



August 4, 2021

Christine Wormuth
Secretary of the United States Army
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Jaime Pinkham
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Dear Secretary Wormuth and Assistant Secretary Pinkham,

As the elected mayors representing the Glades communities of South Bay, Belle Glade and Pahokee in South Florida, we want to raise concerns regarding the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) ongoing process for developing a Lake Okeechobee Systems Operating Manual (LOSOM) schedule. Under Colonel Andrew Kelly's leadership, we feel the voices from our communities, which are overwhelmingly African-American, Hispanic, and other minorities, are being completely ignored while the concerns of wealthy coastal communities represented by Congressman Brian Mast have been given priority.

Colonel Kelly's Plan "CC," in its current form, is completely unacceptable. Our communities depend heavily on water from Lake Okeechobee, which sustains local businesses tied to tourism and agriculture. Plan "CC" could result in a decreased water supply from Lake Okeechobee, which would inflict tremendous economic harm on our region as well as to many other parts of South Florida. Our jobs, our lake's ecology, and our way of life could be totally lost if Col. Kelly's Plan "CC" is implemented without changes to address these issues.

Our other concerns with the process of developing LOSOM are as follows:

- Prior to and during Colonel Kelly's LOSOM "listening tour," elected leaders from the Glades communities of South Bay, Belle Glade or Pahokee were shut-out from setting up local meetings with the USACE to address our concerns (when in contrast, leaders from predominately wealthy communities were given meetings)
- Colonel Kelly's Plan "CC" falls far short of enabling the USACE to fulfil its Congressionally-authorized mission of meeting flood control, navigation, environment and recreation needs within the management of Lake Okeechobee

- Colonel Kelly's Plan "CC" wastes significantly more fresh water resources from Lake Okeechobee by discharging it to the West Coast of Florida as a direct result of concerns raised by Congressman Brian Mast, who continually attacks our communities to improve his home region

Perhaps most concerning to us and your leadership, Colonel Kelly's Plan "CC" ignores President Joe Biden's Executive Order regarding "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," signed on January 20, 2021:

"It is therefore the policy of my Administration that the Federal Government should pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. Affirmatively advancing equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity is the responsibility of the whole of our Government. Because advancing equity requires a systematic approach to embedding fairness in decision-making processes, executive departments and agencies (agencies) must recognize and work to redress inequities in their policies and programs that serve as barriers to equal opportunity."

As our rural Glades communities are home to many minority residents – along with other heavily minority cities such as West Palm Beach negatively impacted by Col. Kelly's Plan "CC" – we feel it is imperative that the leadership at the U.S. Army intervene to ensure fairness in the treatment of all our communities in the development of LOSOM. Our communities want and deserve access to water to support our jobs, our environment and other purposes, and we remain extremely concerned by Col. Kelly's seeming disregard for our economic and environmental well-being. Our rural communities deserve the same considerations as those more economically advantaged along the Florida coasts.

There is much being said nationally about "environmental justice," however, there's nothing just about a plan that even the Colonel himself has admitted will take away water for many purposes in South Florida. We hope you will listen to the concerns of our Glades communities, and we sincerely hope you can serve as an advocate in this process on our behalf.

Sincerely,



Joe Kyles
Mayor of South Bay



Steve Wilson
Mayor of Belle Glade



Keith Babb
Mayor of Pahokee

CC:

Brenda Mallory, Chair of White House Council on Environmental Quality
Congresswoman Frederica Wilson (FL-24)
Congressman Al Lawson (FL-5)