

Palm Beach Post Op Ed May 2016

POINT OF VIEW: Governor must lead, buy U.S. Sugar land for Everglades

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Rick Scott's leadership to exercise the existing contract option to purchase 46,803 acres from U.S. Sugar, south of Lake Okeechobee, before Oct. 12.

This is a time-limited opportunity, and the acquisition and subsequent use of this land to store and treat discharges from the lake will provide benefits to roughly 50 percent of Florida residents.

Significant economic, environmental and water-supply benefits include:

1. Creating new jobs in restoration project construction and management.
2. Serving as an emergency relief to protect the integrity of the Herbert Hoover Dike during high lake stages, thereby increasing the safety of residents and properties adjacent to the lake.
3. Increasing the flow of lake water south into the remnant Everglades and, hence:
 - a. restoring more natural flow into water-starved Everglades National Park and Florida Bay, thereby restoring ecological values to these systems;
 - b. recharging the drinking-water aquifers of millions of Southeast Florida residents; and
 - c. reducing saltwater intrusion into wellfields used by millions of residents.
4. Significantly reducing polluted lake discharges into the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers, estuaries and coastal waters and, hence:
 - a. restoring ecological values to these ecosystems;
 - b. restoring jobs lost by lake discharges in the fishing (commercial and recreational), boating and tourism industries; and
 - c. restoring lost boating, fishing and swimming habitats.

Funding is available. The state had the opportunity to buy this land in October 2013 at \$7,400 per acre, and the cost of delaying this acquisition is significant: South Florida Water

Management District staff estimated the increase in cost to the public at \$150 million to \$350 million.

The state has two available funding mechanisms: 1. direct cash purchase using Amendment 1 funds, or 2. issuance of Certificate of Participation bonds.

The state needs to buy the land from U.S. Sugar before Oct. 12. The acquisition and subsequent use of this land to store and treat discharges from Lake Okeechobee will provide significant benefits to current and future Florida generations.

This action has scientific and engineering justification, and the state has available funding options. What is missing is leadership.

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