



May 27, 2021

Congressman Brian Mast
2182 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Mast,

We represent the lakeside cities of Okeechobee, Moore Haven, Clewiston, South Bay, Belle Glade and Pahokee. All of our communities depend on Lake Okeechobee for either municipal water or water supply for our local businesses. Over the past few years, we have watched with tremendous concern as you have politicized issues and advocated for policies that would harm our communities, all while ignoring real solutions to help Lake Okeechobee, the liquid heart of our state.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been seeking input in the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) process – a process we believe is necessary to reach a balanced schedule that creates certainty for all of the Lake’s purposes, including our communities’ need for water from Lake Okeechobee. Ensuring that water is available for our communities is critical to our public health and safety. Unfortunately, your antagonistic rhetoric against everyone living around Lake Okeechobee and the west coast has raised serious doubts about your leadership and sincerity. Time after time, you attack farmers, which are an integral part of our local economies. You have resorted to spreading misinformation about Lake Okeechobee’s water quality, including your recent publicity stunt at the Pahokee Marina attempting to suggest that the isolated water quality issues there are representative of water quality on the entire lake. You have also attempted to speak for us, but have not ever attempted in good faith to meet with us. When you attack farmers and our communities, you are doing nothing to help the lake. Instead, you delay and distract everyone from making progress on these issues.

Much to the concern of our communities, you previously advocated for a delay in northern storage and treatment projects, which are essential to stopping future Lake Okeechobee discharges and slowing the flow of water in Lake Okeechobee. Currently, more than 95 percent of the water and nutrients in Lake Okeechobee are coming from north of the lake. The northern storage and treatment projects enjoy broad support from a variety of key stakeholders including Governor Ron DeSantis, the Florida Legislature, the South Florida Water Management District,

scientific experts, and environmental groups. It is unconscionable that anyone, much less a U.S. Congressman who is a self-professed advocate for stopping Lake Okeechobee discharges, would attempt to delay this project.

We ask that you stop using Lake Okeechobee as a political prop for your news conferences and press releases. Come meet with us before attempting to speak for us and our lake. We want to see Lake Okeechobee's issues solved, its water cleaned and discharges stopped. Your antics and lack of leadership have no place in this process.

Sincerely,



Dowling Watford
Mayor, City of Okeechobee



Bret Whidden
Mayor, City of Moore Haven



Kristine Petersen
Mayor, City of Clewiston



Joe Kyles
Mayor, City of South Bay



Steve Wilson
Mayor, City of Belle Glade



Keith Babb
Mayor, City of Pahokee

CC: Major General Scott Spellmon
Colonel Andrew Kelly