BRIAN J. MAST
18TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–0918

2182 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225–3026

171 SW FLAGLER AVENUE
STUART, FLORIDA 34994
(772) 781–3266

March 1, 2019

Terrie Bates
Acting Executive Director
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, Florida 33406

Dear Ms. Bates:

As you may know, I have been advocating for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to reduce lake levels during the dry season this year to help mitigate the need for harmful discharges to the estuaries this summer and to benefit the ecology of Lake Okeechobee. On their weekly call on February 26, 2019, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers expressed a desire to get more water out of the lake to accomplish this goal.

On February 22, 2019, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced that it would use additional operational flexibility in the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule to discharge water to the St. Lucie estuary and the Caloosahatchee estuary. The St. Lucie estuary is currently receiving an average of 500 cubic feet per second (cfs) and the Caloosahatchee estuary is currently receiving an average of 1,800 cfs. These are volumes that are neither wanted nor needed.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can achieve lower lake levels without sending damaging discharges to the coasts; however, they need your support to maximize additional capacity, move water south and use as much flexibility as possible to prevent discharges. **I am writing to reiterate my request for your immediate support to assist the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in their efforts to reduce the lake level prior to the start of wet season.**

Specifically, on the February 22, 2019 phone call, the South Florida Water Management District acknowledged that there are several dispersed water management projects that are currently using just a fraction of their total storage capacity. This is occurring despite the fact that over the last five years approximately 50 percent of Lake Okeechobee's water was lost forever after being discharged into the estuaries. This is resulting in a waste of water, which is starving the Everglades and Florida Bay, as well as keeping the water from other South Florida users. Less than 12 percent of Lake Okeechobee's water actually made it to the Everglades in the five-year period ending in 2018. Not only is this ecologically devastating for the Everglades, but this failure in water management has caused a public health crisis on Florida's coasts.

Therefore, I ask for your immediate attention to maximize operational capacity, send water south and answer the following questions:

1. Why are dispersed water management projects not operating at full capacity while Florida is in the middle of a public health crisis as a result of discharges to the estuaries?
2. Will you adjust the operational plan for these projects to ensure that water is sent to these dispersed water management projects as soon as the estuaries reach their optimal flows (1,000 cfs to the Caloosahatchee and 0 cfs to the St. Lucie River) instead of waiting until the estuaries reach the current misguided standards of 2,800 cfs for the Caloosahatchee and 2,000 cfs for the St. Lucie?
3. Why has the South Florida Water Management District left the Lykes West Waterhole flow through treatment offline since December? Why has it taken so long to repair or replace the pump? What is the timeline for getting this pump back online?
4. Will you commit to publishing a weekly report identifying the total capacity of each water project under your jurisdiction and what percentage of that total capacity is currently being utilized? These projects should include the STAs, WCAs, wildlife management areas, dispersed water management projects, EAA and L-8 flow equalization basins. I also ask that you include in this report your justification for operating each project at less than 100% capacity.

Thank you for your immediate attention to these issues, which have severe health, environmental and economic consequences for my constituents.

Sincerely,

Brian Mast
Member of Congress

cc:
South Florida Water Management District Board Members
Col. Andrew Kelly, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers