florida-friendly landscaping and other measures by homeowners is an effort to conserve Florida's water resources, which is in the best interest of all Floridians.
- Expansion of lands eligible to receive compensation to local governments. This provision puts into Florida law a commitment of the South Florida Water Management District to ensure the smaller Glades communities are not adversely impacted by the U.S. Sugar land acquisition.
- Streamlining of government and saving taxpayer dollars — allowing meetings to be conducted via technology and authorizing the use of certain long-term permits.
- Providing fiscally sound policies that ensure the water management districts do not overextend their financial commitments.

Every drop of water makes a difference to Florida's future, and we must continue to protect and wisely manage our water resources. There is no doubt that Florida's environment is better protected when all stakeholders are involved in the decisionmaking process. As a result, I am

committed to preserving the public process throughout this next year. I will continue working with the executive directors of the state's five water management districts to ensure openness and transparency. In addition, I look forward to working with the 2010 Legislature to develop a process that sustains transparency and stakeholder participation.

Michael W. Sole, secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Tallahassee

