



LEE COUNTY
SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Bob Janes
District One

September 30, 2008

Brian Bigelow
District Two

Colonel Paul L. Grosskruger
District Commander
Jacksonville District

Ray Judah
District Three

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Blvd.
Jacksonville, FL 32207-8175

Tammy Hall
District Four

Frank Mann
District Five

Dear Colonel Grosskruger:

Donald D. Stilwell
County Manager

The Lee County Board of County Commissioners ("the Commission") at its meeting today, September 30th, unanimously expressed its support to send you a clear message that further fresh water releases from Lake Okeechobee should be ceased at this time for a period of no less than one week.

David M. Owen
County Attorney

Diana M. Parker
County Hearing
Examiner

On Thursday, September 25, your staff met in a conference call with representatives from Lee and Martin Counties, the South Florida Water Management District, state biologists and environmental advocates for Lake Okeechobee. In that meeting there was a unanimous recommendation to halt lake releases to the estuaries for at least one week. Without any explanation or rationale, Lee County was informed yesterday afternoon, September 29th, that a new round of releases would commence at 0700 today, September 30th. Obviously the undisputed recommendation made by a broad-based group of estuary and Lake advocates was not followed. With Lake Okeechobee levels below fifteen (15) feet, I believe that the recommendation of this broad-based group should be adopted by the Corps.

A one week halt of lake releases is critical to overall estuary health and relief. This period was recommended to help the estuaries have critical recovery time particularly for oysters within the estuary. As you are well aware oysters are a keystone species in our estuarine environment and health of the oyster population can be considered a barometer that gauges the health of our estuary. Oyster spat are currently settling on the mostly dead oysters in the lower to mid estuary and lower river. Survival of this oyster spat is severely compromised by continued fresh water releases. A cessation of releases for a period of one week could be crucial to even having an oyster existence this year.

Lee County is pleased to participate with your team as they struggle to balance the needs of the various safety and environmental concerns associated with operating the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule. We would hope, though, that the recommendations of a broad-based balanced group like that referenced above, would be given serious consideration. If there are mitigating factors that your staff has used to make this decision we are not aware of them. It is our belief that a better process to communicate your decision would be in the best interest of all involved.

Sincerely,

Ray Judah
Chairman

Lee County Board of County Commissioners