

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

June 7, 2018

The Honorable R.D. James
Assistant Secretary of the Army—Civil Works
Department of the Army
108 Army Pentagon
Washington DC, 20310

Dear Assistant Secretary James:

As you know, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' discharges from Lake Okeechobee have wreaked havoc on the communities east and west of the lake. I appreciate that you have engaged on this issue, including a favorable referral of the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) Post-Authorization Chance Report (PACR) to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that will enhance storage and water quality treatment capacity south of Lake Okeechobee.

While this is a necessary long-term solution, more must be done in the short-term to save our communities. Our waterways are a delicate ecosystem that is critically important to the 18th Congressional District of Florida. Nutrient buildup in Lake Okeechobee is known to have caused harmful algal blooms in our waterways following discharges from the lake. These algal blooms have resulted in health problems for my constituents and significant economic damages to our community. I cannot stand idly by while discharges destroy our backyards, businesses are shuttered, people get sick and our environment is destroyed.


It is my understanding that the recent round of discharges from Lake Okeechobee, which began on June 1, 2018, were initiated prior to any determination of the quality of water being released. While water quality testing is currently ongoing on the state level, I cannot fathom why the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would see fit to discharge massive amounts of water into our community without knowing, with certainty, whether the water was safe—especially since there is no immediate risk of flooding or dike failure.

Therefore, I request that, as a matter of policy, the Army Corps tests and publicly reports the water quality prior to authorization of discharges. Moreover, I request that the current discharges cease immediately until the water quality is deemed safe or an imminent threat to life exists.

Furthermore, I would welcome the opportunity to give you and your staff a tour of our community myself so that you can see the damage being brought onto us by these discharges. I believe it would be an eye-opening experience for everybody involved. I request that you coordinate with my office on an opportunity to visit the 18th Congressional District of Florida at your earliest convenience.

Again, I thank you for your immediate attention to this issue and your ongoing willingness to partner with us. Your favorable referral of the PACR for a southern storage reservoir will lead to a tremendous improvement in the quality of life of our community, and I look forward to continuing to work with you on short-term improvements that must be made in the meantime.

Sincerely,

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

Brian Mast
Member of Congress

CC:

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