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July 12th, 2021
COL Andrew Kelly
US Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District
701 San Marco Blvd
Jacksonville, FL 32207

Re: LOSOM Plan Support

COL Kelly,

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on our preferred plan to be used to create balance in the Lake Okeechobee System Operations Manual (LOSOM). Our support for Plan CC was contingent on strong limitations of flows to the Caloosahatchee measured at S-79. Since those changes have not yet been made, and since none of the 6 plans were truly created to represent the interests of the Caloosahatchee, it is difficult to suggest any single plan without understanding how that plan can be optimized. All of the Plans have shortcomings that need to be addressed to remove the negative impacts to the Caloosahatchee Estuary. We believe that Plans EE1, BB and CC all have potential benefits if these shortcomings can be addressed.

Plan EE1 provides significant benefit for the Caloosahatchee Estuary in reducing the highest volume discharges by 50%. Similarly, Plan BB provides benefits in the 2,600 – 6,500 cfs range. We strongly support incorporating the balance of flood control discharges that Plans EE1 and BB provide into the optimization process. Both however, have shortcomings in providing adequate flow in the dry season and both have more significant impacts that are detrimental to the ecology of Lake Okeechobee, which is also of importance to my constituents.

Plan CC seems to have benefits to multiple areas of the system, including for the Caloosahatchee Estuary in low and optimal flows and better performance for Lake Okeechobee than Plans BB and EE1. However, the overall discharge volume to the Caloosahatchee Estuary and the increased burden of becoming the only outlet for Lake Okeechobee discharges in the operational band of the Lake schedule could cause significant long-term damage. If Plan CC were to be selected, this issue must be addressed. This would include capping flows to the Caloosahatchee in Zone D at 2,100 cfs measured at S-79. Both of those conditions are “must haves” for our estuaries.

Plan SR3.5 that was released last Thursday evening had significant potential upside to the Caloosahatchee Estuary, however it is not currently a model we are being asked to select from. Additionally, my understanding is that is predicated on CC Without the described modifications above.

It is important that in Iteration 3 and in the final drafting of LOSOM, the Army Corps shifts from measuring flows at S-77 to measuring flows at S-79. This better aligns with the RECOVER Performance Measures and provides transparency for my constituents. We cannot walk away from this process without that significant piece of long overdue system equity.

Finally, I would like to commend you Colonel for your years of service to our nation, for your team’s hard work on this monumental task and to the legacy you will undoubtedly leave behind.

Sincerely,



Byron Donalds
Member of Congress