

# Tallahassee.com

## Charles Pattison and Manley Fuller: Purchase is key to Everglades restoration

Charles Pattison and Manley Fuller • My View • March 10, 2010

An article in Sunday's *New York Times* describing the still-evolving purchase of U.S. Sugar Corp. lands for Everglades restoration surprised us in how it mischaracterized the justification, need and feasibility of such an important purchase.

The scientific community is in agreement that, in order to meet the goal of restoring the Everglades, a key component and first step is converting thousands of acres of agricultural lands into areas that can store and clean water flowing into the Everglades. The added benefits of protecting South Florida water supplies and improving the health of the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers are similarly critical.

No party has presented an alternative option that is more cost-effective than land acquisition — it is simply the best means of solving the critical water challenges facing the Everglades. The alternative of storing billions of gallons of water underground is both more costly and very energy-intensive. With a willing seller ready for the first time to negotiate a major sale, the reality of substantial land purchases within the Everglades Agricultural Area is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that simply cannot be passed up. Failing to act now can only mean even higher costs later.

Economic realities are important in good times and bad. Although the initial proposal was to purchase more than 180,000 acres, that has by necessity been scaled back to about half that amount, with an option to purchase more tracts when the economy recovers and finances improve. The reduced 73,000-acre acquisition, however, still provides the core benefits needed to make this part of Everglades restoration a success.

Finances are always a consideration, and that is why the South Florida Water Management District is carefully reviewing its budget to make certain that this important acquisition can take place while other Everglades restoration projects continue. Given the dynamic and long-term restoration process

involved with this unprecedented ecosystem, it is not surprising that adjustments have been made in the past and will continue into the future.

Critics of the effort to purchase U.S. Sugar lands have a vested interest at stake.

Opponents realize that, if the sale can't be blocked, then the opportunity to profit from the public's "free" water supplies here will be lost to them forever. Greed cannot be allowed to thwart what is clearly in the Everglades and public's best interest.

Everglades restoration has made great progress in the last few years, and momentum has increased with the federal government honoring its cost-sharing pledges. The bridging of the Tamiami Trail is under way to restore vital water flows into Everglades National Park, and the Kissimmee River restoration is now producing measurable results that exceed expectations for wildlife recovery and public recreation.

This momentum can only be sustained by taking advantage of the U.S. Sugar land acquisition. It is the best cost option that helps fulfill the adopted Year 2000 Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.

Advertisement

**USA TODAY**  
**AutoPilot** ✈️

The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®

Presented by: Hampton

**SEE HOW IT WORKS >>**

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™