

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 24, 2008

CONTACT

Governor's Press Office, (850) 488-5394
Kayla Bergeron, SFWMD, (561) 682-6197

**Governor Crist Unveils Momentous Strategy to
Save America's Everglades, Preserve National Treasure**

*~Water managers to negotiate buy-out of U.S. Sugar Corporation;
Massive environmental acquisition to provide "missing link" for reconnecting
Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades and reviving fabled River of Grass~*

WEST PALM BEACH, FL – Governor Charlie Crist today stood at the edge of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, joined by Florida's top elected leaders, the United States Sugar Corporation and a host of environmental advocates, to unveil a momentous strategy that could bring about one of the largest environmental land acquisitions in the nation's history and provide a "missing link" needed to protect Florida's coastal estuaries and better revive, restore and preserve one of America's greatest natural treasures – the Everglades. The announcement kicks off the 2008 Serve to Preserve Florida Summit on Global Climate, which begins tomorrow in Miami.

"Sixty years ago, President Harry Truman came to South Florida to dedicate Everglades National Park. Today, we follow in the great footsteps – and in the tradition of the great conservationist President Teddy Roosevelt. We continue their legacy of permanent preservation of the one of the most unique landscapes of our country – and on the planet," said Governor Crist. "We have an opportunity to provide the critical missing link in our restoration activities. I can envision no better gift to the Everglades, or the people of Florida, or to our country than to place in public ownership this missing link that represents the key to true restoration."

Announcing a new partnership to revive the *River of Grass*, Governor Crist called on the South Florida Water Management District to begin negotiating an agreement to acquire as much as 187,000 acres of agricultural land owned by the United States Sugar Corporation. The vast tracts of land would then be used to reestablish a part of the historic connection between Lake Okeechobee and the fabled River of Grass through a managed system of storage and treatment and, at the same time, safeguard the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and estuaries.

Governor Crist Unveils Momentous Strategy to Save America's Everglades

Page Two

"This is a watershed event in national conservation history, and a paradigm shift for the Everglades and the environment in Florida, one that would have been inconceivable in years past. Yet, here we are," said Robert Buker, president and CEO of United States Sugar Corporation. "We look forward to continuing to work with the Governor and the District in the cooperative spirit with which we have begun, in order to make the dream represented by the Statement of Principles that we sign here today a reality for Florida tomorrow."

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 – a land mass as large as New York City. The District will also take ownership of the company's assets, including 200 miles of railroad, a state-of-the-art sugar mill, sugar refinery and citrus processing plant. Subject to independent appraisals and approval by the District's Governing Board, water managers will invest \$1.75 billion in cash and certificates of participation to finance the acquisition.

"America's River of Grass sustains life for so much and so many. Today it receives its lifeline," said Everglades Foundation Vice Chairperson Mary Barley. "A restored and sustained Everglades is no longer a dream. History will record this action as the point that brought it within our reach."

Acquiring the enormous expanse of real estate offers water managers the opportunity and flexibility to store and clean water on a scale never before contemplated. Water managers expect that dedicating significantly more land in the Everglades Agricultural Area to restoration will build upon and enhance the 30-year state-federal Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and the State of Florida's Northern Everglades program to restore and protect Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and their respective estuaries.

Benefits from the land acquisition will allow for the following:

- Huge increases in the availability of water storage, significantly reducing the potential for harmful discharges from Lake Okeechobee to Florida's coastal rivers and estuaries when lake levels are high.
- The ability to deliver cleaner water to the Everglades during dry times and greater water storage to protect the natural system during wet years.
- Preventing thousands of tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades every year.
- Forever eliminating the need for "back-pumping" water into Lake Okeechobee from the Everglades Agricultural Area to augment the water supply needs. The District's Governing Board this year voted not to back-pump into the lake during the ongoing water shortage to protect water quality.

--more--

Governor Crist Unveils Momentous Strategy to Save America's Everglades

Page Three

- Additional water storage alternatives, relieving some pressures on the Herbert Hoover Dike while the federal government undertakes repairs.
- Sustainability of agriculture and green energy production.

"The significance of this moment will forever be recorded in Florida's environmental history," said South Florida Water Management District Governing Board Vice Chair Shannon Estenoz. "Today, we offer the Everglades restoration opportunities once thought impossible; environmental progress once considered unachievable; and protections just a decade ago believed unattainable. History will mark today as a watershed event for restoring our beloved national treasure – the Everglades – and generations will thank the Governor for his leadership in making it happen."

To mark the occasion, the Governor stood as official witness as South Florida Water Management District Governing Board Vice Chair Shannon Estenoz signed a "Statement of Principles" with United States Sugar Corporation President and CEO Robert H. Buker. The Statement of Principles provides the framework for the potential acquisition of property. Negotiations on the final agreement will take place over the coming months, with a closing on the real estate anticipated before the year's end. As part of the proposal, United States Sugar Corporation will continue to farm and manage the land consistent with its previous business practices for the next six years. Construction of any new water treatment and storage projects on the agricultural land would likely begin following the six-year transition period.

As the agreement is finalized, the Governor directed the District to work closely with interest groups, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Legislature, United States Congress and federal agencies on the future use of the land and any effects to the planning, design and construction of Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan or Northern Everglades projects. The Governor also called upon the Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development and the Agency for Workforce Innovation to work with United States Sugar Corporation, local governments and area businesses on an economic transition plan for the area.

About the Everglades

America's Everglades once covered almost 11,000 square miles of south Florida. Just a century ago, water flowed down the Kissimmee River into Lake Okeechobee, then south through the Everglades to the Florida Bay – the ultimate destination of the pure sheet flow. Because of efforts to drain the marshland for agriculture, development and flood control, the Everglades is today half the size it was a century ago.

Dubbed the *River of Grass* for the sawgrass that flourished throughout the marsh, the Everglades is a mosaic of freshwater ponds, prairies and forested uplands that supports a rich plant and wildlife community. Known throughout the world for its wading birds and

Governor Crist Unveils Momentous Strategy to Save America's Everglades

Page Four

wildlife, the Everglades is home to dozens of federally threatened and endangered species, including the Florida panther, American crocodile, snail kite and wood stork. The mix of salt and freshwater makes it the only place on Earth where alligators and crocodiles exist side by side.

About the 2008 Serve to Preserve Florida Summit on Global Climate

Governor Crist's monumental announcement kicks off the 2008 Serve to Preserve Florida Summit on Global Climate this week, June 25-26, 2008, at the Intercontinental Miami. Building on the foundation for Florida's energy future that began at last year's summit, the 2008 summit will focus on stimulating economic development in clean technologies as well as "greening" Florida's business community. By encouraging companies to invest in our state's energy future, Florida will transform its energy marketplace to enhance fuel diversity, lessen dependence on foreign sources of oil and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

For more information on restoration of America's Everglades, visit www.myflorida.com. For information on the 2008 Serve to Preserve Florida Summit on Global Climate Change, visit www.myfloridaclimate.com or www.myflorida.com.

###