



CITY OF SANIBEL, FLORIDA

2018 WATER QUALITY PRIORITIES

Introduction

Ongoing water quality issues associated with freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee and stormwater runoff from the Caloosahatchee continue to impact Lee County and its coastal communities. Currently, more than 75 nautical miles of the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary are being impacted by blue-green algae. The blue-green algae, which are also referred to as cyanobacteria, have been identified as *Microcystis aeruginosa*—a known toxin-producing species. These blooms have resulted in beach closures along the Caloosahatchee prompting the Florida Department of Health to post warnings to avoid contact with the algae. These water quality problems must be addressed immediately! This is critical for the health and safety of our coastal communities, for the wellbeing of our river and estuary, and to preserve our quality of life and local economy.

This problem persists because of inadequate water storage within the Kissimmee, Lake Okeechobee, and Caloosahatchee watersheds, and our inability to treat and convey additional water south into Everglades National Park and Florida Bay where it is desperately needed. Flood control projects, channelization, and other land use changes that have occurred throughout Central and South Florida during the past century have resulted in a water management system that is very different from its original state. The highly-engineered system that exists today delivers water to the coast very quickly, with little to no treatment. This has resulted in the Caloosahatchee estuary receiving too much water during the wet season and not enough during the dry season. The water that is delivered is often laden with nitrogen and phosphorus that can stimulate harmful algal blooms. These blooms degrade aquatic habitats and the quality and intrinsic value of our beaches.

The economic security of our communities depends on swift action by our federal and state governments. Tourism in Florida generates more than \$111 billion annually (Visit FL, 2016). In Lee and Martin Counties alone, tourism generates nearly \$4 billion annually. A study conducted by the Florida Realtors in 2015 found that poor water quality can impact real estate values in Lee and Martin counties by almost \$1 billion in 2015 dollars.

We need your support and assistance to implement short-term policies and critical Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects that will address these ongoing water issues that directly impact our economy and Florida jobs.

Federal Priorities

Maintain flows at or below 3,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) measured at the Franklin Lock (S-79) for the remainder of the wet season.

- Watershed runoff & Lake Okeechobee discharges are compounding water quality impacts in the Caloosahatchee River & Estuary.
- Higher salinities throughout the lower & mid-estuary are needed to reduce the area suitable for algal growth.
- Lower flows will also reduce nutrient loading (i.e., nitrogen & phosphorus) from Lake O, which is currently not meeting its Total Maximum Daily Load for nutrients.

Accelerate critical CERP projects, including the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir (EAA), the C-43 Reservoir, & the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project.

- The EAA Reservoir Project will provide critical water storage, treatment, & conveyance south of Lake Okeechobee. This project is desperately needed to reduce the damaging high-volume freshwater releases that are currently impacting the estuaries. It is imperative that the EAA Reservoir Project be included in the 2018 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) & the necessary funds are appropriated so that construction can move forward as soon as possible.
- C-43 Reservoir will provide critical storage within the watershed & needs continued funding by the State to stay on track with the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS). As currently designed, the reservoir does not include a water quality treatment component. The Caloosahatchee is currently “impaired” for nutrients, so it is imperative that a water quality treatment component be added to improve the quality of the water discharged to the river. This will ensure water being discharged to the Caloosahatchee meets the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and does not contribute to existing water quality problems.
- The Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project is critical for reducing inflows to the Lake & must to be fast-tracked. This project will help regulate the volume, timing, and quality of the water delivered to the Lake.

US Army Corps of Engineers must utilize maximum operational flexibility to move additional water south & overcome operational constraints that do not directly impact human health & safety.

- Following Governor Scott’s Emergency Order, the water management system must be reevaluated to maximize freshwater flows south of Lake Okeechobee.
- This includes assessing and overcoming current operational constraints that do not directly impact human health & safety.

State Priorities

State of Florida must work cooperatively with US Army Corps & other federal agencies to accelerate critical CERP projects, including the EAA Reservoir, C-43 Reservoir, & Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project.

- The EAA Reservoir Project will provide critical water storage, treatment, & conveyance south of Lake Okeechobee. This project is desperately needed to reduce damaging high-volume freshwater releases currently impacting the estuaries. It is imperative that the EAA Reservoir Project be included in the 2018 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) & the necessary funds are appropriated so that construction can move forward as soon as possible.
- C-43 reservoir will provide critical storage within the watershed & needs continued funding by the State to stay on track with the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS). As currently designed, the reservoir does not include a water quality treatment component. The Caloosahatchee is currently “impaired” for nutrients. It is imperative that a treatment component be added to improve the quality of the water discharged to the river so that it meets the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) established for the River & does not contribute to the existing water quality problems. The SFWMD should immediately begin designing a water quality treatment component on lands adjacent to the reservoir.
- The Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project is critical for reducing inflows to the Lake & must to be fast-tracked. This project will help regulate the volume, timing, & quality of the water delivered to the Lake.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection & Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services must enforce Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLS), Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPS) & Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs)

- Poor water quality throughout the Kissimmee, Lake O, Caloosahatchee, & St. Lucie watersheds must be addressed immediately.
- The majority of the waterbodies located within the Central and Southern Florida Project are not currently meeting water quality standards.
- Additional water quality monitoring is needed, including additional flow sensors in eastern Caloosahatchee to determine source of runoff; & additional water quality monitoring is needed to assess BMAP & BMP implementation.

SFWMD must explore every opportunity to move additional water south & overcome operational constraints that do not directly impact human health & safety.

- Following Governor Scott’s Emergency Order, the water management system must be reevaluated to maximize freshwater flows south of Lake Okeechobee.
- This includes assessing & overcoming current operational constraints that do not directly impact human health & safety.



Impacts of Freshwater Discharges from Lake Okeechobee & the Caloosahatchee on Sanibel Island

7. Re: Water clarity on bay
Jun 9, 2018, 7:39 PM

gaby1226
Miami, FL
Level 3 Contributor
34 posts
11 reviews

On the news today, I saw heartbreaking footage of brown water by the Lighthouse. It's been rainy so water has been released from Lake O. We opted to go to the Keys this year to avoid the disappointment

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1

1-7 of 7 replies Sorted by Oldest first

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Watch this Topic

25. Re: Lake O releasing brown water into gulf
Jun 16, 2018, 12:24 PM

firstmom
Level 3 Contributor
41 posts
4 reviews

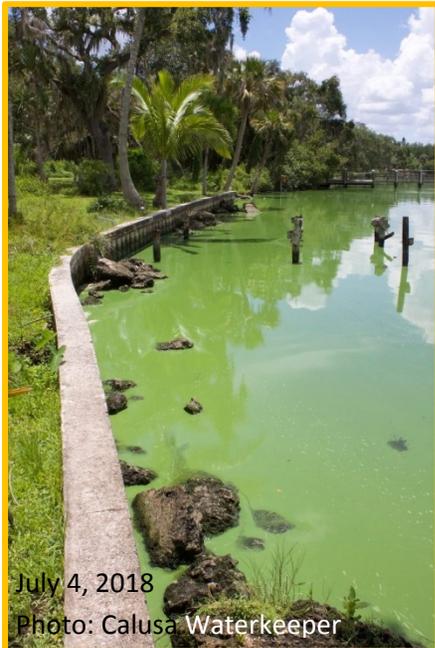
We are back. We changed our hotel and stayed on the West gulf instead. It was beautiful! The water was dark but I'm not sure the lighthouse and it extended down the coast but I'm not sure how far. But because we were on the West gulf the water was clear brown water at all. The beach was beautiful. The water was clear. It ended up being a great vacation and I'm extremely happy that we changed hotels. We stayed at West Wind Inn and I would highly recommend it. We plan on returning here again and would definitely stay at West Wind Inn.

Mentioned in this post

West Wind Inn
2,234...
Sanibel Island, FL

Save Reply

**Regional Impacts of Excess
Nutrients from Freshwater Releases
from Lake Okeechobee &
Stormwater Runoff from the
Caloosahatchee Watershed**



Harmful algal blooms associated with Lake Okeechobee & Caloosahatchee watershed discharges. Photos of blue-green algae bloom in the Caloosahatchee taken June 25 through July 8, 2018. Blooms are currently impacting the entire length of the river and estuary.