



Lee County
Southwest Florida

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Colonel Andrew Kelly
Jacksonville District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Boulevard
Jacksonville, FL 32207

May 11, 2021

Colonel Kelly,

On behalf of Lee County, I am writing to express my deep concern about current management of Lake Okeechobee and the direction the Army Corps is moving in with the modeling of Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM). As we have expressed to you in the past, tourism and the natural environment are the lifeblood of Lee County's economy. The economic loss that we experienced in the summer of 2018 was unlike any felt in the system. Our freshwater rivers and canals were flooded with blue green algae and our saltwater environment was besieged with red tide. Our tourism industry suffered that season, based in part on how the Army Corps was managing Lake Okeechobee. Now, after the loss of tourism in 2020, we cannot afford a similar event just as our economy is recovering post-Covid. All measures must be taken to avoid this outcome.


In your tenure as Commander of the Jacksonville District you have demonstrated a willingness to operate the system differently. Unfortunately, any concern that you have shown for the health of the Caloosahatchee Estuary in the past has not been apparent in the LOSOM modeling process to date. In reviewing the newly released "Balanced Framework" alternatives your concept of "balance" seems to put the burden of high-volume discharges solely on the Caloosahatchee. All four plans that included decision trees appear to be varying levels of devastating for the Caloosahatchee Estuary. This is unacceptable. Worse yet is the lack of transparency by your team in how these "Balanced Framework" alternatives were selected and how you chose plans that unilaterally sacrifice the Caloosahatchee Estuary to protect other parts of the water management system. It is truly disappointing that you would support such an unbalanced approach as the starting point for discussion and a marked shift from how you, as District Commander, have engaged with the west coast since the awful events of 2018.

We have heard from your staff that in this process you are exploring different "perspectives of balance". Without understanding exactly what this means, it is clear to us that balance thus far has not been to include the health of the Caloosahatchee. For Lee County, any balanced plan must decrease high volume discharges and increase optimal flows, and improve over the Future Without performance. We cannot continue to be starved for water in the dry season only to

be deluged by high volume discharges weeks later as the rainy season arrives. 2018 is not an option.

We sincerely hope that your past actions are indicative of a Commander that wants to make a positive difference for the Caloosahatchee Estuary. It is imperative that you take an objective and equitable approach to managing lake operations this summer and in developing LOSOM, with restoration of the Caloosahatchee Estuary as a key objective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Ruane', with several horizontal strokes extending to the right.

Kevin Ruane
Chairman, Lee County Board of County Commissioners

- cc. Representative Byron Donalds, United States Congress, FL District 19
- Chauncey Goss, Chairman, South Florida Water Management District
- Drew Bartlett, Executive Director, South Florida Water Management District