



RON DESANTIS
GOVERNOR

May 17, 2021

Mr. Jaime Pinkham
Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
Department of the Army
108 Army Pentagon
Room 3E446
Washington, D.C. 20310-0108

Lieutenant General Scott A. Spellmon
Commanding General and Chief of Engineers
Headquarters
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20314-1000

Dear Acting Secretary Pinkham and Lieutenant General Spellmon:

Today, water levels in Florida's Lake Okeechobee stand at 13.47 feet. By contrast, on May 17 of the preceding two years, water levels were more than two feet lower. Higher lake levels are prompting growing concern in the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuary communities regarding the potential for significant Lake Okeechobee discharges and harmful algal blooms (HAB) this summer. Status quo lake management is not an option – the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must do better to manage lake levels and prevent harmful discharges to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers.

The prior years' significantly lower water levels reflected successful efforts by the federal government to meet water management commitments to the state of Florida. This was achieved by prioritizing dry season releases, including substantial volumes sent south to the Everglades, to build excess capacity for lake inflows in advance of the rainy season, and dramatically reducing the risks of transporting spawning HABs in lake outflows. Such actions were possible, in part, because the Corps, at the direction of the President, empowered the local Jacksonville District Commander to make decisions consistent with those principles even when such actions may have deviated from historic federal management patterns.

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Ultimately, it is the Corps' responsibility to manage the excess water now in the lake. The state of Florida is doing its part to address the contemporary environmental impacts of a water management system that the Corps helped design decades ago. Under my direction, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the South Florida Water Management District have increased state efforts to expedite additional treatment and flow capacity to the south, including through construction of the Central Everglades Planning Project and the Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoir. Additionally, Florida continues to invest considerable resources to support testing and implementation of innovative water treatment and HAB mitigation technologies by DEP and state water management districts to limit the health risks of HABs when water managers are unable to prevent blooms from reaching communities.

With the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) update currently underway, it is critical that the Corps work in concert with the state of Florida and recommit to the successful lake management principles that put the lake in the best position to avoid harmful discharges to the northern estuaries. **LOSOM must promote environmentally-beneficial releases that support lower lake levels during the dry season, and enhanced operational flexibility for managers to hold water in the lake during the wet season to prevent harmful discharges into the estuaries and send more water south to benefit the environment and our communities.**

These decisions have a significant impact on Florida's water quality, economy and our local communities. I will continue to work to end harmful discharges to the estuaries while prioritizing the sending of more water south. LOSOM is an important opportunity for the Corps to demonstrate their shared commitment to this mission.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ron DeSantis
Governor