

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Statement from Florida Crystals Corporation and Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida regarding Sen. Joe Negron's press conference**

West Palm Beach, Fla. (August 9, 2016) Florida Crystals and Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida have supported each science-based restoration plan that was publicly developed with all stakeholders in a collaborative process to provide real answers for the system.

In fact, a water-management consultant for Florida Crystals met with Sen. Joe Negron on Thursday, Aug. 4, at his invitation, to share solutions that have been proven to work to provide tangible relief for the estuaries with the lowest fiscal impact. He did not mention today's proposal at the meeting. Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative, whose growers' land falls within the general footprints shown on the map today, was not invited by the senator.

"We will be reviewing the details of the plan announced today by Sen. Joe Negron as soon as they are made available to the public, especially since his proposal calls for taking another 60,000 acres of productive farmland out of production in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA), most of which is our private land," said Gaston Cantens, Vice President of Florida Crystals.

The EAA has already lost more than 100,000 acres of farmland in the past 20 years for restoration. The real price of today's proposal is the loss of jobs and economic activity in the Glades communities.

"Taking another 60,000 acres of productive and sustainable farmland out of the EAA will without a doubt close down our sugar mill and put us out of business," said Barbara Miedema, Vice President of Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida. "Sen. Negron's plan means losing a thousand or more jobs in the Glades communities, not to mention the impact to businesses in the community that provide services to us."

Everyone is looking for solutions for the system. Our companies strongly support science-based plans that will provide measurable benefits to Lake Okeechobee and the coastal estuaries. Unfortunately, Sen. Negron's land buy does neither.

We strongly believe water storage and treatment projects are imperative north of Lake Okeechobee, as identified in Sen. Negron's University of Florida Water Institute Study, to address the massive volumes of nutrient-rich water that continue to degrade the lake. Storage north of the lake will also provide meaningful relief from the discharges to the coastal water bodies east and west, and the government already owns more than 100,000 acres there. It only makes sense to store the water at its source rather than allow it to continue to damage the lake, the estuaries and the Everglades. We also encourage septic tank conversion plans that will address the high concentrations of nutrients in the St. Lucie River and Estuary from the local basin, which contributes 79 percent of the water. Each region should be responsible for

cleaning its own water. The small cities on the south end of Lake Okeechobee converted their septic tanks to modern sewage systems years ago.

While stakeholders often disagree about how to achieve restoration, the one certainty we all agree on is that funding is hard to come by. That's why the idea of shifting \$900 million of limited resources away from vetted projects only to buy more land south of Lake Okeechobee is nonsensical. The government already owns 48 percent of all land in South Florida and nearly 110,000 acres in the EAA.

It doesn't stop there. On top of the nearly billion dollars needed to purchase the land, a 60,000 acre reservoir is estimated to cost around \$3.5 billion to construct. Assuming the now nearly \$4.5 billion project is ever constructed, taxpayers will be dismayed to find out that little to nothing has changed for the purported purpose of the reservoir: the St. Lucie Estuary would still receive 94 percent of the total water flow it does today and will continue to receive 88 percent of the Lake Okeechobee discharges it does now.

Meanwhile, designed and authorized projects, with a price tag of tens of billions of dollars, are in the queue and are waiting for funding, including the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), Everglades Restoration Strategies, Central Everglades Planning Process (CEPP) and Northern Everglades & Estuaries Protection Program (NEEPP). Those plans will restore the system holistically. CEPP and Everglades Restoration Strategies both are south of Lake Okeechobee.

More than \$6 billion has already been spent south of Lake Okeechobee and has resulted in almost full restoration of the southern Everglades. Sending excess polluted lake water south without treating it first at its source north of the lake will not only continue to damage Lake Okeechobee but will also jeopardize the southern Everglades and the unprecedented success the public-private partnership between the state and local agencies and EAA farmers has achieved.

Palm Beach County residents also lose in Sen. Negron's proposal, as it would take 60,000 acres of land off of Palm Beach County's tax rolls to address a problem that originates in Martin County and regions to the north.

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