

Florida Oceanographic Society Position Statement

On the Health of Florida's Coastal Ecosystems

Updated 3-22-21

1. Stop the discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the St Lucie Estuary for public health and safety, the economy and the environment.

- a. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) demonstrated that it is possible to end regulatory releases to the St. Lucie Estuary and also protect Congressionally-authorized purposes (Alternative 4C1_3307 (22448)), therefore, we urge the USACE and other entities to stop discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie Estuary.
- b. Urge the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to maximize the volume of Lake Okeechobee water sent to the south, utilizing the Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs), flow equalization basins, reservoirs and other facilities as needed; and establish a target of 250,000 acre feet of Lake discharges to the Everglades during the dry season.
- c. Urge the State of Florida and U.S. Congress to expedite the funding and construction of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir project.
- d. Urge the USACE and SFWMD to operate the new C-44 Reservoir/STA to minimize toxic discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the St Lucie Estuary as well as excess flows from the C-44 Basin.
- e. Urge the USACE to expedite the completion of the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) to ensure adaptive management of Lake Okeechobee's waters for the maximum benefit to human health and safety, and environmental health.
- f. Urge the USACE and SFWMD to utilize LOSOM to move water out of Lake Okeechobee to the south prior to the wet season, eliminating the potential damaging discharges to coastal estuaries during the summer and fall, when toxic cyanobacteria blooms are a greater threat to human health.

2. Reduce the pollution of the Lake Okeechobee, the St Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries' watersheds for public health and safety, the economy and the environment.

- a. Hold Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) accountable for achieving the Total Maximum Daily Loads of the Lake and Northern Estuaries.
- b. Urge FDEP to replace the current ineffective pollution reduction strategies (Basin Management Action Plans, (BMAPs)) with an effective, collaborative and enforceable approach.
- c. Urge FDEP to use measured nutrient data in the BMAP reports – not computer-simulated values.

- d. Urge FDEP to establish and enforce nutrient load discharge limits for landowners in watersheds of Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries.
- e. Urge Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) and FDEP to strengthen reporting requirements, monitoring and overall regulation of the application of Class AA and Class B biosolids.
- f. Urge FDEP to incorporate estimates of pollution loading from the application of Class AA and Class B biosolids in the BMAPs and annual progress reports.

3. Expedite the funding and implementation of the remaining Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects including the Indian River Lagoon-South Project

- a. Urge the USACE and SFWMD to prioritize the completion of the C-44 Reservoir and STA Project.
- b. Urge the USACE to prioritize the C-23/24 Reservoir and STA project, the C-25 Reservoir and the St. Lucie Estuary Muck Removal components of the Project.

4. Protect Florida's freshwater and estuarine wetlands

- a. Urge the SFWMD, FDEP and FDACS to establish an effective permitting program to prevent the destruction of freshwater and estuarine wetlands from nutrient loading and land use changes.
- b. Urge the SFWMD and FDEP to support programs to restore and preserve wetlands, living shorelines and estuarine habitats such as seagrasses, oyster beds and mangroves.