



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

3301 Gun Club Road, West Palm Beach, Florida 33406 • (561) 686-8800 • FL WATS 1-800-432-2045 • TDD (561) 697-2574
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 24680, West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680 • www.sfwmd.gov

June 25, 2004

Ms. Susan Brookman, Chairman
Southwest Florida Watershed Council, Inc.
P.O. Box 61063
Fort Myers, FL 33906-1063

Dear Ms. Brookman:

Thank you for your letter of May 20, 2004 requesting releases of water from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee Estuary. A series of low level pulse releases was made to reduce water level in Lake Okeechobee under a temporary deviation from the Water Supply and Environmental Regulation Schedule (WSE). Well within the "safe" range of 300 – 2800 cubic feet per second (cfs), the releases benefited the Caloosahatchee by maintaining low salinity during the record dry period that occurred in March and early April. Tape grass beds continued their recovery from the 2001 drought and oysters had a successful spring recruitment.

Under authority of The Adaptive Protocols for the Operation of Lake Okeechobee, a series of three environmental releases averaging 300 cfs over 10 days began on April 29. The last started on May 27. Despite these releases, salinity rose above the 10 ppt Minimum Flow and Level (MFL) criterion. As discussed in the recent update of the MFL in 2003, runoff from the tidal basin ordinarily augments releases at the Franklin Lock and Dam. Dry conditions precluded runoff from the tidal basin. Salinity rose above the target level. Rainfall generated discharge began on June 4 and drove salinity below 10 ppt. Although tape grass beds have shown no evidence of extensive mortality, performance over the next few months will indicate whether the recent high salinities have retarded or halted recovery.

The extreme high and low flows that the Caloosahatchee experiences are largely due to lack of storage. Projects (reservoirs, aquifer storage and retrieval wells) associated with the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and other alternatives proposed by the Southwest Florida Feasibility study will provide a long-term solution. Revisions to the WSE Schedule for Lake Okeechobee also are being examined. In the meantime, revisions to the WSE Schedule for Lake Okeechobee also are being examined to: (a) storage in the Lake during the wet season and (b) identify changes in the schedule to allow more low level pulse releases to moderate high salinity.

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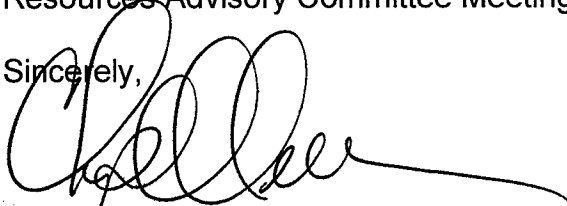
EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Henry Dean, *Executive Director*

Ms. Susan Brookman, Chairman
June 25, 2004
Page 2

The District appreciates your concern for the Caloosahatchee and invites you to take advantage of opportunities to work with us in the future, such as the upcoming Water Resources Advisory Committee Meeting on June 28, 2004.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chip Merriam', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chip Merriam
Deputy Executive Director
South Florida Water Management District

HD/pd

c: John Albion, Chair, Lee County Board of County Commissioners
Nicolas Gutierrez
Chip Merriam
Jacque Rippe