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Everglades Foundation Honors Florida Governor Crist For Environmental Commitment

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02/16/2010
the Gov Monitor

Governor Charlie Crist will be honored by the Everglades Foundation for his strong environmental record and continued commitment to Everglades restoration.

The recognition will be presented to the Governor prior to the Everglades Foundation's Fifth Annual Everglades Benefit. Recently, Governor Crist unveiled his \$2.1-billion 2010-11 budget recommendations to safeguard Florida's natural resources.

These recommendations include investments in the Florida Forever land conservation program and Everglades restoration.

"Restoring and reviving Florida's Everglades is not only a matter of being a good steward of our beautiful state, it is about protecting the economic impact our natural resources have on all Floridians," said Governor Crist. "The Florida Everglades are recognized throughout the world for its lush environment and wildlife, and it remains an essential source of water for the people of Florida that we must protect."

Continuing his focus on protecting the health of the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and their estuaries, Governor Crist has proposed \$50 million to ensure that Everglades projects will continue to restore a more natural water flow for this unique ecosystem and improve water quality for all of South Florida. Lake Okeechobee is the upstream water source for the Everglades and provides the water supply for nearby towns, agricultural operations and downstream ecosystems. The lake supports a multi-million dollar recreational and commercial fishery, as well as flood control for surrounding communities. During the past three years, Governor Crist has signed budgets designating \$300 million toward Everglades restoration.

Governor Crist has also recommended \$50 million to revive Florida Forever and continue the preservation of Florida's unique natural resources and wildlife. Since 1963, Florida has committed more than \$7.5 billion to preserve and conserve roughly 3.8 million acres of land. However, the program funding was temporarily suspended last year due to economic challenges.

Earlier today, the Governor congratulated Nova Southeastern University (NSU) Oceanographic Center for receiving a \$15 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act matching grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology. The matching grant will support construction of the Center of

Excellence for Coral Reef Ecosystems Science Research at the existing NSU Oceanographic Center at John U. Lloyd Beach State Park in Dania Beach. The 86,000-square-foot Center of Excellence for Coral Reef Ecosystems Science Research facility will house local, national and international coral reef research and will double the size of the current research area. The grant contributes toward the \$30 million project which is expected to create 22 new academic jobs and 300 construction jobs, employ 50 graduate students, and preserve 22 existing academic jobs.

About Everglades Restoration

Florida's Everglades restoration efforts are truly historic. To date, Florida has invested more than \$2.4 billion in the 30-year, \$10.9 billion Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, the 50/50 state and federal partnership to restore and protect the Everglades. During the two tightest budget years in Florida history, \$50 million has been dedicated for Everglades restoration in both 2008 and 2009 to continue the state's partnership with the federal government. The Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District has also agreed to invest approximately \$530 million for 72,500 acres of property south of Lake Okeechobee. The district will have an option to purchase another 107,500 acres for restoration within 10 years after closing.

In 2007, Governor Crist worked to expand the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act to safeguard the entire northern Everglades system, including the Lake Okeechobee watershed as well as the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers and estuaries. He has worked to protect and improve the quality, quantity, timing and distribution of water north of Lake Okeechobee. Additionally, the continuation of the Florida Forever program is a key component to securing the future of the Everglades.

Topics: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Caloosahatchee river, Center of Excellence for Coral Reef Ecosystems Science Research, clean energy, conservation, Dania Beach, Department of Commerce, economic development, economic growth, Economy, ecosystem, environment, environmental commitment, Everglades Foundation, Everglades restoration, Fifth Annual Everglades Benefit, Florida, Florida Forever land conservation program, Governance, government, Governor Charlie Crist, John U. Lloyd Beach State Park, Lake Okeechobee, Lake Okeechobee Protection Act, monitor, National Institute of Standards and Technology, natural resources, news, NSU Oceanographic Center, renewable energy, South Florida, St. Lucie, tourism, U.S., United States

Water managers put Everglades matter on hold

02/16/2010

Bradenton Herald - Online

ANDY REID

Decision delayed on extending land deal deadline

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Mounting financial concerns could pose renewed hurdles to Gov. Charlie Crist's proposed \$536 million Everglades restoration land deal with U.S. Sugar Corp.

The South Florida Water Management District will wait until next month to decide whether to extend the deadline on the contract to buy 73,000 acres from U.S. Sugar. The delay allows the Florida Supreme Court to rule on a pending legal challenge to the land deal.

In March, the district board also will be discussing the implications of a difficult budget situation, which could imperil the costly land deal. Property tax revenue has declined because of drops in home values.

The district board still can back out of the land deal if it is expected to become too much of a strain on providing core services such as flood control and protecting the water supply.

District Attorney Sheryl Wood said waiting until the board's mid-March meeting still gives the district plenty of time to take action before the March 31 contract deadline.

The district faces, in addition to a tight budget, the expense of responding to newly proposed federal water pollution standards. It could cost billions of dollars to address those standards.

"I'm not panicking," said District Board Member Shannon Estenoz, a vocal supporter of the U.S. Sugar deal. "Do we still need the land? Oh, yeah. ... Buying land is more important now than ever."

Historic sites in the path of Everglades restoration

02/15/2010

Sun Sentinel

Reid, Andy

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First, farming and development robbed the Everglades of its life-giving water flows. Now, making up for those environmental mistakes risks robbing the Everglades of its history.

Multibillion-dollar plans to recreate once-natural water flows to the Everglades involve building massive reservoirs and filter marshes across hundreds of thousands of acres south of Lake Okeechobee.

But saving an environmental treasure threatens to trample sacred ground. Some of the land identified for restoration includes historic sites where South Florida's earliest Native American inhabitants lived and buried their dead.

An infusion of federal money has been a shot in the arm for long-stalled Everglades restoration construction. Now South Florida's tribes and other advocates for preserving historic sites are calling for caution as construction plans spread to more land.

Saving what remains of the Everglades shouldn't mean disturbing what remains of some of the Everglades' earliest human inhabitants, said archaeologist Bob Carr, executive director of the Archaeological and Historical Conservancy in Davie.

"Our mission is to preserve as many of the sites as possible in South Florida," Carr said. "We are not convinced that destroying them is a necessity of restoration."

There are "serious problems" with the locations of some proposed construction projects, said Fred Dayhoff, a consultant for the Miccosukee Tribe. Also, the pending deal to add at least 73,000 acres of U.S. Sugar Corp. land to Everglades restoration could jeopardize even more historic sites, Dayhoff said.

"We have to figure out how to avoid these sites," said Dayhoff, a retired national park ranger who worked at Everglades National Park. "If someone came along and said, 'We are going to use your [ancestors'] cemetery to store stormwater on,' you would probably get a little excited."

Burial sites, campgrounds and midden mounds — containing archaeological-rich discards of Native American life — are among the evidence of the past that can be found in the path of Everglades restoration.

Many of the sites were living areas or temporary campgrounds for the ancestors of the Tequesta, the name given to Native Americans along the South Florida coast when the Spanish explorers arrived, Carr said.

They often were located on higher ground that through the centuries continued to serve as living areas for the Seminoles and Miccosukee, who followed the Tequesta to South Florida.

Many of the sites have long been registered with the Florida Division of Historical Resources and flagged for protection.

Some of those historic sites are within the more than 40,000 acres of stormwater treatment areas already built. A 1996 report prepared by Carr's firm identified sites threatened by stormwater treatment area construction plans.

Pottery shards and human remains — some from 4,000 years ago — were among the finds that offer a picture of prehistoric life in South Florida. In addition to helping tell the human story, animal and plant remains serve as a "barometer of change" in the environmental record, Carr said.

"It's a rare glimpse into how these ancient people were surviving and living," Carr said.

Three of the historic sites were protected by berms, creating their own island preserves within the stormwater treatment areas.

But preservation isn't always an option, according to the South Florida Water Management District, which leads Everglades restoration.

One of the stormwater treatment areas now covers a site where human teeth and decorated ceramic pottery shards were found, possibly dating back to 2000 B.C., according to a state archaeological report.

Preservation wasn't an option in that case because of the need to use as much land as possible for water treatment, said Georgia Vince, who coordinates the district's response to dealing with historic sites.

"It's a delicate balance," Vince said. "As we move forward ... that will be a large issue. We will run into this again."

When officials determine they can't build around historic sites, they are supposed to "mitigate" for the damage. That can mean erecting a sign explaining the historical significance of the location. Sometimes, remains and artifacts are relocated.

For the stormwater treatment area construction project, mitigation called for more in-depth archaeological study of the affected sites to create a historic record of what was found. That report has not yet been completed.

Two other historic sites that archaeologists identified for protection were supposed to be left outside of the stormwater treatment area, but a follow-up visit after construction showed that they "disappeared," Carr said.

Federal and state laws set standards for how to treat Native American remains and artifacts, but don't necessarily require canceling or altering construction projects.

The federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, passed in 1990, established new provisions for working with tribes to protect human remains and other "cultural items." It includes penalties for illegal trafficking of those historic items. If a site is to be excavated, the law calls for consulting with tribes and determining if anything found there should be removed or remain.

State Rep. Mark Pafford is calling for more follow-through from state agencies about historic preservation requirements. Everglades restoration planners "have the science" to work around historic sites and the state should make preserving them a higher priority, said Pafford, D-West Palm Beach.

"We don't spend a lot of time talking about where we came from," Pafford said.

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