



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Negotiations for Historic Everglades Land Acquisition Move Forward

SFWMD Governing Board ratifies "Statement of Principles" for landmark purchase to protect famed River of Grass, coastal estuaries

West Palm Beach, FL – The Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) today took the next step for bringing about one of the largest environmental land acquisitions in Florida's history. The Governing Board unanimously ratified the "Statement of Principles" that was signed with United States Sugar Corporation and witnessed by Governor Charlie Crist last week to bring vast tracts of land in the Everglades Agricultural Area into public ownership.

The formal action authorizes District staff to now initiate detailed negotiations and due diligence to purchase the assets of United States Sugar Corporation, including 187,000 acres of land, for Everglades restoration. Acquisition of the property will provide the "missing link" needed to protect Florida's coastal estuaries and better revive, restore and preserve one of America's greatest national treasures – the Everglades.

"Governor Crist's bold vision has brought us to a new day for Everglades restoration," said Eric Buermann, SFWMD Governing Board Chair. "This is a significant moment for our state, our nation and our environment. Today's ratification confirms the District's commitment to this remarkable opportunity for protecting and restoring America's Everglades and Florida's coastal estuaries."

In accordance with the framework and parameters outlined in the Statement of Principles, detailed and confidential purchase agreement negotiations will now begin, and could last for up to 75 days. At the same time, independent real estate appraisals and assessments of the identified lands and assets will be conducted

by highly-qualified specialists. The ultimate purchase price and agreement will depend upon the appraisals and assessments and will require approval by the District's Governing Board.

The proposed agreement between the South Florida Water Management District and the United States Sugar Corporation involves the public purchase of nearly 300 square miles spanning four counties in South Florida. The land would be used to reestablish a part of the historic connection between Lake Okeechobee and America's Everglades through a managed system of storage and treatment.

"The District and our partners have made excellent progress in environmental restoration during the past decade, but this acquisition creates possibilities we never thought possible," said SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. "We look forward to working closely with the local communities and our stakeholders as we turn this landmark concept into a working reality."

Benefits from the Everglades land acquisition include:

- Increases in water storage to reduce harmful freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee to Florida's coastal rivers and estuaries.
- Improvements in the delivery of cleaner water to the Everglades.
- Preventing thousands of tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades.
- Eliminating the need for "back-pumping" water into Lake Okeechobee.
- Relieving some pressures on the Herbert Hoover Dike while the federal government carries out repairs.
- Sustainable agriculture and green energy production.

As part of the proposed acquisition, United States Sugar Corporation, over the next six years, will retain the right to farm and manage the land consistent with its previous business practices and fulfill remaining business obligations. The District, together with the Governor's Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development, will work closely with communities surrounding the Everglades Agricultural Area on an economic transition as the negotiations move forward.

"As we work through these negotiations, it is imperative that we keep the communities most affected by this purchase engaged and involved," said the SFWMD Governing Board Chair. "This Governing Board is committed to working with its state and local partners to realize not only the environmental benefits of this potential purchase but also the new economic opportunities associated with sustained agriculture, green energy production and restoration."

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About the South Florida Water Management District

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.