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Contact:
Joseph Klock, Jr. – 305.476.7100
Gaston Cantens – 561.248.1953

Florida Crystals Supports True Everglades Restoration

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. - August 6, 2009 - Florida Crystals has supported and continues to support true Everglades restoration. We recognize that restoration of the Everglades is critical for long-term sustainable agriculture in South Florida.

As an advocate for true Everglades restoration, we were compelled to challenge, along with the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians, the proposed bond validation to finance the acquisition of U.S. Sugar lands, because it is a gross misuse of public funds and a departure from the Everglades restoration plan the state and federal governments and all other interested stakeholders, including farmers, have been working toward for more than a decade. The proposed deal is a substantial road block to the implementation of projects that would have a meaningful impact on restoration.

The District's proposed acquisition will essentially divert all available funding to a land purchase without a purpose. District witnesses admitted in Court that, after incurring the purchase debt, the District will have no financial ability to do anything with the land.

Many proponents of this deal have claimed it will benefit water supply, estuary relief and water quality, but the District's Executive Director admitted under cross examination that none of these benefits will result naturally from this land purchase. All would require the planning, construction, operation and maintenance of massive public infrastructure that the District has no ability to undertake and no plan to build or finance. The land purchase, therefore, serves no purpose except to terminate or indefinitely postpone decades of planned projects that could provide meaningful restoration.

Florida Crystals has participated fully and exhaustively in the District's public planning process for Everglades restoration. Florida Crystals has publicly proposed alternatives that would require far less land, have a fraction of the total cost and provide better benefits to both the Everglades and to Lake Okeechobee, which is suffering from severe nutrient enrichment problems from northern basins.

We are hopeful that, regardless of the outcome of the current court proceedings, the District will go back to the drawing board to craft a realistic and fiscally prudent plan that can actually be implemented and provide real benefits.

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