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## **SCCF, BIG ARTS and Everglades Foundation to present conservation forum**

02/04/2009

Cape Coral Daily Breeze

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South Florida Water Management District Governing Board Vice Chair Shannon Estenoz will be on Sanibel on Feb. 17, to participate in the annual Conservation Lecture at BIG ARTS sponsored by the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, BIG ARTS and Everglades Foundation.

"U.S. Sugar, Local Aquatic Preserves and the Everglades: How Getting the Water Right in the Everglades Agricultural Area Helps Our Estuary" will feature Estenoz, who has been instrumental in the vote to support the purchase; Dr. Thomas Van Lent, Senior Scientist for the Everglades Foundation; and Rae Ann Wessel, SCCF Natural Resource Policy Director who has brought the voice of the west coast and our estuary to the discussions and decision-makers. Kirk Fordham, CEO of the Everglades Foundation, will moderate the panel discussion.

Estenoz will present a brief overview of the status of the purchase. Dr. Van Lent will present a program on restoration alternatives

after the land purchase, including the science of storing one million-acre feet of water in the Everglades Agricultural Area and positive benefits for Southwest Florida resulting from the acquisition of 180,000 acres south of Lake Okeechobee from U.S. Sugar Corp. 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.

This is a unique opportunity to access these decision-makers, ask questions about the deal 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, please call SCCF at (239) 472-2329.

#### Speaker biographies

Shannon Estenoz is the vice chair, Board of Governors of the South Florida Water Management District. Since 1996, Shannon has worked in the NGO sector for the restoration of the Everglades. She began her Everglades career as the executive director of the Environmental & Land Use Law Center. In 1997 Shannon joined the World Wildlife Fund as its Everglades field representative, and later as its Everglades program director. Shannon joined the National Parks Conservation Association as the director of its Sun Coast Region, a position she held until July 2007. In April of 2007, Gov. Charlie Crist appointed Shannon to the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District, and today she serves as the Board's vice chair, and as vice chair of the Water Resources Advisory Commission. Shannon also chairs the Broward County Water Resources Task Force. In 2001 Shannon won a National Wetland Award for her role in the passage of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000, which authorized the \$8 billion Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. Shannon is a fifth generation native of Key West and holds degrees in international affairs and civil engineering from Florida State University.

Tom Van Lent, Ph.d., P.E., is currently the senior scientist at the Everglades Foundation where he works on providing scientific and technical support to non-governmental environmental organizations supported by the Foundation. His responsibilities include presenting expert analysis of hydrologic, engineering, and ecological information to assist in development of Everglades restoration alternatives and meeting Everglades restoration and protection objectives. Van Lent has a distinguished career as a scientist and engineer. He graduated from South Dakota State University before attending the University of Minnesota and Stanford University where he received master's and doctorate's degrees respectively. He has also worked at the South Florida Water Management District, Everglades National Park and as an assistant professor at South Dakota State University. Van Lent is a resident of the Florida Keys.

Rae Ann Wessel, SCCF natural resource policy director, is a limnologist and marine scientist with 26 years of experience working in the environmental field in South Florida. For 19 years, she managed her own environmental consulting firm, Ecosystem

Specialists, working both in the field and with regulations at the local, regional, state and federal levels. In 1994 Wessel assisted with coordination of a community forum on issues related to the Caloosahatchee. The forum resulted in the creation of the non-profit Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association. Since that time, she has been involved with identifying critical Caloosahatchee issues and building support for sustainable solutions. In addition, she is involved in oxbow research, historical documentation, natural resource policy issues and education projects on the Caloosahatchee and its estuary. Wessel has developed and guides educational river cruises about the history, folklore, ecology and current issues related to this historic river.

Kirk Fordham is a veteran political operative, having worked on numerous House and Senate campaigns. He currently serves as chief executive officer of the Everglades Foundation, the only national organization dedicated solely to protecting and restoring one of the world's most unique natural ecosystems. Previously, Fordham worked as head of Rock Creek Strategies, his own public affairs and government relations firm. For 14 years, he served as a chief of staff and senior legislative staffer on Capitol Hill for three Members of Congress. In 2004, he was the architect of the successful fundraising effort for then-HUD Secretary Mel Martinez's winning Senate campaign. A graduate of the University of Maryland-College Park, Fordham is a native of Rochester, New York and now lives in Miami.

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## **U.S. Sugar deal too costly for state role**

02/05/2009

Palm Beach Post - Online

PAUL QUINLAN

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Gov. Charlie Crist's administration decided to put the full burden of his billion-dollar-plus Everglades initiative on taxpayers in southern Florida so as not to worsen the state's already strained budget, newly released court records show.

Sometime before June, when Crist unveiled his \$1.75 billion plan to buy out U.S. Sugar Corp. and use its farmland empire to restore the Everglades, the administration rejected proposals to have Tallahassee pay half the cost, according to the records.

That left taxpayers in the 16-county South Florida Water Management District to finance the state's priciest-ever conservation land purchase.

"The original concept would be that it would be a 50-50 partnership with the State of Florida," Tom Olliff, the district's assistant executive director, said in a recent deposition with attorneys for a rival company seeking to block the deal. "Specifically, I know that there were discussions regarding the changes that appeared to have and were projected to continue to occur to the state budget."

Sure enough, a \$2.4 billion state budget gap led lawmakers to hold a special session last month to cut spending and raid state savings accounts. But it's not clear how affordable the deal is for the

district, which is proposing a bond issue to finance the purchase.

From Tallahassee to the district's suburban West Palm Beach headquarters, questions about the price and timing have dogged the ambitious proposal, which Crist in November scaled back to a \$1.34 billion, land-only purchase. The state faces a September deadline to close on the 180,000 acres.

"I can't imagine a worse time to do something like this. I can't imagine us ever negotiating a worse deal than this," said Mike Collins of Islamorada, the district board's only non-Crist appointee.

Crist's spokesman said "a lot of options" were discussed before anything was brokered with U.S. Sugar.

"One of the options we did discuss was a 50-50 split," said Sterling Ivey. "But it was determined that the district had the bonding capacity when the options were being discussed and has the bonding capacity now."

Mike Sole, secretary of the state Department of Environmental Protection, said in an e-mailed statement Thursday that there had been "no formal analysis" of splitting the costs - "just discussion during the early stages to see if a split would be possible."

"Due to the state's limited bond capacity it was decided that the water management district has more options for financing," added Sole.

The district's financial analysis shows that the deal would saddle the agency with a deficit of more than \$88 million in 2010, or about one-fifth of its "core" expenditures for the year. Debt payments would add up to between \$2.9 billion and \$3.4 billion altogether over 30 years.

That's left the deal on uncertain footing. Just before approving the sale contract in December in a 4-3 vote, the district's board inserted a clause that would allow it to cancel if the purchase interfered with district's core missions of water supply management and flood control.

The district will pay for the land by issuing "certificates of participation," a financing mechanism similar to bonds.

District leaders will go before Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Donald Hafele today to seek permission to borrow up to \$2.25 billion. It faces legal objections filed by U.S. Sugar rival Florida Crystals Corp., among others.

District Executive Director Carol Wehle told lawmakers in Tallahassee this week that she expects the bond case to wind up before the state Supreme Court.

Wehle told the legislators her agency still intends to close the deal without raising property taxes. "We will live within our means," she said.

#### Financing the U.S. Sugar deal

The South Florida Water Management District plans to finance its purchase of U.S. Sugar's 180,000 acres by issuing up to \$2.25 billion in "certificates of participation," which are similar to bonds.

This method allows the district to borrow without seeking voters' approval.

The process requires setting up a not-for-profit corporation that will own the land and lease it to the district on one-year, renewable terms.

A trustee, in this case Deutsche Bank, will oversee the corporation, collecting lease payments from the district and selling interest in those payments to investors.

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## Big deal threatens small towns

02/05/2009

Palm Beach Post

Joel Engelhardt

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The endangered towns on Lake Okeechobee find themselves in the uncomfortable position of seeking aid and comfort from the enemy. The enemy in these parts is the state, which is insisting on buying 180,000 acres of fertile farmland to convert into who knows what.

To Clewiston and Belle Glade and South Bay and Pahokee and other tiny places dotting the lake, the plan to buy U.S. Sugar to save the Everglades, means just one thing: their death knell.

Since Gov. Crist announced the now-\$1.34-billion deal on June 24, business in Clewiston, the town U.S. Sugar built, has faltered. People aren't fixing up their homes anymore so the paint store and the plumber can't make money. Residents can't flee because they can't sell their houses - who's going to buy a house in a dying town? - so the real estate agents aren't making money. It's gotten so bad that business is down even at the local McDonald's.

But these residents won't give up. They made so much noise that they rattled the South Florida Water Management District board, which voted 4-3 for the buyout in December but which must vote again before the buyout is completed in September.

The people who love their way of life want to know how Gov. Crist will keep his big deal from killing their small towns. They want a plan. They want action. They figure the moment the land deal closes, no one will care what they want anymore.

What they got was Dale Brill. Dr. Brill holds a doctorate in marketing and is Gov. Crist's economic development officer. He came down for three days of meetings and tours this week. The first thing he told 15 business leaders at a meeting Tuesday in Clewiston is that he's no Superman. But he is representing the governor. And the governor told him, just the night before, "You've got to move the needle."

Dr. Brill worked mostly to put this tough crowd at ease. "I am on the hook" with the governor, he said. He knows how hard it can be, he said, having grown up in Lockport, Ill., as steel mills and oil refineries closed.

He tried to be real. He'll help them negotiate the maze of bureaucracy. He'll be their bridge to Tallahassee, where, at the governor's direction, he is now included in weekly meetings with the secretaries of Transportation, Community Affairs and Environmental Protection.

He called them the Three Amigos. Add Dr. Brill and call them the Four Musketeers or the Four Horsemen. Doesn't matter. It'll take a lot more than a nickname to satisfy this crowd.

Dr. Brill says he can do it. "I'm in government not because I wanted to be a bureaucrat," he said. "The reason I'm in it is to be able to look back and say 'I made a difference.' "

Dr. Brill got here by way of Visit Florida, the state's public-private tourism agency. He's been a marketing professor at Florida State University and, for three years, wrestled with General Motors Corp. over the company's shift to e-commerce.

He talked specifics. He promised to help find money to close a troubled deal to bring a City Mattress plant to Clewiston's empty industrial park. He promised to find ways to widen 22 miles of State Road 80. And he pledged to deliver the plan that everyone wants. "You've got my personal commitment," Dr. Brill said, "to give you a sense the ball is rolling somewhere."

Not exactly Knute Rockne, but not wild-eyed either. Dr. Brill is new to Clewiston but he has grasped one sure thing. The people of this city founded in the 1920s, before U.S. Sugar came in 1931, are not ready to give up when U.S. Sugar leaves in 2016. He knows enough to know that wild-eyed promises won't work. Not here. Not now.

"I have my marching orders (from the governor) to give you that plan," he told the business leaders, "and if that commitment isn't there, then I'm the fool."

His enemies - former enemies, perhaps - pray he isn't.

Joel Engelhardt is an editorial writer for The Palm Beach Post. His e-mail address is joel\_engelhardt@pbpost.com

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## **Dauray Defends His Vote Against U.S. Sugar Purchase**

02/05/2009

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Dauray defends his vote against U.S. Sugar purchase  
By TAMMY ZINK, sancapnews@breezenewspapers.com  
POSTED: February 3, 2009

At its regular meeting on Tuesday, the Sanibel City Council welcomed South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) board member Charles Dauray, who attended the meeting at the request of the Council. Dauray represents Lee, Collier, Hendry and Charlotte counties on the SFWMD Board.

Dauray's invitation to Sanibel was sparked by his recent vote against the purchase of 187,000 acres of U.S. Sugar lands, which many believe is paramount to restoring the natural flow of water from Lake Okeechobee south to the Everglades.

Despite Dauray's no vote, the \$1.34 billion land purchase agreement passed by a margin of 4-to-3. Sanibel City Councilors wanted to know why Dauray chose to vote against the purchase.

Touted by Florida Governor Charlie Crist as an important land acquisition akin to the creation of such national landmarks as Yellowstone Park, the purchase agreement between U.S. Sugar and the South Florida Water Management District contains an "escape clause," which allows the SFWMD to back out of the deal before the September 2009 closing deadline if financing becomes a problem - which many say could very well be the case with the State of Florida facing a \$3.4 billion budget shortfall and the economy continuing its nosedive.

The district reportedly plans to finance the purchase through a bond issue to be repaid by the taxpayers of the 16 counties that make up the South Florida Water Management District.

The deal will also allow U.S. Sugar to lease back the lands for \$50 per acre, and continue operations there for another seven years - a measure that competitors have argued against as an unfair government subsidy.

Despite his vote against the U.S. Sugar deal in December, Dauray told the Council that he ultimately supports the land purchase.

"But I don't support the timing," he said. "It's a huge obligation with very bad timing."

Dauray went on to explain to the Council the many different factors that went into his decision to vote against the purchase. Citing everything from appraisals that have estimated the land's value at up to \$400 million less than the contracted price, to the economic impact the purchase would have on the people of Clewiston who depend on sugar farming for survival, Dauray said that the Everglades restoration project was a huge undertaking that had never before been attempted in the history of the world.

In addition to the actual exorbitant price of purchase, and the seven-year continued operation of U.S. Sugar, Dauray said that he was worried about the cost of the actual engineering project to restore the flow of water to Lake Okeechobee.

"What happens if funding is not available?" he asked, adding that environmental concerns associated with such a large-scale construction project would also be an issue. "As the Everglades

have been drained of water, wildlife has been moving inland. If we were to put in a contrivance, and put water back where Mother Nature intended, the animals would lose the habitat that has been artificially created. It could tie us up in court forever."

Dauray said that despite the initial elation among environmentalists about the U.S. Sugar purchase, it could be decades before any positive environmental impact would be realized.

"We could be looking at 40 years," he said. And any number of years is much too long in Dauray's eyes. "We need to get something done now," he warned. "We need help now, to relieve pressure on the estuary system now. Everyone is in a hurry except when it comes to the big plan. I don't think all the players have played yet."

Dauray said that he had a firm understanding of and sympathy for the water releases from Lake Okeechobee that have polluted the waters of the Caloosahatchee River and led to outbreaks of red drift algae that chased tourists away from local beaches.

"Garbage in, garbage out," he said.

However, he pointed out that the releases were necessary to protect against flooding after several hurricanes dumped copious amounts of rain into the lake, raising water levels to extremely dangerous heights.

"It's a matter of public safety," said Dauray. "If it gets to 17 feet, they're going to release water."

When asked about the possibility of cleaning up Lake Okeechobee to minimize the environmental effects when releases are necessary, Dauray said that, too, was an enormous undertaking.

"Dredging is a possibility to get the muck out," said Dauray. "But then, you're looking at particle suspension. And you have to understand that much of the contamination is chemical, from DDT that was used to get insects off of cows."

Although the purchase agreement with U.S. Sugar is pretty much a "done deal," Dauray said he still hopes for a more financially appropriate, and more timely solution to the water problems that now exist.

"We know what we want to do, but it's what we're able to afford to do as taxpayers," he said. "About the best we can do within our means is to continue to emphasize your deep concern for the area you have. We'll never go back to exactly what it was. I wish we had a magic wand and kettle of gold and that we could take care of it today. But we've got a hefty struggle ahead of us."

Dauray urged those who wanted to help in that struggle to pay attention to the activities of the South Florida Water Management District.

"Not today, but coming up, keep yourselves informed," he added.

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## U.S. Sugar Land Vital for Everglades

02/06/2009

Ledger, The

CHARLES GEANANGEL

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Florida is positioned to take a giant leap forward in our effort to protect the Everglades. On the table is a deal that would allow the state to purchase more than 182,000 acres of property in the Everglades Agricultural Area that is owned by the United States Sugar Corp..

Many Everglades advocates such as me never believed that such a deal would never be possible. Yet, in December, after thorough public discussion, the governing board of the South Florida Water Management District approved both the purchase of more than 180,000 acres for \$1.34 billion and a related leaseback of that land for continued farming for seven years.

This unique deal makes government and U.S. Sugar partners in managing the succession of ownership. U.S. Sugar intends to remain a profitable agricultural interest for at least the next seven years. The SFWMD needs a land manager and needs to avoid imposing extreme economic hardship on the workers and communities that rely on U.S. Sugar's farming enterprise. The agricultural community needs to know when surplus land from the U.S. Sugar deal will be available for purchase or lease.

The acquisition will meet these needs and, with additional project planning and implementation, will ultimately secure Florida's environment and economy from the impacts of drought and flood.

Everglades restoration has long been compromised as a result of insufficient land available in the agriculture area on which to build reservoirs and water-treatment areas. Acquiring the U.S. Sugar land provides an unprecedented opportunity to store, treat and convey water in a manner that more naturally mimics nature's hydrologic patterns.

The projects made possible by the purchase will also reduce competition for water supply, improve fishing, and provide increased recreation and tourism opportunities. All of these benefits will help enhance Florida's economy and environment.

This is by far the most cost-efficient approach to storing, treating and moving water. Reworking the manner in which water moves through the ecosystem is vital to recovering Lake Okeechobee and the northern estuaries, reviving flow through the historic river of grass, and getting freshwater to the parched marshes of Everglades National Park and Florida Bay.

Additional restoration land south of the lake will relieve pressure on the vulnerable Hoover Dike and allow vast amounts of dirty lake water to be moved south for treatment and storage. The lake water will become a more certain source for the parched Everglades and for urban water supply. Other farms in the agriculture area will also benefit from water security.

Sending the dirty water south for treatment and storage will provide water security for the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. This security is achieved by dramatically reducing the need for large harmful discharges, and will secure water quality that helps fishing, hunting and bird-watching. These recreational activities are vital parts of Florida's economy.

The Everglades Protection Area, including the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, has also suffered greatly from both water management activities, and high levels of nutrients in agricultural and urban runoff. The altered habitat has greatly diminished wading-bird population. Fresh flowing water, delivered in more natural cycles, is necessary for the Everglades to function as a healthy ecosystem.

The acquisition of U.S. Sugar land and the implementation of large-scale projects will allow for water delivery of sufficient quantity and quality to the natural system. This delivery will bring the ecosystem back from its current precarious tipping point.

The southern end of the Everglades ecosystem once harbored the most abundant wildlife in Florida. Located at the end of a chain of habitat destruction, the southern end of the system has long suffered a cascade of impacts from alterations throughout the entire Everglades ecosystem.

Habitat degradation in the southern mangrove zone and Florida Bay is documented by decline of fish-eating birds (e.g. pelicans, osprey, eagles), predatory fish, alligators and crocodiles. Audubon scientists recently recorded the worst roseate spoonbill nesting season in Florida Bay since the 1960s.

Downstream ecosystems will benefit immensely from the large storage capacity provided by U.S. Sugar land. Until the system has sufficient storage capacity, the southern part of the system will continue to degrade as a result of receiving too little freshwater. Other restoration projects, now being planned or built to benefit Everglades National Park and Florida Bay, will not be as effective without additional sources of freshwater.

All stakeholders will participate in the open process of deciding what land to use, trade or surplus from U.S. Sugar acreage. The ability to use extensive land in the agriculture area to store excess water during wet periods, clean it and deliver it, where and when it is needed most, will secure water for South Florida's population during dry periods and protect coastal communities during wet seasons.

Everglades advocates urge the public and decision-makers alike to support the U.S. Sugar land deal as a smart restoration decision, which will provide tremendous benefits for the public and for the natural system.

[ Charles Geanangel of Winter Haven is a board member of Audubon of Florida and an officer of the Lake Region Audubon Society, located in Polk County. ]

