



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

July 20, 2018

The Honorable Tracey Gore
Mayor
Town of Fort Myers Beach
2525 Estero Boulevard
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931

Subject: Lake Okeechobee Discharges

Dear Mayor Gore:

Your letter of June 19, 2018 raises many thoughtful questions and it is clear the Town of Fort Myers Beach and the South Florida Water Management District (District) have a strong mutual interest in protecting the Caloosahatchee Estuary. The District agrees that current conditions in the Caloosahatchee Estuary unacceptably impact the environmental and economic character of your community. We share your concern with these conditions knowing that the wet season will continue through October.

As a resident of Palm City, I too see first-hand the impacts of these discharges on my community. Please understand that the District is resolute in its efforts to complete the massive water storage and delivery projects, such as the C-43 West Basin Reservoir, that form the backbone of restoration and future water management flexibility.

As you are aware, the risks to life, health and safety resulting from the present condition of the Herbert Hoover Dike (Dike) necessitates too frequent discharges. This is why Governor Scott continues to focus on expediting repairs to the Dike, even if it requires the State of Florida (State) to directly fund a portion of the federal obligation. The District supports the Governor's efforts and is optimistic the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) will fully rehabilitate the Dike by 2022 now that they have identified federal construction funds provided by Congress for post-hurricane relief efforts. Completing the rehabilitation efforts - while simultaneously undertaking a restudy of the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule to identify and be ready to immediately employ all flexibility in operations - is a must.

The State and District are also fully committed to building storage and conveyance to provide relief from damaging discharges. The State is funding the construction of the C-43 West Basin Reservoir, dispersed water management projects, and has spent approximately \$2.5 Billion to date on projects to move clean water south from the Lake. Additionally, the District has undertaken an unprecedented planning effort regarding the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir to provide an additional 240,000 acre-feet of storage, 6,500 acres of treatment and conveyance improvements. Continued efforts are needed to ensure that Congress approves and funds the project while continuing to press the need for implementation of the full Central Everglades Planning Project which

includes additional conveyance features and flood protection attributes necessary for the additional storage to work.

We understand the State and District's efforts provide much needed options for mitigating damaging discharges. Notwithstanding USACE operations, our communities deserve to know what we are doing to ease impacts, even if just a little. Moving excess water out of the vast Water Conservation Areas to make room for water from the Lake and its contributing watersheds is a priority today and will continue as a priority in the coming weeks and months.

Specifically, the District is moving water out of the Water Conservation Areas eastward to tide throughout the lower east coast, limited only by the need to provide flood protection to the coastal communities. The District recently received authorization from USACE to raise the operating level of the L-29 canal along Tamiami Trail to 8.0ft from the previous 7.5ft criteria. We have also asked the USACE to complete the remainder of its construction in the southern part of the system, to enable full utilization of system capacity.

The District is currently utilizing the existing storage in the A-1 Flow Equalization Basin (FEB) and the L-8 FEB located in Palm Beach County. Recent rainfall filled the A-1 FEB; however, the District is working on measures to free capacity in order to move more water south. Likewise, the District is using the L-8 FEB to reduce the flow of water into Lake Okeechobee from the L-8 basin through Culvert 10A. Currently, the L-8 FEB is near capacity due to the recent rains and District water managers are aggressively working to pull down the levels within it to accommodate additional inflows.

The flow of water through the S-310 structure into Lake Okeechobee, provides flood protection for families and businesses in the City of Clewiston and surrounding area. It is the only viable discharge point from the basin for local flood protection needs aside from the S-4 pump station which also sends water back to Lake Okeechobee. For the benefit of these residents, the District will operate the S-310 as necessary to provide flood control.

I am happy to report that we are working to install additional flow monitoring stations to better track progress as part of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's nutrient load reduction efforts in the watershed as well as flows from the upstream basins to the estuary. I am certain that if the City of Bonita Springs would like to participate in or request additional information on these efforts, that FDEP would welcome your involvement.

Finally, the District has assessed each of its water storage projects with private landowners and interim storage on public lands to provide benefits in the St. Lucie, Caloosahatchee, and Lake Okeechobee watersheds. Approximately 54,000 acre-feet of water retention and storage has been pressed in to service across the three watersheds with additional projects anticipated to go to construction in the coming fiscal year. All of these public-private projects are either at storage capacity or currently accepting additional water to reach capacity in the coming days.

Mayor Tracey Gore
July 19, 2018
Page 3

Like you, the District carefully monitors weather conditions and remains hopeful that nature will provide the reprieve that is necessary for the USACE to slow or discontinue Lake discharges to the Caloosahatchee River. Having just experienced record-setting rainfall in May and facing another 3 months of the wet season, it is important that we continue to stay vigilant. I commit to keeping all our communities fully apprised of District actions to accommodate Lake water elsewhere in the system as the wet season progresses. You and your constituents can access our weekly high-water updates by visiting our website <https://www.sfwmd.gov/managinghighwater>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ernie Marks', is written over the word 'Sincerely,'.

Ernie Marks
Executive Director

EM/mbh

cc: Governing Board Members