

# ***Stop Sugar Hill / Send the Water South***

## **MYTH vs. FACT**

U.S. Sugar Corporation and Hilliard Brothers-Florida, Ltd. “Sugar Hill” would create a massive, sprawling city between the Everglades and its water source, Lake Okeechobee. The 67-square-mile project would bring 18,000 new residential units and 25 million square feet of commercial, industrial, office and other buildings and uses directly into the Everglades Agricultural Area and adjacent basins in Hendry County.

Friday, Oct. 3 is the deadline for Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to submit written comments to Hendry County and the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) on the “Sugar Hill Sector Plan”. These comments are required to support a subsequent formal challenge by the state to this Sector Plan, if it is ultimately adopted by Hendry County.

**In order to make an informed policy decision, it’s important for public officials to separate the facts from the myths.**

*Myth – A Sugar Hill city will have no effect on the State’s option to buy U.S. Sugar lands*

**Fact – Sugar Hill city jeopardizes the State’s ability to exercise its existing contractual option to buy the U.S. Sugar Corporation’s land holdings in the area:**

- The So. Fla. Water Management District has an option to buy 48,600 acres of US Sugar land by October 2015. Over 13, 000 acres of that land falls within the Sugar Hill sector plan.
- That contract gives the District a second option which expires in October 2020 under which it must buy all of the company’s land holdings (approximately 153,000 acres or the balance if the 2015 option is exercised), and cannot buy just some of the land.
- As a result, land use changes on the U.S. Sugar lands directly impacted by the Sector Plan can impact the District’s ability to buy any or all of the company’s lands – even those currently outside of the Sector Plan.

**Myth:** *Sugar Hill city is no threat to the coastal estuaries and Everglades restoration.*

**Fact: The Sugar Hill city is a direct, unequivocal threat to the coastal estuaries and the Everglades:**

- The U.S. Sugar land acquisition, according to the SFWMD, “provides water managers with the unprecedented opportunity to store and treat water on a scale never before envisioned for the benefit of America’s Everglades, Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and estuaries.”  
[http://www.sfwmd.gov/portal/page/portal/pg\\_grp\\_sfwmd\\_koe/pg\\_sfwmd\\_koe\\_restoration\\_project\\_plan](http://www.sfwmd.gov/portal/page/portal/pg_grp_sfwmd_koe/pg_sfwmd_koe_restoration_project_plan)

- By either directly allowing massive development on these lands, or driving up the speculative land values, the Sugar Hill Sector Plan would drastically reduce that opportunity. Approving the Sugar Hill Sector Plan would:
  1. Enable the development of tens of thousands of acres of sugar land;
  2. Hamper the public acquisition and use of lands needed for restoration both within and outside of the sector plan's footprint.
  3. Eliminate the possibility of potential restoration projects on lands directly slated for development;
  4. Compromise potential restoration projects on adjacent and nearby lands;
  5. Fuel suburban sprawl on lands needed for restoration;

***Myth*** – A sector plan is not a zoning change.

**Fact** – Under Florida law, once a sector plan is adopted and becomes effective, the landowner can be issued zoning changes and actual development approval without the need for any additional comprehensive plan changes.

***Myth*** – A Sugar Hill city will benefit Hendry County's economy without harming the South Florida economy

**Fact** – The economic benefits of the Sugar Hill Sector Plan are speculative and duplicative of existing Sector Plans in the County, but it jeopardizes the ability to stop the economically devastating pollution of the coastal estuaries and the Everglades:

- Hendry County already has two recently-approved sector plans. Hendry County can build its economy without involving the lands optioned in the U.S. Sugar Land Acquisition contract.
- The Sugar Hill Sector Plan would draw infrastructure spending away from the established cities of Clewiston and Moore Haven to speculative warehouses, strip malls and suburban housing on U.S. Sugar Corp's land.
- This will end up costing Hendry County residents to subsidize U.S. Sugar's sprawling city and turn the Clewiston and Moore Haven into ghost towns.
- Approval of the Sugar Hill Sector Plan guarantees no economic development. It is a speculative, 50 year plan, which simply gives the landowner "options" over that lengthy timeframe.
- The cost of the Sugar Hill city to the estuaries and the Everglades could be devastating:
  - The Everglades provides the water supply for nearly one in three Floridians.
  - Failure to restore the Everglades and protect the estuaries could mean the loss of tens of billions of dollars for the region.
  - **Without all of the optioned U.S. sugar lands we will *not* be able to send water south and will *not* be able to protect our estuaries.**