



May 20, 2004

Mr. Henry Dean, Executive Director
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, Florida 33416-4680

Dear Mr. Dean,

I am writing to encourage you to consider asking the Governing Board at its meeting in June to request that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers authorize releases of water from Lake Okeechobee in order to protect downstream ecosystems if conditions during the remainder of this dry season warrant. These releases are authorized by the Water Control Plan (Sections 7-08 to 7-10) and by Florida Statutes (Chapter 373, F.S.). As you know, the Adaptive Protocols for Lake Okeechobee Operations call for SFWMD staff to approach such releases in a pro-active manner, and we believe that it would be prudent to take action in June unless significant rainfall occurs in the Caloosahatchee watershed in late May and early June because it appears that the MFL will be exceeded within the coming week. We'd also like to suggest that in future years, this issue be placed on Governing Board meeting agendas in March, April and May as a standard procedure so that the Governing Board discussion required in the Adaptive Protocols is on record before exceedences become a reality.

The members of the Watershed Council appreciate your efforts to manage the system with frequent low-level discharges as opposed to infrequent high-volume discharges in recent months, since this is the time of the year the estuaries respond best to lower flows. Your actions, along with those of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, succeeded in lowering Lake Okeechobee significantly, with minimal negative impacts to the estuaries. Lake Okeechobee and the estuaries are on track to a healthier state, and water supply has not been compromised. We hope that you will continue to balance the needs of the region's natural systems with those of its human inhabitants.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Brookman
Chairman

Copies: Mr. Nicolás J. Gutiérrez, Jr., Esq., Governing Board Chairman
Mr. Chip Merriam, Deputy Executive Director for Water Resources
Ms. Jacque Rippe, Lower West Coast Service Center Director
Mr. John Albion, Lee County Board of County Commissioners Chairman

The mission of the Southwest Florida Watershed Council is to protect, conserve, manage and/or restore the land and water resources of the Caloosahatchee and Big Cypress Watersheds. Through increased awareness, participation and cooperation among all stakeholders in consensus building, planning and decision making, we are working to meet the economic, natural and cultural needs for this and succeeding generations.