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### Everglades restoration needs growers to collaborate

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10/26/2009

Palm Beach Post - Online

SANDY MOHER

Palm Beach Post Letters to the Editor

While The Post accurately reported overwhelming public support for the state's historic U.S. Sugar land acquisition (Oct. 20), the story incorrectly asserted that we seek to "boot sugar companies out of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA)."

In fact, we believe that the Glades communities' future depends on a healthy agricultural industry, along with a thriving Everglades and an abundant clean water supply. If Everglades restoration is to succeed, it is important that sugar farmers continue their role in the cleanup of water pollution through more environmentally friendly farming practices. Additionally, poorly planned industrial sprawl in the heart of the EAA, like the Florida Crystals proposal for an inland port, is more harmful to the Everglades than sugar cane production.

It is for this reason that we - along with a strong majority of Floridians - oppose the building of a massive inland port complex in the middle of the region slated for key Everglades restoration projects. Instead, it is only logical to locate such a sprawling transportation and distribution center closer to the very communities that are most in need of economic development and the jobs that would result from such a facility.

State planning, transportation, and environmental protection officials have raised unusually strong concerns about the location of a massive industrial complex on the Florida Crystals site. They have questioned the wisdom of the Port of Palm Beach's effort to unilaterally make such a regionally important siting decision without coordinating with other ports and state agencies that are critical to the viability of such a venture.

Nonetheless, a wealthy and politically connected corporation is seeking to steamroll the opposition of citizens and agencies, significantly increasing the value of thousands of additional acres of its land by securing approval for massive industrial development, interfering with Everglades restoration and sending even more polluted water into this fragile ecosystem. The company's claim that it is doing this for the good of the economically disadvantaged citizens of the Glades cannot be taken seriously.

We continue to develop a cooperative relationship with farmers throughout the state who are constructive partners in Everglades restoration. Florida Crystals should follow the lead of their colleagues in the agriculture community who

recognize that the future of our state depends on a collaborative effort to grow our economy, protect the Everglades and preserve our water supply.

KIRK FORDHAM,

CEO, Everglades Foundation

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## **Whose In Charge?**

10/25/2009

Naples Daily News - Online

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Posted October 25, 2009 at 12:58 p.m.

The problem with being a compulsive reader is that there is a lot of junk and misinformation out there. Sorting through the chaff is sometimes an impossible chore. If the subject is indefinable enough -- meaning there are two diametrically opposite views — then compulsive reading can become a curse.

With the purchase of "Big Sugar" on their plate and power hungry super-star staff to support Everglades's restoration, South Florida Water Management District has downplayed commercial permitting requiring wetland mitigation within the functional watershed.

Having reviewed their "no compete" agreement with a commercial mitigation banker managing Big Cypress Mitigation Bank, which is in Lee County, that includes the Big Cypress Basin service area, I'd have trouble siding with the belief that they even understand what "...no net loss of wetland function as near the area of impact..." really means. And yet their recent reorganization marginalizes, even further, the Big Cypress Basin Board, Director and his staff, and the intent of Florida Law that created Big Cypress Basin and recognized it is an isolated basin not influenced by the Okeechobee Basin or the Everglades.

Big Cypress Basin has an independent Board appointed by the governor that should have the authority and responsibility to manage basin projects without the approval of South Florida Water Management District; yet, that isn't how the South Florida Management District staff view things, i.e., they want to control the Board and have subsumed the Big Cypress Basin Director and his staff under West Palm managers.

See the issue at: <http://tinyurl.com/yjm5w45> and <http://tinyurl.com/ok6ujc>.

Tweet: <http://twitter.com/dennisvasey> or Email: [dennisvasey@collierswcd.org/](mailto:dennisvasey@collierswcd.org/)

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## **COLUMN Waters need their watchdog**

10/25/2009

Palm Beach Post - Online

Sally Swartz

George Jones spent 34 years in government before becoming the Indian Riverkeeper, charged with protecting and restoring the Indian River Lagoon. It was perfect preparation.

Once head of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection parks district from Fort Pierce to Key West, he took over from Kevin Stinnette a year ago. The Riverkeeper movement started in 1966 as the Hudson River Fishermen's Association, an environmental watchdog and enforcement group. Now the organization, with Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as its chief prosecutor, has 180 riverkeepers worldwide. Residents, businesses and foundations pay the keeper's \$24,000-a-year salary, and area residents serve on the board of directors.

The Indian River Lagoon, stretching 156 miles from Jupiter Inlet in Palm Beach County to Ponce Inlet in Volusia County, supports a multimillion-dollar fishing industry. It serves as a nursery for microscopic organisms, fish, dolphins and manatees and as a haven for rare plants and animals.

Runoff from farms and cities, discharges of polluted water from Lake Okeechobee and the delay of Everglades restoration are some of the lagoon's problems. Dumping of fresh water from canals in St. Lucie County also has harmed water quality. Mr. Jones is working with county officials to stop the spread of sewage plant waste on farms. Several counties, including Martin and Palm Beach, send waste to St. Lucie and pay the farmers. Runoff sends polluting amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus to the lagoon.

Mr. Jones wants the county and the DEP to end or modify the practice. He hopes that others follow Martin County's lead in cleaning stormwater before it flows to the lagoon. Mr. Jones notes that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has forced the state to start setting standards for measuring water quality.

The Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District are working together. Federal money at last is flowing to Everglades projects. The proposal to buy U.S. Sugar land, to ease the flow of water south from Lake Okeechobee, has people talking about how to store and clean water. Given his background, though, Mr. Jones knows "the stalling tactics" government can use.

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Mr. Jones is looking into the failure of a huge project to shore up Indian River Drive after the 2004-2005 hurricanes. "What was supposed to be a 50-year fix," he said, "turns out to be a 3 1/2 -year fix." He also investigates polluters who dump into the lagoon. Equipment, pioneered by Edie Widder, a former Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution scientist and founder of the Ocean Research and Conservation Association, could help identify the dumpers.

Mr. Jones tells organizations that invite him to speak about his faith in the power of citizens working for change, which is the heart of the Riverkeeper movement. "The water belongs to us. But no matter how outraged we are that the rivers are polluted, we often can't get government to move. We need to start demanding clean water." That's a message government can't hear too often.

Sally Swartz is a former member of The Post Editorial Board. Her e-mail address is [sdswartz42@comcast.net](mailto:sdswartz42@comcast.net)

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## Gov. Charlie Crist's official schedule shows he takes off about 10 weeks a year

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10/23/2009

St. Petersburg Times - Online

Marc Caputo

By and Shannon Colavecchio, Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — Since campaigning three years ago on a promise to work hard for Floridians, Gov. Charlie Crist has scheduled the equivalent of almost 10 weeks off annually.

A St. Petersburg Times/Miami Herald review of Crist's official daily schedule is a telling indication of how he mixes governing, campaigning for U.S. Senate and taking enough personal time to, in his own words, "recharge."

On 81 regular work days, Crist had no events scheduled or took off personal time. On 129 other occasions, the schedule shows Crist worked half days — just a brief phone call sometimes — equal to at least 64.5 more days off, the Times/Herald found.

The most notable change in his schedule lately: Crist is phoning it in more often in meetings with staff. He also is spending more time away from the Capitol, holding news conferences in South Florida, the Tampa Bay area and Central Florida — big television markets where he has "after-hours" fundraisers.

Crist, 53, acknowledges that his schedule might show he has had an outsized amount of time off. But he says his office can't keep a list of how he spends every hour because it would be overwhelming.

"I'm like a doctor: I'm always on call," says Crist, the son of a physician. "As long as I have a cell phone on me, which I'm talking to you right now on, I'm working. I'm never not governor."

As he campaigns on his record, the official record of when he works takes on added significance in this recession-racked state where 1 million people have no job at all.

A day off here, there

Crist is intimately familiar with how a politician's work schedule can become a campaign liability. In 2006, the Republican hammered Democrat Jim Davis, his gubernatorial rival, for frequently missing votes in Congress.

"I'll come to work every day," Crist said in one debate.

His campaign attacked Davis with ads featuring an empty chair. Later, Democrats turned the tables with [www.emptychaircharlie.com](http://www.emptychaircharlie.com), a Web site to highlight what they say is Crist's lax effort.

The Times/Herald reviewed Crist's daily calendars from his first day in office on Jan. 2, 2007, through Friday. Days in which he worked four hours or less were counted as half days. Holidays and weekends were excluded, though Crist occasionally attends events on those days. And particularly during the spring legislative session, there are days that begin early and run late. Also, when disasters strike — like Lady Lake's killer tornadoes Feb. 2, 2007— Crist is quickly on scene.

As governor, Crist earns \$130,273 a year. Unlike other state employees, his work hours aren't strictly defined or mandated. He is not limited to 22 days off yearly, as are senior managers and political appointees in state government.

Crist didn't take his time off all at once. He took a personal day here, a half-day there.

Add all the blank time together and Crist hasn't scheduled at least 29.1 weeks of work — about 9.7 weeks a year. On 173 other days, Crist's schedule shows he worked between four and six hours. And on his half days, he was scheduled to work an average of 2.5 hours.

Crist's schedule shows he's often on a campaign — whether it's touting low crime rates or seeking a spot last year on Sen. John McCain's presidential ticket. Crist has flown to spots around the state and nation more than 525 times, according to his schedule, which doesn't list everywhere he goes.

Many of his schedules feature the cryptically labeled "Work and Call Time." Crist said he uses it to talk to staff, return calls, read reports or just have a few moments to focus on what's important.

During such time on Sept. 16 this year, he was spotted shopping with his wife at Bloomingdales in Aventura.

Compared to Jeb . . .

At a glance, Crist's official schedule resembles that of predecessor Jeb Bush, with frequent press conferences, foreign trips, conferences at swank hotels, sporting-event cameos, movie visits, receptions, tours of disaster areas, funerals and meetings with staff and constituents from every corner of Florida.

Bush's schedule was also riddled with work-and-call time, though his former budget director, Donna Arduin, echoed other former staffers in saying that Bush's hours were devoted to rigorous budget and policy briefings.

"Jeb's schedule wasn't just ribbon cuttings," Arduin said. "When you saw work-and-call time, it was time he met with staff, hours of briefings on bills and policy. And after dinner, the e-mails would start coming at you."

Bush received nearly 400,000 e-mails at [jeb@jeb.org](mailto:jeb@jeb.org), which is still active, and personally responded to many of them, according to former staffers.

Crist, who relies on a cell phone whose number he regularly passes out, doesn't have an iPhone or a BlackBerry — a device that the tech-savvy Bush featured in his official portrait.

But Crist is thinking of getting one of the hand-held devices now that he's on the road so much.

"Lately I've thought it might be helpful," Crist said. "One of the things I like is to listen to the tone of someone's voice, the inflection. . . . I'm not the most avid user of e-mail. I try to return every call I get. It makes it challenging."

Short days, quick trips

On Friday, April 6, 2007, Crist had one event: the Tampa Bay Rays 6:15 p.m. home opener in St. Petersburg. Monday, March 23 this year was marked as the start of "uninsured week" and began with a call to his chief of staff. He then had no scheduled events.

Crist took off a week in mid-December 2008 to honeymoon. But he worked, calling South Florida Water Management District board members to persuade them to vote to proceed with a buyout of U.S. Sugar lands in the name of Everglades restoration.

On Jan. 25, 2007, a few weeks after he was sworn in, Crist flew around Florida to tout the hurricane insurance bill he signed in hopes of stabilizing rates. Later that year, property tax-cutting fever gripped the Capitol and Crist promised that taxes would "drop like a rock." They didn't, but he hosted three more high-profile fly-arounds to the issue.

This year, Crist began visiting unemployment centers in Tallahassee, Jacksonville, Kissimmee, Orlando, Tampa, West Palm Beach and Miami.

"One of the reasons I go to the offices is to look into people's eyes, and to hear what they're going through," Crist says.

On Feb. 19 this year, Crist's schedule shows his biggest political gamble: appearing on stage with President Barack

Obama to support the stimulus package loathed by conservatives.

'Things come up'

Marco Rubio, Crist's U.S. Senate opponent, was House speaker during Crist's first two years in office and they often clashed. Rubio faults Crist for failing to push his plan to swap homestead property taxes for a higher sales tax.

"With his support of deficit spending, cap-and-trade climate-change legislation and \$2 billion in new taxes and fees, we're probably better off with him not showing up to work," said the Miami Republican.

Said Crist: "Anybody can criticize your style. We've had to recalibrate what we do. . . . Things are changing constantly in this state and we have to react."

On Wednesday, Crist filled an otherwise-skimpy schedule by flying from Fort Lauderdale to Clay County for a press event with the local sheriff about a missing girl, Somer Thompson. Later that day, her body was found in a Georgia landfill.

The next morning, Crist had two events: a 7:35 a.m. briefing and a 9 a.m. meeting with chief of staff Eric Eikenberg, who's leaving the governor's office to work on Crist's campaign. The meeting was held by phone — as were two more on Friday morning.

At that very moment, Crist was at a New York breakfast fundraiser. He was then scheduled at a fundraiser in Orchard Lake, Mich.

"We can't schedule everything," he said. "It's called spontaneity. Things come up and if you don't have the time and flexibility to react, then you're not giving your full attention. If you overschedule just to look good then you're not doing good."

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