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SFWMD official plans visit to Sanibel

01/28/2009

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South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board Vice-Chair, Shannon Estenoz, will visit Sanibel on February 17, to participate in the Annual Conservation Lecture at BIG ARTS sponsored by the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF) and Everglades Foundation.

Participants will focus on Everglades restoration and the advantages of the U.S. Sugar Corp. land acquisition to Southwest Florida.

This year's timely presentation, "U.S. Sugar, Local Aquatic Preserves and the Everglades: How Getting the Water Right in the Everglades Agricultural Area Helps Our Estuary," will also feature Thomas Van Lent, senior scientist, Everglades Foundation, a leading authority on water resource issues and Rae Ann Wessel, natural resource policy director, SCCF, who has brought the voice of the west coast and concern for its estuaries to lawmakers.

Estenoz was instrumental in the vote to support the U.S. Sugar Corp. land purchase.

Van Lent will discuss restoration alternatives involving the land purchase, including the science of cleaning and storing water in the EAA (Everglades Agricultural Area) and the positive benefits for Southwest Florida's estuaries resulting from the acquisition of 180,000 acres south of Lake Okeechobee.

The presentation will be followed by an interactive public participation panel discussion and question-and-answer session.

Following the presentation, attendees are invited to a wine-and-cheese reception on the Gainer Veranda, sponsored by BIG ARTS.

The SCCF and the Everglades Foundation invites all interested parties to take advantage of this opportunity to access these decision-makers, ask questions about the Everglades restoration initiative and find out how you can help make this historic opportunity a reality.

The program will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 17 at 7:30 p.m. at Big Arts' Schein Hall. Tickets are \$20 per person. Big Arts is located at 900 Dunlop Road, Sanibel.

Tickets are available at Big Arts or by phone at (239) 395-0900; for more information on the program, call SCCF at (239) 472-2329.

COUNTY WARNED TO MAKE CUTS, NOT TO COUNT ON TAX INCREASES

01/27/2009
Sun Sentinel

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Don't count on tax increases to ease a lingering budget crunch, state legislators told Palm Beach County commissioners Monday.

Commissioners met with legislators to discuss a more than \$40 million wish list for local projects that includes road improvements, beach protection and infrastructure help for Glades communities.

But the Legislature just held a special session to propose cutting programs and dipping into savings to bridge a \$2.3 billion projected deficit. Cuts could go deeper when legislators meet again in March.

Increased taxes on cigarettes, to go along with proposed increases in speeding ticket fines, is one proposal to boost state revenues.

Closing so-called sales tax loopholes, including exemptions for everything from ostrich feed to skyboxes, has also been discussed.

State and local leaders still need to "cut out waste" before increasing taxes at a time when businesses are closing and people are losing their jobs and homes, said state Rep. Ellyn Bogdanoff, R-Fort Lauderdale.

"If we want to raise taxes, I'm not sure who's paying them," Bogdanoff said.

County officials told legislators they already called on department heads to cut costs by 10 percent, which likely means more layoffs following last year's belt-tightening when the county laid off 62 employees and eliminated 211 vacant positions.

State Rep. Carl Domino, R-Jupiter, said 10 percent cutbacks may seem like a lot to government budget planners, but Florida residents - especially those who lost their jobs - are seeing much more serious declines.

"Their incomes have gone down to zero," Domino said. "This is a tough environment."

State cuts to education funding, including slashing \$480 million from funding for kindergarten to 12th grade, threatens Palm Beach County's push to attract a growing biotech industry that relies on an educated work force, Commission Chairman Jeff Koons said.

Commissioners said Gov. Charlie Crist's plan to buy U.S. Sugar Corp.'s 180,000 acres - most of it in Palm Beach County - for Everglades restoration threatens agricultural jobs in struggling Glades communities.

The state should help put people to work by pushing for the development of more renewable energy that could lead to new environmentally friendly industries, Rep. Maria Sachs, D-Delray Beach, said. Increased speeding fines and cigarette taxes likely won't be enough, she said.

"Anybody you see speeding and smoking, thank them," Sachs said. "We need something better [than] these sin taxes."

Andy Reid can be reached at abreid@SunSentinel.com or 561-228-5504.

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Everglades needs bailout money

01/26/2009

Key West Citizen

Robert Silk Citizen Staff

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Glades advocates seek federal funds for projects

Leading environmental groups are hoping Florida Bay will cash in on the massive \$825 billion economic stimulus plan being championed by President Barack Obama.

The stimulus package also should target Fort Jefferson in Dry Tortugas National Park, according to advocates and Everglades National Park officials.

Over the past couple of months, a coalition of some 30 green advocacy groups has been pressing the incoming Obama team, as well as legislators and key players within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to get money to the Everglades.

The group is calling for \$860 million over the next two years for 11 different 'shovel-ready' Everglades restoration projects, including two key Florida Bay-related undertakings.

Many of the projects have been delayed for years. At the same time, the federal government has not kept up with its 2000 commitment to split the cost of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan with the state.

Last fall, the congressionally-backed National Resource Council found that Florida has doled out \$2 billion for the \$20 billion restoration plan, while the federal government had delivered only \$340 million. Those figures do not include the \$1.34 billion Florida plans to spend acquiring 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar Corp. land south of Lake Okeechobee.

'Everglades restoration is at a crossroads,' Sara Fain wrote in a press release commenting on the Everglades Coalition's gathering of politicians and advocates in Miami earlier this month. Fain, a restoration program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association's, co-chaired the annual event.

'We have suffered from broken processes, funding shortfalls and development pressures that continue to compete with restoration, all while the Everglades continues to decline,' she wrote. 'We need a renewed commitment from the administration and Congress to get the largest restoration plan in the world back on track.'

Everglades National Park also has weighed in on which restoration efforts it would like to see funded through the stimulus package, and its list is similar to the one being championed by

environmentalists, Superintendent Dan Kimball said.

The park and advocates are calling for funding of a project along the Tamiami Trail and another that would revamp the largest canal cutting through the southern Everglades. Both would restore vital freshwater flow into Florida Bay.

Along the Tamiami, the green groups are asking Obama and the feds to spend \$485 million over the next two years to build two bridges, totaling three miles in length, to improve water flow. The expenditure, they estimate, would create nearly 1,700 jobs.

The present plan, which is mired in litigation, calls for a smaller restoration project along the highway, featuring a single one-mile bridge. It was added only after the Corps of Engineers scuttled the two-bridge plan, saying it was too expensive.

'When you are dealing with a stimulus package and not individual appropriations, those perceived limitations are changed,' said April Smith, director of ecosystem restoration for the National Audubon Society.

Environmentalists also are lobbying for \$35 million in stimulus funds for a second bay project, the planned C-111 Spreader Canal. The canal would distribute freshwater gradually as it snakes from Miami-Dade County toward Florida Bay and Barnes Sound.

It would replace the existing C-111 canal -- the area's largest -- which releases water at one choke point in Barnes Sound, and, scientists say, is draining feeder sloughs and wetlands just north of Florida Bay. Construction of the spreader canal would create 710 to 1,050 jobs, advocates say.

Smith said the Obama team hasn't responded to any of their recommendations. But she has been pleased by the support of Florida's Congressional delegation.

'I am certainly hopeful that when the bill does go out any day now we will see the inclusion of ecosystem projects,' she said.

Environmentalists already received a bit of good news on Jan. 16, when House Democrats included \$2 billion for the national parks in their proposed \$825 billion economic recovery package.

That could mean good things for Everglades National Park, which in addition to pushing for general Everglades restoration funding, has sent a separate list to Washington featuring some \$17 million in projects that are ready to go within park boundaries.

Prominent on that list is the continued rehabilitation and stabilization of Fort Jefferson in Dry Tortugas National Park, which like the Everglades falls under Kimball's auspices.

'We have a pretty hefty list. And we feel pretty good that we have things we could move forward with really quickly,' Kimball said.

The National Parks Conservation Association also has targeted Fort Jefferson as a prime example of ready-to-go park projects. Restoration already has begun on three sides of the hurricane- and tide-ravaged fort that served as a federal prison in the post-Civil War era. Funding is needed to restore the other three sides.

Work could begin on two of those sides immediately, with \$10 million, the association said.

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The News you need for the Week ahead

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Rep. Snyder to talk about the Everglades

State Rep. William Snyder, R-Stuart, will talk about environmental issues, including Everglades restoration and other legislative issues, during a meeting of the Martin County Conservation Alliance starting at 6:30 p.m. Monday at the Blake Library, 2351 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart. For more information, call (772) 286-9845.

Focus group results on board agenda

Results from focus groups conducted at every public school in St. Lucie County will be discussed when the School Board meets for its workshop at 5 p.m. Tuesday in the board room, 4204 Okeechobee Road, Fort Pierce. A total of 664 parents, faculty and community members participated in the groups from September to December. The effort was aimed at gaining input about the vision and needs of individual schools and the overall school district.

School boundaries on Tuesday agenda

The Indian River County School Board finalizes new

middle-school attendance zone boundaries at its Tuesday board meeting. The meeting begins at 6 p.m., at the district offices, 1990 25th St., Vero Beach. The board is changing the boundaries because a new middle school, off 53rd Street between 58th and 66th avenues, is slated to open next fall. The proposed boundaries are available online at indianriverschools.org. For details, call (772) 564-3200.

Redevelopment in

south Martin County

Redevelopment initiatives in Old Palm City, Indiantown, Hobe Sound, Golden Gate, Port Salerno, Rio and Jensen Beach will be discussed at a meeting of the Countywide Community Redevelopment Advisory Committee at 6 p.m. Wednesday at the Martin County Administrative Center, Growth Management Department Conference Room, 1st floor, 2401 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart. For more information, call (772) 463-3288.

U.S. Sugar purchase

on the agenda

A proposal to establish a public "Restoration Reserve" on the U.S. Sugar property Florida is considering buying will be discussed during a meeting of the Rivers Coalition starting at 11 a.m. Thursday at Stuart City Hall, 121 S.W. Flagler Ave., Stuart. Although the state's plans to buy 180,000 acres of land is designed to restore the Everglades, the land also could be used to create a network of waterways offering all kinds of public uses, such as nature trails and education centers. For more information, call (772) 225-6849.

Transit plan to be

discussed Wednesday

A Regional Transit Development Plan and the 2035 Regional Long Range Transportation Plan will be discussed during a meeting of the St. Lucie Transportation Planning Organization and the Martin Metropolitan Planning Organization starting at 2 p.m. Wednesday in the St. Lucie County Commission Chambers, 2300 Virginia Ave., Fort Pierce. For more information, call (772) 288-5484.

ST. LUCIE

Some homes to be

declared nuisances

Port St. Lucie City Council is set to declare several homes public nuisances and discuss the collection of unpaid nuisance clean-up fees during its regular meeting 7 p.m. Monday.

Bridal Expo added

to Home Show

The Pilot Club of Fort Pierce's annual Home Show & Bridal Expo is set for Friday, Saturday and Sunday at the new Havert L. Fenn Center on Virginia Avenue.

Admission and parking are free.

An addition this year is a Bridal Expo. A bridal fashion show will open the event Friday.

Bridal/wedding exhibitors will be available through the weekend to discuss wedding attire, catering, flowers, jewelry, limousine service, photographers and travel plans.

The annual Home Show provides an opportunity for homeowners with remodeling ideas to discuss plans with professionals. For information, call Cindy Bryant at (772) 473-6107 or Cathy Townsend at (772) 201-5503.

Gardenfest! returns

to Vero Beach

Gardenfest! is returning from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday at Riverside Park in Vero Beach. Admission

is free.

More than 70 vendors will display their yard and garden products with emphasis upon "green" -- living trees, bushes, orchids, roses, herbs, butterfly plants, palms, ferns plus furniture, pottery, iron items, fountains, lighting and many other items and services of interest.

There will be youth activities from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day and a variety of grilled foods for hungry shoppers. For more information contact gardenclubofirc.org or (772) 567-4602.

Stuart's Arts Fest

is this weekend

The 22nd annual Arts Fest unfolds 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday amid the backdrop of waterfront Flagler Park in downtown Stuart.

Displays of artistic creations of more than 120 accomplished artists will be featured, as well Latin jazz saxophonist Ed Calle and other musicians and puppet shows and fun for the youngsters.

Food and beverages, including microbrewed beer, will be available; \$3 suggested donation; (772) 219-1719.

Porter's 'Can-Can'

on stage in Stuart

Cole Porter's musical "Can-Can" takes the stage this week at the Lyric Theatre in Stuart.

Show times are 8 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Tickets are \$25. Call

(772) 286-7827 or visit

lyrictheatre.com.

David Copperfield in Melbourne Wednesday

Magician and illusionist David Copperfield will perform at the King Center in Melbourne on Wednesday. Show times are 5:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$37.75 to \$55.75; call (321) 242-2219 or visit kingcenter.com.

'Don Pasquale'

Metropolitan Opera star Paul Plishka will perform in "Don Pasquale" at the Vero Beach High School Performing Arts Center, 1707 16th St., Vero Beach, at 7:30 p.m. Saturday. Tickets are \$30, \$40, \$50 and \$100; (772) 778-1070.

Beach Walk

"Beach Walk IV -- Introduction to our Seashores" features an educational stroll along Stuart Public Beach with a naturalist. Adults can meet at the Florida Oceanographic Coastal Center, 890 N.E. Ocean Blvd., Hutchinson Island at 9 a.m. Thursday; (772) 225-0505, ext. 108;

fos-cc.org.

Czech Orchestra

The Czech Orchestra will perform selections by Beethoven, Dvorak and Smetana at 7:30 p.m. today at the Community Church of Vero Beach, 1901 23rd St. Cost is \$40; (772) 778-1070.

'Fully Comitted'

"Fully Comitted" is on the Waxlax Stage at Riverside Theatre, Vero Beach, through Feb. 8. Show times are 8:15 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday; and 2:15 p.m. Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. For tickets, call (772) 231-6990 or (800) 445-6745 or visit at river

sidetheatre.com.

Some PSL homes to

be declared nuisances

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Transit plan topic

of joint meeting

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Meet chairwoman,

superintendent today

There will be cookies, coffee and a chance to talk with School Board Chairwoman Judi Miller and Schools Superintendent Michael Lannon at a new series of informal public gatherings beginning today.

The first event is scheduled for 8 a.m. today in the community room of Fort Pierce Central High School, 4101 S. 25th St..

Future events will take place at different schools throughout St. Lucie County.

Should land be donated for redevelopment?

The Fort Pierce Redevelopment Agency board at its 12:30 p.m. meeting Wednesday will decide whether to donate 6.87 acres of land for the proposed \$90 million Atocha Village project on the old H.D. King Power Plant site on Indian River Drive.

Snyder Development LLC is proposing to build a mix of shops, restaurants, condominiums and a hotel on the property.

City Commissioner Rufus Alexander also is expected to ask the board to reconsider a decision to build the controversial \$600,000

parking lot at 309 and 311 Ocean Drive. Several property owners near the proposed parking lot have signed a petition to the city opposing the project.

Science and engineering fair

The public can catch a glimpse of the top entries in the Education Foundation of Indian River County's Indian River Regional Science and Engineering Fair on Saturday. The projects may be viewed from 12:30 to 1:45 p.m. at Gifford Middle School, 4530 28th Court, Vero Beach. The fair is presented in partnership with the School District of Indian River County and is supported by private donations and grant assistance; more than \$1 million in scholarships and academic prizes will be awarded to students. For more information, call the Education Foundation of Indian River County office: (772) 564-0034.

Sebastian to consider

Fleming Street plans

Sebastian City Council on Wednesday will consider for approval of a 116-unit town house development within the Chesser's Gap Commercial Planned Unit Development on Fleming Street, across from the Wave Street intersection. The proposed project consists of 116 units in 18 residential buildings, together with parking, water and sewer service, drainage, and landscaping. A public hearing on the request will be at the 6:30 p.m. council meeting.

Help spend \$700K

in public funds

Have advice for the Indian River County Land Acquisition Advisory Committee? The members are looking at about \$700,000 left from a

\$50 million environmental-cultural bond issue in 2004. And at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday they'll be in the County Administration Building B, 1800 27th St., Vero Beach.

School budget topic

of town hall meeting

The Indian River County School District budget will be the topic at the district's town hall meeting, "Shining the Light on the Education Budget," at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Richardson Center, Indian River State College, Mueller Campus, 6155 College Lane, Vero Beach. Schools officials will talk about the district's financial situation, give an update on this month's special legislative session and discuss where to go from here. Call (772) 564-3200.

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Veto Florida Forever Cut

01/25/2009

Palm Beach Post

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Palm Beach Post Editorial

Sunday, January 25, 2009

Gov. Crist is thinking twice about a \$4 million cut to this year's state budget. He's thinking clearly.

Last year, the Legislature renewed the Florida Forever program. For nearly 20 years, as Florida has grown, the state has used the program to buy land for preservation. This spring, the state is supposed to issue the first set of bonds for the planned \$300 million in purchases. During the special session, however, the Legislature cut the \$4.26 million that would have gone to service the debt in the budget year that ends June 30.

What are these?

Charles Lee, a vice president for Audubon of Florida, said in an interview that legislators told him and other conservation lobbyists that the state remained committed to Florida Forever and would restart the program next year. Later, though, legislators began expressing concern over the \$20 million to \$30 million in debt service that would be required over a full year. Senate President Jeff Atwater, R-North Palm Beach, worried about Florida losing its AAA bond rating. That promise from Tallahassee suddenly sounded shaky. Gov. Crist - who has made his own promises about repaying raided trust funds - said last week that he might veto the Florida Forever cut.

The danger is that if the program stalls this year, it could die next year. Some legislators never have liked Florida Forever, which began in 1990 under Gov. Bob Martinez, a Republican. Obviously, it can be tough to argue that as the state cuts money for public schools and health care the state should keep spending money to buy land. The difference is that education and health care won't stop, despite the cuts. At some point, the aim will be to restore the money. If Florida Forever is zeroed out this year, the whole program could disappear.

"If this were a \$300 million hit to the budget in one year, of course it would be different," Mr. Lee said. "But \$4 million? That gets lost in the noise. You wouldn't save much, and the program would be at risk." Indeed, the Legislature's ham-handed budget work of the past two years threatens other programs that have helped Floridians buy homes and kept young people from drifting into lives of crime and starting to smoke.

With Florida Forever, there's another consideration for Gov. Crist. He pushed hard for the state's purchase of U.S. Sugar's land for Everglades restoration. In that case, though, he didn't have to find the \$1.34 billion those 180,000 acres will cost. That money is coming only from the taxpayers in the 16 counties of the South Florida Water Management District. If the governor now balks at

spending \$4 million - and even if he balks at \$20 million for next year - because he might have to make a tough choice, he will look less like a champion of the Florida environment.

With property values down, land-buying money would go further than ever. Gov. Crist should veto the \$4 million cut. The program is called Florida Forever, not Florida For A While.

EVERGLADES TALKS FOCUS ON RESTORING WATER FLOW

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The \$1.34 billion deal for the largest public land buy in Florida history started backward.

Instead of creating a plan to fix the Everglades and then shopping for land that could make it work, state officials started by striking a deal for 180,000 acres of U.S. Sugar Corp. farmland that was once part of the famed River of Grass.

Supporters contend that a simple real estate maxim explains why the state put other Everglades projects on hold and spent more than a year trying to reach a deal with U.S. Sugar: location, location, location.

U.S. Sugar's farmland sits right in the path of water that once flowed naturally from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades and never before was the company willing to part with the land at a price the state was willing to pay.

Now, facing a September deadline to close the deal, state officials are starting the public process of deciding how to use the land to restore flows of water from the lake to the Everglades.

A group of about 100 environmentalists, agricultural representatives and Glades community leaders on Thursday gathered just down the road from U.S. Sugar's Clewiston sugar mill to discuss how the deal could reshape the landscape south of Lake Okeechobee.

The South Florida Water Management District proposes using a series of reservoirs and treatment areas to store, clean and deliver water to what remains of the Everglades.

Where to build those facilities and how much land is needed has tremendous long-term effects on the cost of restoring the Everglades.

Those decisions also affect how much farmland gets sacrificed for restoration in Glades communities dependent on agricultural jobs.

"There is no perfect footprint . . . for any of the projects that we are talking about," said Tom Olliff, the district's assistant deputy director.

Worried about losing farmland to restoration, Glades business leaders questioned the state jumping at the U.S. Sugar deal instead of sticking with plans to purchase land north of Lake Okeechobee to capture and clean polluted water before it drains into the lake.

Cleaning polluted water before it flows into Lake Okeechobee and then storing more water in the lake would allow the state to avoid buying as much land in the Glades, said Barbara Miedema, vice president of the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida.

"Do you really need to take this much land out of production in the Everglades Agricultural Area?" Miedema asked.

The economic ripple effects of buying cow pastures north of Lake Okeechobee and converting them to water storage would be less widespread than sacrificing farmland vital to the economies of Glades communities, Clewiston attorney Antonio Perez said.

"Does it make sense to take some of the most productive farmland in Florida?" Perez asked.

The land deal has been hailed for its potential benefits to the environment, but it is "disingenuous" to create the impression that it will enable sugar cane fields to be transformed back into the Everglades, said Kevin McCarthy, Hendry County commissioner.

The deal would lead to massive construction projects to create the infrastructure to store and treat water that would be moved south through canals. "Everything you do is not [re-creating] a River of Grass," McCarthy said.

A draft plan for how to use the U.S. Sugar land is due by June. The group, open to anyone interested, meets again at 10 a.m. on Feb. 3 at the district's West Palm Beach headquarters.

Cost remains a significant hurdle to finalizing the deal with U.S. Sugar. The district has until September to line up financing for the deal and then must determine if it can afford the long-term debt payments. Those payments would come from property taxes paid in the 16-county district from Orlando to the Keys.

The cost of the land deal threatens to leave the district "tapped out," Executive Director Carol Wehle said Thursday. That calls into question how to pay for the reservoirs and treatment areas.

"The challenge is going to be where are we going to get the funding to build this?" Wehle said.

A restoration plan approved in 2000 called for the state and federal government to share in the cost of Everglades restoration, but so far the federal government hasn't delivered most of its share.

Whether district officials will agree to proceed with the U.S. Sugar deal without a renewed commitment for help to pay for restoration projects remains to be seen, district governing board member Jerry Montgomery said Thursday.

Andy Reid can be reached at abreid@SunSentinel.com or 561-228-5504.

State Gas Stations Face Choice Upgrade Tanks Or Close

01/24/2009

TBO.com

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WEST PALM BEACH - First it was high credit card fees. Then came higher gas prices. Now, hundreds of gas stations around the state are shutting down because their insurance companies will not renew policies unless stations install new double-walled underground gas tanks, which can cost \$400,000.

That can make or break stations, which make money on the sale of sodas and plastic-wrapped honey buns, not gas.

'We are going to lose a lot of stations because they have not upgraded,' said Pat Moricca, president of the Florida Gasoline Retailers Association in Longwood.

Charles Beale, owner and vice president of Delta Petroleum, a Mangonia Park-based firm that sells and installs the tanks, said: 'There are a lot of people having trouble. I had one in here the other day who had tears in his eyes. He said there was a good chance he would lose his property and his business.'

Figures are not available on how many stations have closed, but an estimated 20 percent of the state's approximately 8,000 to 9,000 gas stations have yet to make the change.

'If it is a mom-and-pop and the margins are slim, it's not worthwhile for them to spend \$250,000 to \$300,000 to upgrade the tanks. Some will shut that down and just run the convenience store,' said Jack Barsin, president of Tank Insure Inc. in Merritt Island. 'You will see more and more of it by the end of the year.'

It's not just gas stations at risk.

George Lott, owner of Lott Bros. Marina in North Palm Beach, spent \$20,000 to have the marina's underground tank removed rather than replacing it for around \$100,000.

'It would have taken me the rest of my life to pay that off with what we make on gas,' he said. In business since 1962, the marine and tackle store no longer sells fuel to boaters.

The tank rule affects hundreds of businesses with underground fuel tanks, whether the fuel is for a generator or lawn mowers.

Publix Super Markets has fuel tanks to run standby generators; hospitals in Palm Beach County do, too. Golf courses, churches, nursing homes and farms are subject to the regulation.

But it comes at the worst possible time for gas station owners.

When gas prices were high, station owners had to pay up to 12 cents a gallon to credit card companies, which tie their fees to the

cost of gas. As prices nose-dived, the tiny profit margins on gas sales tightened even further. As the recession took hold, even the sale of snacks a profit generator fell.

The nation's credit crunch has exacerbated the inability of station owners to finance new tanks, a job that typically costs \$200,000 to \$300,000.

Larger, newer stations aren't likely to have a problem.

'With the smaller ones, the older ones with two or three bays, definitely the tanks are an issue,' said real estate broker Marc Gomes, vice president of PetroProperties and Finance in Coral Gables. 'They can't afford to get them done, or they cannot afford to get financing to get them done.'

Real estate broker and consultant Ron Santicola, president of Highland Beach-based Condevco LLC, said: 'There were people who had tank construction jobs lined up, and the banks pulled funding.'

The wave of insurance cancellations 'came out of nowhere,' Moricca said. 'This was something we never expected.'

Even though the new tank deadline is not until Dec. 31, insurers have been cutting off stations since last year. Lott, for instance, said he made the decision after cancellation of the marina's pollution insurance in September.

It's illegal to operate in Florida without pollution insurance.

Tank Insure's Barsin said ACE Insurance, a global firm headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland, has dropped at least 200 of his clients. The other two major providers of pollution liability insurance will not write policies for new customers.

'I have files lined up the wall that have been non-renewed by ACE,' Barsin said. 'They can't get insurance.'

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is aware that insurers are not renewing policies for gas stations.

'We can't control the decisions of the insurance company,' spokeswoman Cristina Llorens said.

One reason insurance companies are skittish is that evidence of fuel spills might be found during installation. Remediation could easily run into five figures, Santicola said.

'You can't blame the insurance company,' she added.

Jim Smith, president and CEO of the Florida Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association in Tallahassee, estimates at least several hundred stations are in jeopardy of closing or have closed because of the lack of pollution liability insurance.

Staying open may just cost too much.

Carl Berner, president of Berner Oil in Clewiston, is primarily a wholesale distributor whose company delivers fuel to farmers and small gas stations. He also owns six stations, including two in Clewiston that need new tanks. That town's future is in jeopardy because of the state's pending buyout of U.S. Sugar Corp.

'I am looking at a quote to do my tanks right now for \$184,000, and that is with me providing the tanks. We are looking at \$200,000 to \$220,000 per location,' Berner said. 'I have to do a couple of locations out here, and I am looking at the town being decimated.'

Rich Ice Cream made the decision more than a decade ago.

'We were told they needed \$150,000 worth of upgrades' to gas and diesel tanks, said Alan Beswick, plant engineer for the West Palm Beach ice cream maker. 'We decided at that point it wasn't worth it.'

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convenience store tackle store palm beach beale lawn mowers
sodas

