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EDITORIAL Port dream a pipe dream?

08/24/2009

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Palm Beach Post - Online

A reality check for those who believe that an inland port would produce jobs to save the Glades communities comes in the state's objections to a proposal by Florida Crystals.

The West Palm Beach-based, family-owned company wants Palm Beach County to alter its growth plan on Tuesday to allow the inland port - a warehousing and distribution hub - on 318 acres next to Florida Crystals' Okeelanta sugar mill near South Bay. But the state's growth management agency, the Department of Community Affairs, objects, in part because the need for an inland port has not been demonstrated.

The project is caught up in Gov. Crist's wish for the state to buy U.S. Sugar's land.

Citing two state studies, the DCA dispels the talking points with its rebuttal: The inland port is unlikely to participate in the Asian import trade; export possibilities to the Caribbean appear limited; the inland port would do little to enhance the hemmed-in Port of Palm Beach; the inland port's success depends on offering low costs. The county, which submitted the proposal for state review this year, countered by citing the same reports to say that an inland port is justified and the best location is the Okeelanta property.

The Crystals site is among six, two of them in Palm Beach County, pitched to the Port of Palm Beach for designation as an inland port that would take, store and distribute cargo by truck or rail from the three South Florida ports. The Port of Palm Beach insists that its five elected commissioners will make the final selection.

But the politics of Gov. Crist's U.S. Sugar purchase may change that. Hendry County, which has two entries in the inland port sweepstakes, wants the inland port there, to offset job losses as Hendry-based U.S. Sugar sells its land. Florida Department of Transportation Secretary Stephanie Kopelousos held a meeting 11 days ago in Belle Glade that may have been the first step in wresting control from the Port of Palm Beach.

The state's studies say that the inland port must have the participation of Port Everglades in Broward County and the Port of Miami. But the Port of Miami is investigating an inland port at the Florida East Coast Railway yards in Hialeah, Miami Today reported last week.

The Florida Crystals site also faces legitimate opposition from environmental groups, which worry that it would block

Everglades restoration options for water storage south of Lake Okeechobee. Florida Crystals counters that restoration must go around its site, which is dominated by sugar-processing facilities.

For Port of Palm Beach commissioners, the idea of an inland port taking jobs and an industrial tax base anywhere but Palm Beach County is anathema. But they will do themselves and the county no favor if they remain blind to political and market realities.

SUGAR LAND BUY, WATER DUMPING NOT BEST OPTIONS

08/23/2009

Sun Sentinel

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My colleague, Eric Buermann, chairman of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board, recently pointed out in a column to your newspaper that many environmentalists have called the purchase of U.S. Sugar's land "fresh hope" for the Everglades.

I find it extremely sad that hope is all we have after all the years of hard work to produce actual benefits to the Everglades and estuaries. Just this month, the water district requested court approval for massive public debt to fill a bottomless environmental "hope" chest with no reasonable expectation of ever realizing any meaningful public benefit from it.

It is likely, as the state's attorney has opined, that the \$2.2 billion requested cannot be authorized under state law. That means that the water district will not have the money for existing authorized projects. Those of us who oppose the structure of this deal do not oppose Everglades restoration.

Quite the opposite is true. There is no denying the urgent need for storage and treatment. There is also no denying the district's admission in court that much of this land will be unavailable for 20 years and that other projects already authorized, funded and designed on land we already own will not go forward as a consequence of this purchase.

This point is critical and often missed in the debate. Twenty years is a long time.

What's more, it is entirely likely that the A-1 Reservoir, already authorized, funded, under construction and now out of court could be finished in three years. It is also likely it would hold more water than any project built on the U.S. Sugar land.

Proponents of the deal constantly refer to their "vision." Visions are cheap, projects are expensive and delaying restoration for obscure, undefined and illusive visions is irresponsible.

Michael Collins is a member of the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District.

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BLACK COUNTY OFFICIALS PUSH FOR PORT IN THE EVERGLADES

08/22/2009

Sun Sentinel

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A coalition of black elected officials is using its political muscle to push a controversial plan to build an "inland port" in the Glades.

For the first time in its nine-year history, the Palm Beach County Caucus of Black Elected Officials has formally taken a position on a countywide issue.

The 42-member group passed a resolution last month supporting plans that would put the rail-linked warehouse and distribution center in western Palm Beach County, despite objections from environmentalists who say it would interfere with Everglades restoration. Members plan to speak in favor of the project at meetings on the issue.

The caucus is also pushing for the creation of an "economic transition and support" plan to map out how the Glades region would recover from the state's purchase of thousands of acres of U.S. Sugar land. The sale, aimed at restoring the Everglades, would leave many in the Glades region without work.

"The economic impact is inarguable," said Mangonia Park Mayor William Albury, the group's president.

The push came four months after former County Commissioner Addie Greene was hired as the group's executive director.

Greene, who retired from her county commission seat earlier this year, founded the caucus in 2000. After stepping down, she promised to give the group a higher profile in county politics.

"This is the first time we have ever done a resolution to support anything," Greene said Thursday.

More than a dozen caucus members gathered outside the county's downtown governmental center to show their support for the inland port project.

The caucus has not endorsed a specific location in the Glades region for the port, Albury said.

The Port of Palm Beach will ultimately decide where the project is built.

Sugar grower Florida Crystals Corp. has submitted plans to build the port on 318 acres it owns near Lake Okeechobee. It is the only Palm Beach County site near the lake that is under consideration by port commissioners.

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Black officials' group headed by former Palm Beach County Commissioner Addie Greene supports 'inland

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08/21/2009

Palm Beach Post

Sorentrve, Jennifer

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