



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Water Managers Outline Overarching Restoration Goals for U.S. Sugar Corporation Land Acquisition

WEST PALM BEACH, FL – The South Florida Water Management District’s (SFWMD) restoration goals to revive the “River of Grass” are ambitious: Clean the water before it reaches the Everglades and store enough water to minimize harmful discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and estuaries.

In an update to its Governing Board on Wednesday, District staff presented an overview of concepts to incorporate vital water storage and treatment on vast tracts of agricultural land if negotiations to acquire the land and assets of the U.S. Sugar Corporation are successful.

“This acquisition represents an unprecedented opportunity to protect and restore the Everglades in a way we never anticipated,” said Kenneth Ammon, District Deputy Executive Director for Everglades Restoration. “The increased flexibility provided by these lands will present a suite of restoration options and will work to build upon and enhance the federal/state partnership known as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.”

On June 24, 2008, Florida Governor Charlie Crist announced a strategy to purchase vast tracts of land south of Lake Okeechobee to protect and restore America’s Everglades and Florida’s coastal estuaries.

Benefits from the land acquisition would include:

- Major improvements in the volume and delivery of water to the Everglades.
- Preventing tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades.
- Increases in water storage to reduce harmful freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee to Florida’s coastal rivers and estuaries.

- Eliminating the need for "back-pumping" water into Lake Okeechobee.
- Enhancing the timing and delivery of cleaner water to the natural system.
- Managing Lake Okeechobee water levels within an ecologically desirable range.

Acquiring agricultural land on which to build a highly engineered network of managed storage and treatment is intended to better manage the timing and quality of water delivered to the Everglades. The District's preliminary restoration concepts include creating one million acre-feet of water storage south of the lake. An acre-foot means one acre of land covered by one foot of water. That storage would be combined with one million acre-feet of storage north of the lake, as called for by Florida's technical plan to restore and protect the [Northern Everglades](#).

Along with storage, part of the land would be used to provide one million acre-feet of water quality treatment on an average annual basis. These additional treatment wetlands would help improve the quality of water flowing into the River of Grass. The District currently operates 52,000 acres of stormwater treatment wetlands that use plants to take up nutrients from water flowing into the Everglades.

The District is also evaluating concepts to include and/or increase storage, treatment and restoration in other watersheds, including the C-139 basin, the S-4 basin and around Lake Hicpochee, the headwaters of the Caloosahatchee River.

The Governing Board also received an update from staff on the acquisition activities and the public process associated with the potential purchase. The SFWMD is moving forward with "due diligence" and evaluation of U.S. Sugar Corporation's assets, which include a mill, refinery, citrus plant, railroads, buildings and equipment. The due diligence includes engineering assessments, land surveys, environmental assessments and appraisals.

Another key component of that due diligence is the addition of an independent outside auditor to assist with the evaluations. This brings additional expertise and oversight to the due diligence process and ensures the District's actions are transparent. The outside auditor is also a core component of providing assurances and value for investment of taxpayer dollars.

If successful, the District staff will present a proposed contract to the Governing Board. The public will have the opportunity to review and comment on the contract. Public meetings will be held to discuss due diligence results before any closing. See [Just the Facts: Everglades Land Acquisition](#).

“Public participation is as vital to the Everglades restoration process as the projects themselves,” said Sheryl Wood, the District’s general counsel. “The citizens of Florida and stakeholders will play a valuable role in this process.”

If closing occurs, the District will ensure broad public and stakeholder participation in the restoration planning process for the land.

For more information on reviving the River of Grass, visit the South Florida Water Management District’s special web site section:

www.sfwmd.gov/riverofgrass

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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.