

Dear Friends,

While we are all being challenged to stay safe and manage our lives in a new way with the COVID-19 pandemic, Florida Oceanographic is involved in several advocacy efforts moving forward on the front lines of water conservation. These efforts include making recommendations towards the new Lake Okeechobee release schedule, voicing our concerns on revisions to water quality regulations and opposing a “New Start” for the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Storage Reservoir project.

Save our Waters, not just water supply

Private industry is again trying to push the state to make decisions that benefit their special interests and not our waterways and coastal communities. The water in Lake Okeechobee should not be “saved” as a water source for farming at the expense of environmental habitats in Florida. Recent pressure is being put onto the Florida Congressional members to apply the “Savings Clause” from the 2000 Water Resource Development Act to the new Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule. This “clause” only applies to the saving of water for water supply while implementing the projects specific to the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). The Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule is not a CERP project and it is an outright attempt to further control the water for private industry. We oppose applying this “clause” to the development of the new Lake regulation schedule.

Say No to a “New Start”

We strongly disagree with the recent decision by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to re-class the EAA Storage Reservoir as a “New Start” project. Classifying it as "New Start" means delays to the construction and funding of this critical project. The WRDA 2018 Bill approved and authorized the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Storage Reservoir project as a part of the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP). However, recently the Corps determined that it should be classified as a “New Start” project, separate from the CEPP. This new designation will significantly delay the design/build work the SFWMD started this year and will further delay sending water south from Lake Okeechobee while continuing the damaging discharges to the coastal estuaries. We need to tell the USACE that this is NOT a “New Start” and should move forward as a component project of CEPP, which is already authorized.

Strengthen Water Regulations

Managing water quality is essential to saving our watershed and coastal ecosystems and it is the responsibility of the SFWMD to ensure that this management is followed. We are participating in the work by the SFWMD to make major revisions to

the water quality regulation rule known as 40E-61. The District was charged with revising this rule to better regulate and enforce water quality within the Lake Okeechobee, St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee watersheds. As they are proceeding forward, the Florida Legislature passed appropriations legislation this year that limits the implementation of this rule to monitoring water quality only. This Rule governs waters going into Works of the District and regulates water quality through more than 750 permits throughout these watersheds. We need this Rule to be strengthened to stop the pollution of our waters, not weakened by the State Legislature in their 2020 legislation.

Stop the Discharges

Over the years, discharges from Lake Okeechobee have plagued our estuaries. Changes must be made to how the Lake is managed so we can ensure the protection of our precious waterways, as well as the health and economic stability of our coastal community! We are participating in workshops held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, on what should be included in the new Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM). Specific to the coastal estuaries, the Corps and SFWMD are working together to fix discharge flow rates into the estuaries by incorporating performance metrics (known as RECOVER) that would indicate if flow rates are optimum, stressful or damaging to the ecosystem. We are insistent that there should be NO artificial flows from the Lake or canal-managed watersheds that cause harm to the estuaries.

We must continue to advocate for clean water on all of these fronts even during these challenging times. As Florida residents and water advocates, we cannot allow more setbacks to the health and proper management of our waterways. Let's all stay engaged to protect Florida's ecosystems and Save our Waters!

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark Perry', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mark Perry
Executive Director
Florida Oceanographic Society

