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'Environmentalists' hinder Everglades restoration

11/02/2009

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Palm Beach Post - Online

Palm Beach Post Letters to the Editor

The Everglades Foundation's rhetoric in its Oct. 26 letter to the editor regarding the foundation's desire to develop a collaborative relationship with "other" growers in the Everglades Agricultural Area to protect the Everglades cannot be taken seriously.

What they mean is that they support taking as much land in the EAA out of private ownership and limiting any land use through bogus buyouts, regulatory restrictions or land-use decisions.

All the farmers in the EAA have implemented best management practices that have resulted in a 68 percent reduction in phosphorus leaving the farming region in the 2008-09 water year. The long-term average reduction is above 50 percent, or twice what's mandated.

Additionally, all farmers pay a special tax of \$25 per acre, or more than \$200 million, to help pay for construction and operation of the regional treatment system. Under this program, according to the South Florida Water Management District's 2009 Environmental Report, more than 2,848 metric tons of phosphorus have been removed. This is the only significant project operational and providing benefits to the Everglades ecosystem.

Backed by the Everglades Foundation, the water district's efforts to accelerate key Everglades projects have been stalled or abandoned in favor of buying some of U.S. Sugar's land. Adding insult to injury, after wasting a half-billion dollars to "buy" 72,000 acres of scattered parcels and paying \$1.5 billion in interest, U.S. Sugar will continue to farm the land for the next 20 years.

How does this advance Everglades restoration? In fact, it hampers restoration by virtually pledging all of the district's financial resources to implement a bogus land purchase deal cloaked as "restoration." Our tax dollars would be better spent completing the state's legislatively endorsed Acceler8 Program and the Northern Everglades Plan.

As the debate over where Palm Beach County should site an inland port continues, one message seems to be overlooked: The facility should be in Palm Beach County. It's the Port of Palm Beach's facility and it should benefit Palm Beach County, not Martin, not Hendry and not Glades.

The Palm Beach County Commission and Planning and Zoning Commission have determined that the site adjacent to Florida Crystals' Okeelanta industrial complex would be a compatible land use. The jobs and taxes would benefit Palm Beach County. Since the Okeelanta site is already industrial, the idea that a co-located inland port would hamper Everglades restoration is nothing more than a red herring. Don't be fooled by environmental activists' rhetoric.

GEORGE H. WEDGWORTH

Belle Glade

Editor's note: George Wedgworth is president and CEO of the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida.

SW Fla.'s water watchdog won't just go with the flow

11/01/2009

News-Press

Lollar, Kevin

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Charles Dauray is many things, but he proudly insists he's not an environmentalist.

Southwest Florida's representative on the South Florida Water Management District's governing board is a businessman, historian, amateur paleontologist and meteorologist, artist and president and CEO of College of Life Foundation, which is dedicated to the preservation of Koreshan history.

Among Dauray's affiliations are the Isaak Walton League of America, CREW Land & Water Trust and Calusa Nature Center.

"I'm a conservationist, not an environmentalist," Dauray said. "Some environmentalists think man is the enemy of nature. For conservationists, man is an integral part of nature.

"Extreme environmentalists like PETA think animals should be able to sue people because somebody ate a trout last night."

A native of Rhode Island and a 1966 graduate of Providence College, Dauray was working for A.G. Edwards in St. Louis when he visited family in Naples for Christmas in 1970.

"I came down, and it was 20-below in St. Louis," he said. "I said, 'Bag it, I'm staying here.' And I did."

After moving to Florida, Dauray was a restaurateur and a Realtor, while getting involved with such organizations as the Save Our Everglades Referendum Steering Committee, the Marine Habitat Foundation and the boater-advocacy group Standing Watch.

In 2000, Dauray was offered the head job at Koreshan Unity Foundation, whose name he changed to College of Life Foundation, in part to distance the organization from cult leader David Koresh, whom Dauray calls "the wacko from Waco."

"I was a perfect fit for the foundation," Dauray said. "I had a real estate license. I knew how nonprofits worked. I'd been a stockbroker, so I could add 2 and 2. I knew history. I knew the area. I was going through a personal transition in my life, so I said I'd give it a try, see what happens. And I liked it."

Seven years later, Gov. Charlie Crist appointed Dauray to the South Florida Water Management District's governing board.

As an unpaid member of the water district board, Dauray has three priorities:

The health of Lake Okeechobee.

"The heart of the whole thing is Lake Okeechobee," he said. "If you can't fix the lake, nothing is going to get fixed."

- Educating children about water.

"The generation before mine, my generation, and the generation immediately after mine took water for granted," Dauray said. "Those days are over. We're going to have to pay more for water or save and conserve water to keep it affordable. That's where the kids come in. We need to bring children into a water-conservation ethic."

- Buying and restoring U.S. Sugar Corp. land - Crist originally proposed the district buy 180,000 acres for \$1.3 billion;

now the district is looking to buy 73,000 acres for \$536 million.

"I have to tip my hat to the vision of the governor for putting together a plan to buy U.S. Sugar so there can be a connectivity of the entire watershed from Orlando to the Keys," Dauray said.

As important as that connection is, Dauray was one of three governing board members to vote against the \$1.3 billion plan last December.

"This acquisition is coming from (property) taxes: The entire responsibility is borne by the 16 counties of the water district," Dauray said. "In my point of view, it was too much, not affordable."

Although some Everglades advocates criticized Dauray at the time, Kirk Fordham, CEO of the Everglades Foundation, said Dauray made the right vote.

"We've found him to be pretty open in discussions with the environmental community, concerning the U.S. Sugar acquisition in particular," Fordham said. "Although he was against it in the first run, he offered helpful suggestions to make it more feasible when state funds were dwindling. He helped push the deal in a direction to make it easier for the state Legislature to support.

"In the long run, his fingerprints on that deal will help it move to closing next year."

Michael Collins, who has been on the water district's governing board since 1999, also praised Dauray.

"Charles brings a lot of energy to the table," Collins said. "He's one of those guys that covers a lot of ground. He's not afraid to jump in his car and find out what the issues are on the edges of the area he represents. And he brings a heck of a work ethic."

Not everyone is so complimentary.

On more than one occasion, Lee County Commissioner Ray Judah has criticized Dauray; at a meeting in April with The News-Press Editorial Board, for example, Judah called Dauray a puppet to east coast interests, referring to what many see as a conflict over water between the district's east coast and west coast counties. Judah this summer declined to discuss Dauray's voting record. He did not return calls for this story.

Asked to respond to Judah's comment, Collins was angry.

"That's a blatant misrepresentation of everything Charles has done since he's been on the board," Collins said. "His record speaks for itself. It's just a malicious misrepresentation of the truth."

Dauray was a little more laid-back about Judah's comment.

"Environmental issues can be very emotional," he said. "We're not going to get done what needs to get done with affordable water conservation by calling people names. This needs to be a cooperative effort, not a combative arena. Sometimes Ray can get a little vigorous, but that's OK.

"You seek a balance to satisfy the needs of 10 million people in 16 counties, asking, 'Where's the money going to come from? Where's the money going to be applied?' At the same time, you're dealing with extremes of nature and other variables. It's tough stuff, and it's never going to be perfect."

As to any water conflict between the coasts, Dauray said:

"I'm a proponent for not only dollars for the west coast but also hydrological activities that affect the west coast. Two board meetings ago, I said I will not stand idly by while the west coast becomes the sacrificial lamb for east coast water interests."

SW Fla.'s water watchdog won't just go with the flow

11/01/2009

News Press - Online

Kevin Lollar

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Focuses are Lake O, land deal, education

1:10 A.M. — Charles Dauray is many things, but he proudly insists he s not an environmentalist.

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