

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

July 19, 2021

Colonel Andrew Kelly  
Jacksonville District Commander  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
701 San Marco Boulevard  
Jacksonville, FL 32201

Dear Colonel Kelly,

Thank you for your preliminary selection of Balanced Alternative CC as the preferred alternative for the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual. This letter is to offer my support for finalizing this selection and to share my recommendations for optimization of this plan.

While Balanced Alternative CC holds a lot of promise, it is a major compromise for the St. Lucie, as Balanced Alternative AA performed far and away the best for Florida's East Coast. Balanced Alternative AA also sent the most water south into the Everglades. The optimization process thus offers an opportunity to incorporate critical elements of Balanced Alternative AA in the final iteration to send more water south in the dry season and further reduce discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries.

Specifically, when optimizing Balanced Alternative CC, eliminating Zone F and lowering the bottom of Zone D would allow more water to flow south into the Everglades and give the Caloosahatchee more ecologically beneficial flows throughout the dry season. Making those changes would also create more storage capacity in the lake to reduce damaging high lake stages, reduce harmful discharges to the Caloosahatchee and eliminate discharges to the St. Lucie in Zones B and C.

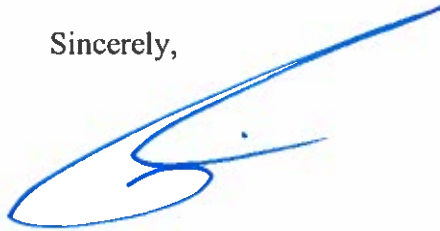
All this having been said, I am deeply concerned about a proposed bait and switch that would see Balanced Alternative CC not just optimized but radically altered to undermine the performance of the current plan. With the suggested optimization changes above, high-volume discharges to the Caloosahatchee can be decreased *without causing further harm to the St. Lucie or Lake Okeechobee*. To be clear, East Coast stakeholders cannot support Balanced Alternative CC if it is re-written to exceed the Iteration 2 modeled performance of 72,000 acre-feet per year, which was already a substantial concession on our part.

To put an even finer point on it, some have begun advocating for a new model—SR3.5—that would double the volume of discharges to the St. Lucie, again relying on our community to shoulder the burden of harm despite receiving no benefits from the system. This would be an unacceptable betrayal of Florida's East Coast that would perpetuate the harmful status quo rather

than rebalancing the scales toward more just management of Florida's waterways. Moreover, this kind of deceptive bait and switch would put the Army Corps in serious jeopardy of running afoul of federal law, further delaying improvements to the management of Florida's waterways that we have been fighting together to accomplish.

In conclusion, now is not the time to back away from the chance to make a once-in-a-decade improvement to the massive injustice of Florida's water management. The foremost principle for the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual should be "do no harm," and the same should be true of optimizations made during Iteration 3. I look forward to continuing to work with you to accomplish this goal, and I thank you again for the hard work of all those involved in this undertaking.

Sincerely,



Brian Mast  
Member of Congress

CC:

Timothy Gysan  
Senior Project Manager  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Drew Bartlett  
Executive Director  
South Florida Water Management District