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FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Trudi K. Williams
Representative, District 75

12 December 2008

South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33406

Dear Governing Board Members:

I write you today as a former member and Chairman of the District's governing board, and as a member of the Florida Legislature representing the people of Southwest Florida. I am writing with grave concern over the terms and structure of the proposed deal that you are considering to purchase U.S. Sugar farmland and the accompanying leasebacks.

It is my belief that in its current form, this deal fails any serious risk-benefit analysis. It requires an irresponsible displacement of restoration priorities that are critical to the survival of Lake Okeechobee, the Caloosahatchee Watershed, the St. Lucie River, estuaries on both of Florida's coasts, and the Florida Everglades.

Most damaging is the fact that the deal as structured threatens to undermine the consensus on Everglades restoration priorities that took decades to achieve, and for which billions have already been spent to undertake.

There are those who will argue that you must act now because this is a now-or-never opportunity. I do not believe that. One of the last major land acquisitions in which the district was involved was for Babcock Ranch. This long-sought preservation effort took over four years, two long-term failed negotiations between the owners and the state, and numerous deadline extensions to achieve. In the end, the deal was made practical and possible by the purchase of the land by a private interest that sold to the state only the land needed for its public purposes. The Babcock ranch deal was half the size and a quarter of the cost of the deal you are contemplating today. Does it not merit the same degree of thoughtful analysis and tough negotiations? Given the fact that the Babcock purchase took place when the state had huge budget surpluses and today we face equally huge shortfalls - should you not take a step back to ask yourself if the benefits outweigh the costs and the risks?

You have publicly acknowledged that this deal will "max out our credit card." Is this land deal at this time, for which you have not determined an ultimate use, worth imperiling the C-43 Reservoir (which you stopped construction on to use the money for this project), the Caloosahatchee Watershed Project, the Northern Everglades Plan, and all other contemplated restoration projects?

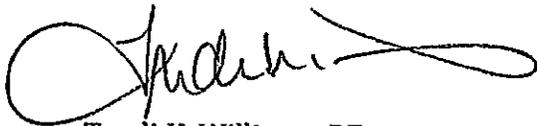
As a former governing board member, I worry that if you approve this deal it will not only be a fiscal disaster for the district, but will cause concerned legislators to re-think appropriations to, partnerships with and the governance of this and other water management districts. Many of my colleagues in the legislature are understandably outraged that at a time when people are losing jobs and losing homes, and when government is having to lay off teachers and law enforcement officers, an un-elected board can commit to such a costly land purchase with no plan for the ultimate end use and with terms that seem to be unfair to taxpayers, smaller farmers and long-needed restoration priorities.

The cold hard fact is that the anxious buyer never gets a good deal. And when the car salesman tells you that "you have to act now," the time-honored truth is that you always get a better deal if you are willing to walk away from a bad one.

I call on you to hold off on the current U.S. Sugar purchase contract until such time as a better deal can be negotiated, all stakeholders can be included, restoration plans can be determined, and restoration funding priorities can be debated.

Thank you for your consideration, and for your service to the people of Florida.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Trudi K. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a long, sweeping tail that ends in a small flourish.

Trudi K. Williams, PE
Representative District 75

cc: Governor Crist
Speaker Sansom