



August 6, 2007

Mr. Charles Dauray
South Florida Water Management District Governing Board
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, Florida 33406

Re: Lake Okeechobee Backpumping

Dear Mr. Dauray:

This letter is written to request that you vote against the practice of backpumping from the EAA into Lake Okeechobee on the basis that it undermines the significant financial investments and commitment the State has made in cleaning up the Lake and estuary discharges and presents a health hazard for the communities whose drinking water comes from the lake.

Backpumping from the EAA affects the lake by contributing excess nutrients to the water resulting in violations of water quality standards established to clean up the lake. These excess nutrients cannot be absorbed and result in algal blooms which accumulate as toxic lake sediments, consume oxygen needed by fish and aquatic insects and cause problems with providing a safe drinking water supply. These impacts affect not only the lake but are enormous impacts to the coastal estuaries where 70% of water is discharged from the lake. Backpumping from the EAA contributes an average of 87-154 ppb of Phosphorus and 1493 tons of Nitrogen into Lake Okeechobee. Compare these levels to the nutrient limits permitted; 40 ppb phosphorus and 393 tons of Nitrogen. The bottom line is backpumping from the EAA is contributing 2-4 times the permitted levels of phosphorus and nearly 4 times the nitrogen levels to the lake.

While phosphorus loading is the critical concern for the lake and Everglades ecosystems, the Caloosahatchee & St Lucie estuaries are most significantly impacted by the increased nitrogen levels. Nutrient loading from backpumping alone is contributing 30-40 percent of the nutrient loads that are damaging the quality of the lake and the coastal estuaries that the State has committed millions of dollars to clean up. Simply put the current policy that allows backpumping is undermining the taxpayer's investment in water quality and ecosystem restoration. This is not good fiscal, ecological or public policy.

Equally, water policies for this system carry a social responsibility for the public health, safety and welfare of communities that use the lake as for their drinking water supply. The heavy organic loads delivered with the nutrients into the lake from backpumping requires an additional level of treatment that in combination with the organic matter produces damaging by products known to contribute to cancer and birth defects. This water policy unfairly impacts the poorest counties around the lake for whom the lake provides drinking water.

Clean water is not optional, it is the basic human right of every individual and our responsibility to ourselves and the other living systems upon which our lives are intertwined. We must prioritize the health of these systems to protect the economic viability and quality of life of Southwest Florida.

Backpumping is not a sustainable solution for the health of the lake, the health of citizens living around the lake or the health of the coastal estuaries. It is instead a failed water policy.

The Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation is a nonprofit conservation foundation which has been dedicated to the preservation of natural resources on and around Sanibel and Captiva Islands on the Gulf Coast for the past 40 years. SCCF has been a dedicated partner working with stakeholders for solutions to the water quality problems that are undermining our economy and degrading our natural environment.

On behalf of the 4,000 members of the Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation we request your support in reversing the status quo in water policy by rejecting the option of backpumping from the EAA into Lake Okeechobee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erick Lindblad".

Erick Lindblad, Executive Director
Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation