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DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S CAUCUS

August 21, 2019

Colonel Andrew Kelly
District Commander
US Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District
701 San Marco Boulevard
Jacksonville, Florida 32207

Dear Colonel Kelly,

As Representatives of Palm Beach County, we are writing to share the concern of many stakeholders in South Florida in regards to the planned deviation from the water control plan for Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades Agricultural Area, also known as the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS 2008). A large cross-section of South Florida's economy and communities, both private and public, rely on Lake Okeechobee for everyday needs and will be directly affected by the Army Corps' decisions regarding lake levels.

I recognize the difficult decisions involved in maintaining appropriate lake levels and releasing toxic algae into the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers. With that said, I urge the Army Corps to consider residents who may be without water if a drought occurs and rain predictions are wrong.

As the former mayor of West Palm Beach, I am acutely aware of the threats to Palm Beach County's water supply when lake levels are below 10.5 feet. During my term, a severe drought left the city days away from not having water for drinking or fighting fires. Ad-hoc deviations that leave the lake levels too low may put many South Floridians in similar peril. And aggressively lowering Lake Okeechobee will likely result in more undesirable discharges to the Lake Worth Lagoon and impacts to Grassy Waters Preserve and the Loxahatchee River.

Some other potential impacts to lowering lake levels include:

- Ecological damage to the Everglades and Grassy Waters due to the lack of backup water supply from the Lake during dry times
- Inability to maintain minimum flows and levels in the Loxahatchee River and increased ecological impacts due to advancing saltwater
- More frequent water shortages that require increased water use restrictions on public utilities, agriculture, nurseries, and others
- Impacts to freshwater supplies in wellfields due to saltwater intrusion, affecting the health and safety of residents and resulting in the need for massive alternative water supply infrastructure investments
- Potential impacts to crop production, potentially affecting nationwide crop prices and domestic availability
- Restrictions to navigation and limits on recreational and commercial fishing, which impacts small businesses such as marinas

We urge the Corps to expand the 15-day review period and continue to work with the many local stakeholders who would be affected by lower lake levels, including Palm Beach County Water Utilities Department, the City of West Palm Beach and surrounding municipalities, the agriculture industry, and the environmental community.

Please keep us informed of all decisions regarding the pending release schedule. We look forward to working with the Army Corps to draft a new Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) that considers the needs of our ever-growing population in South Florida and provide an open and public process to better understand the proposed deviation and potential environmental impacts.

Sincerely,



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

CC: South Florida Water Management District