



# Everglades Coalition

## RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE EVERGLADES AGRICULTURAL AREA (EAA ) July 30, 2008

### **Immediate Recommendations**

As the state of Florida moves ahead with acquisition of U.S. Sugar and works to compile contiguous tracts of land, the Everglades Coalition recommends the following:

1. **The State of Florida should maximize acreage of land purchased for conveyance, water storage, and treatment. This is a singular opportunity of which full advantage must be taken. At a minimum, the State must ensure that the restoration plans that result from this land acquisition will provide an adequate supply of clean water for the Everglades and;**
  - Fully evaluate all options for restoring flow through the EAA, including the Plan 6 Flowway option, in a public process with maximum stakeholder involvement.
  - Eliminate excess phosphorus discharges into the Everglades. Existing deficits call for expansion of STA-1W and STA5 by a minimum of 12,000 acres.
  - Guarantee a reliable water supply for the Everglades during drought and significantly reduce damaging releases through the estuaries by providing a minimum of 1 million to 1.5 million acre feet of storage.
  - During wet years, further decrease damaging releases to the estuaries by moving approximately 1 million acre feet of water south through the Everglades. Redirecting this additional flow through the Everglades will require up to an additional 45,000 acres for stormwater treatment as well as land for flowways / conveyance to maximize the natural connection between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades.
  - Consider land swaps of up to 30,000 acres in the Kissimmee Basin to implement the Northern Everglades Plan and projects to improve Lake Okeechobee water quality.
2. **The State should work closely with the Federal government to set forth appropriate priorities based on the new availability of critical lands. Both governments should place an immediate focus on eliminating barriers to sheetflow that currently prevent any treated and stored water from moving south.**
3. **The State of Florida should commit to providing resources and meaningful support to the local communities in order to sustain economic viability within these communities.**
4. **Conservation easements to promote the creation and / or maintenance of sustainable agriculture or restoration uses should be placed on all agricultural land conveyed or swapped by the state. Development rights on land acquired by the state should not be traded or sold to facilitate development elsewhere.**

## **Long-term recommendations**

As the Federal and state governments look to re-evaluate restoration priorities in light of the opportunities that acquisition of additional land in the EAA presents, the Everglades Coalition recommends that the following are considered:

- 1. The Federal and State partnership must be re-invigorated.** With a renewed investment from the State of Florida, it is critical that the Federal government sustain its commitment to restoring America's Everglades. Strategies must be developed to keep the remainder of CERP and other restoration efforts on track.
- 2. Project development for restoration plans in the EAA should be conducted in an open, fully transparent process to allow for full engagement by all interested stakeholders.**
- 3. Implement a plan for full removal of barriers to sheetflow** in Water Conservation Area 3 and Everglades National Park. Removing levees and canals in the WCAs, the existing Tamiami Trail, and implementing seepage control along the eastern border of the Everglades will allow a natural drying pattern that would result in the greatest benefit to the Everglades. Any additional storage created will be useless to the Everglades without removing these barriers to flow.
- 4. The State of Florida should initiate the process for designation of the EAA as an Area of Critical State Concern.**
- 5. Regarding proposals for an inland port facility, no action should be taken by local, state or federal agencies to process permits or comprehensive plan amendments regarding the location of such a facility until such time as the land purchases from U.S. Sugar and associated land swaps are completed and appropriate revisions are made to the CERP.**
- 6. Local government must share responsibility for Everglades restoration through planning decisions and must prevent development that undermines protection and restoration of the greater Everglades ecosystem. As restoration plans for the EAA are developed, local governments should:**
  - Promote sustainable agriculture within the EAA and prevent conversion of agricultural land to uses that are incompatible with restoration, which, among other things, can include mining, landfills, major roadways, rail lines, power plants, institutional and civic uses.
  - Institute a moratorium on any land use changes, re-zonings, conditional use approvals or other approvals for development, mining or other changes in use within the EAA until restoration plans are fully developed. Permanently prohibit development or land uses within the EAA which are incompatible with or which may impair restoration of the Everglades.
  - Prevent fragmentation of habitat or potential locations of restoration-related uses by new roads, infrastructure, or development.
  - Within the municipal boundaries of the Glades Communities, promote sustainable economic development that is compatible with and / or enhances restoration; prohibit uses that are incompatible with restoration objectives.
  - Maintain compact urban growth patterns within existing population centers of Glades communities to keep land remaining in the EAA available for agriculture and land uses that facilitate Everglades restoration. Prevent development on agricultural lands outside of municipal boundaries. Amend Comprehensive Plans and land development regulations to include incentive programs to facilitate urban infill development patterns while discouraging sprawl.