



Town of Fort Myers Beach

Tracey Gore
Mayor

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June 19, 2018

Ernie Marks, Executive Director
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33406

Re: Request for Immediate Relief for the Caloosahatchee Estuary from Lake Okeechobee Discharges

Dear Executive Director Marks:

The Town of Fort Myers Beach is requesting immediate relief for the Caloosahatchee estuary from the damaging high- volume discharges from Lake Okeechobee. We request that flows from Lake Okeechobee be discontinued until flows measured at the Franklin Lock (S-79) drop below 3,000 cubic feet per second (CFS). The discharges from Lake Okeechobee, combined with the large amount of stormwater runoff from the Caloosahatchee watershed, are resulting in low salinities through the estuary, bay, and Gulf of Mexico adjacent to our community that are not suitable for estuarine and marine organisms. The discharges are also producing a dark- colored freshwater plume that is extending out into the Gulf of Mexico and along Sanibel's beaches . This is already impacting tourism, the quality of life for our residents, and the local economy.

Since January 9th, the west coast stakeholders and Lake Okeechobee scientists have been requesting additional water be released from Lake Okeechobee to improve ecological conditions within the Lake and to supplement the Caloosahatchee Minimum Flow and Level (MFL) (see weekly Caloosahatchee Estuary Conditions Reports prepared by the west coast stakeholders). Despite this request and having more than adequate water within Lake Okeechobee for water supply, additional water was not released from the Lake. This resulted in the Caloosahatchee exceeding the MFL salinity criteria of 10 psu in Fort Myers for 89 days. We recognize that the 150- 350 cfs that was requested to supplement the Caloosahatchee MFL may not have lowered the Lake enough to prevent the current situation entirely; however, it would have reduced the Lake level by nearly two inches . Holding this additional water in the Lake resulted in direct harm to the Caloosahatchee estuary by allowing salinity within the upper estuary to exceed the 10 psu ecological harm threshold and is now contributing to the damaging high discharges to the estuaries. This is clearly not shared adversity. It is our position that if water is going to be held in the Lake for water supply purposes at the expense of the estuaries, even

after numerous requests to lower the Lake and provide beneficial flows to the Caloosahatchee, this water should be now be moved south, not east and west.

At the June 5th South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force joint Working Group and Science Coordination Group meeting, Army Corps and South Florida Water Management District staff discussed a number of important Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects that have been recently completed or are in advanced planning and/ or construction stages. We applaud the Army Corps and the District for your hard work and dedication towards completing these important CERP projects. District staff reported that the L-8 Flow Equalization Basin (FEB) and the A-1 FEB were recently completed and are currently online. As we review the Corps' Lake Okeechobee and Vicinity Report we see that between May 23rd and June 5th the L-8 canal back- flowed 30, 007 acre- feet (ac-ft) of water into Lake Okeechobee and the S-310 back- flowed 4,239 ac- ft, totaling 34, 246 ac-ft. During the same time period, 45, 553 ac-ft (S-77: 34, 988; S-308: 10, 565 ac -ft) was discharged to the estuaries- representing 75% of the volume sent to the estuaries. This leads to a number of questions that need answered. Why is the L-8 FEB not providing the necessary relief to eliminate the need for back-flowing from the L-8? What is the future strategy for reducing or eliminating back - flowing from the S-310? How did the A -1 FEB perform during this event? Is it providing additional capacity for moving more Lake water south or is it primarily taking stormwater runoff from the Everglades Agricultural Area?

Our current situation underscores the inherent inequities in the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS 2008) and the Adaptive Protocols for Lake Okeechobee. Presently, LORS is calling for releases of up to 3,000 cfs measured at the Moore Haven S -77 structure and up to 1,170 cfs at the S-80 structure. Target discharges to the Caloosahatchee are currently being measured at the S-77 structure (at the Lake). When calculating the "up to" flows to the Caloosahatchee estuary, these flows do not consider watershed runoff. However, in the St. Lucie estuary the discharges from the Lake are always measured downstream of the Lake at the S-80 structure (at the estuary), which takes into account watershed runoff. This inequity needs to be addressed either through operational flexibility now or at the least in the next revision of LORS. There is also a great deal of inequity built into the Adaptive Protocols for Lake Okeechobee. Currently, the Adaptive Protocols unilaterally cutback freshwater flows from the Lake to the Caloosahatchee when no other water users are being rationed. The Adaptive Protocols need to be revised to ensure that the Caloosahatchee receives adequate flows to meet the established ecological salinity targets for estuary. The Caloosahatchee should not experience all the harm, while other water users are not subject to water shortage cutbacks and all other ecosystems throughout the system are spared. The Adaptive Protocols are the primary reason why the Caloosahatchee did not receive supplemental flows this dry season, which resulted in an MFL violation for 89 days and directly contributed to our current situation.

Approximately 50% of the freshwater flow that we are currently receiving in the Caloosahatchee estuary at S-79 is coming from Lake Okeechobee. The remainder of the water is coming from the watershed between Moore Haven and the Franklin Lock. Because we lack adequate flow monitoring within the Caloosahatchee tributaries east of S-79, we cannot determine where the stormwater runoff is entering the system or what future projects are necessary to address the issue. We request that the SFWMD and/ or FDEP deploy flow monitoring stations within the major tributaries of the Caloosahatchee to help better understand where the discharges are originating and how they may be addressed in the future.

Again, we appreciate your hard work and dedication to restoring America's Everglades and the Northern Estuaries and we look forward to working with you as a partner to this end. We hope that you will consider our requests and address our concerns.

Sincerely,



Tracey Gore

Mayor