BRIAN J. MAST
21ST DISTRICT, FLORIDA

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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March 25, 2024

Colonel James Booth
Jacksonville District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Boulevard
Jacksonville, FL 32207-8175

To Colonel Booth:

I am writing again to urge the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to immediately stop discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie Estuary.

While the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule, 2008 (LORS08) allows discharges at current lake levels, the schedule does not require these discharges, and the USACE's most up-to-date modeling, conducted as part of the development of the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM), clearly indicates that discharges to the St. Lucie Estuary are not advisable right now. In fact, under LOSOM, the USACE would currently be prohibited from discharging to the St. Lucie Estuary, unless lake recovery operations were initiated.

Therefore, please answer the following questions no later than March 29, 2024:

- Has the USACE made a determination that under LOSOM lake recovery operations would have been initiated?

- If so, the stated objective of recovery operations is to achieve a lake stage below 12.0 feet for 90 days (non-consecutive) between mid-April and mid-September or to recede below 11.5 feet for at least 60 days (non-consecutive) between May and August. Is this objective achievable? If not, why is the USACE operating as if under recovery operations when the objective is not achievable?

The bottom line is that, since the Army Corps started discharging meaningfully distinct freshwater into the saltwater St. Lucie Estuary, the lake level has dropped from 16.39' to 15.55', algal blooms have appeared on the lake, and reports indicate that discharges are already having detrimental effects on aquatic life, including corals. With the upcoming oyster spawn, the detrimental impacts will only continue to multiply.

In conclusion, the ongoing discharges are not only incredibly damaging to our estuary but directly contradict the USACE's best available science and modeling. I urge you to immediately cease discharges to the St. Lucie Estuary. Thank you for your attention on this issue.

Sincerely,

Brian Mast
Member of Congress