

13. **NEW BUSINESS**

e. Legislative Issues

- ii. Draft City position regarding Everglades Restoration (Mayor Denham)

Support Everglades Restoration – Protect our Estuary and our Beaches

PRESS RELEASE/ COUNCIL DISCUSSION Draft

One urgent cause for concern still remains the quality of water that surrounds our island, in our bays and our estuary. The city enacted a red algae management program but most of us understand that this is realistically only a Band Aid – dealing with algae removal – and not a solution to the red algae issue. The primary concern is when there is a major storm event; will it trigger major releases of polluted water from Lake Okeechobee? Although community actions have contributed to some changes in control of lake levels and release schedules, nothing in the infrastructure has changed to prevent a reoccurrence of the issues post Hurricane Charley. Our efforts to control urban pollution will of course help during times when there are no major storm events, but hurricanes could still leave us with polluted water and beaches.

Why do I bring this up at this time? The featured speakers at the BIG ARTS Conservation Forum last week, sponsored by SCCF and the Everglades Foundation, demonstrated how our water quality improvements are linked to the purchase of land from U.S. Sugar. Converting land in the EAA to storage and treatment south of the lake for Everglades Restoration is the most fundamental solution to our river and estuary water quality.

Unfortunately, we now find, special interest groups are working to prevent the State from acquiring the necessary land. These special interest groups want the land for themselves – for more sugar production, for rock mining, and one consortium has proposed building a landfill in the Everglades. All of these outcomes would further pollute the Everglades and prevent restoration of the flow way south.

Two legislators have introduced bills into the State legislature that would prevent all water management districts from using a financing tool known as Certificates of Participation for land acquisition and restoration projects. Without this financing option- which the SFWMD has used to fund restoration projects in the past- the State will be unable to finance the US Sugar purchase and we will lose meaningful relief for the estuaries. Unbelievably, this bad legislation is sponsored by two of our local legislative leaders. Senate Bill 1436 is sponsored by Mike Bennett and House Bill 987 sponsored by Representative Trudi Williams.

Some three or four years ago in a public meeting, Carla Johnston (the mayor at that time) justifiably called a “water quality 911.” This community embarked on a major public awareness program which helped the formation of the Northern Everglades Program. It also, in my opinion, contributed to Governor Crist’s decision to begin the process of acquiring land from U.S. Sugar. Sanibel has a reputation that we are able to influence state lawmakers. We need to make this 911 call once more. We need the combined forces of the island and greater west coast communities and every individual who votes and who cares about water quality the Florida environment and its impact on our economy.

I am calling on the community to raise its voice in opposition to these two lawmakers and inform them that you oppose their efforts to stop the Everglades restoration land acquisition.

Tell them to withdraw SB1436 / HB987 and put their efforts into initiatives that will protect the Everglades our estuary and our beaches, not destroy them

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