

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 18, 2021

Colonel Andrew Kelly
Commander and District Engineer
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District
701 San Marco Blvd
Jacksonville, FL 32207

Dear Colonel Kelly,

We appreciate your leadership as a new Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) for Lake Okeechobee is developed. We share your commitment to ensuring human safety and flood protection for South Florida, as well as ensuring the needs of all Floridians connected to the Lake Okeechobee system can continue to be met. As you know, the lake is authorized to be managed – exclusively – for five explicit purposes. These are, Flood Control; Water Supply; Navigation; Enhancement of Fish and Wildlife; and Recreation.

To date, Congress has fully funded the Herbert Hoover Dike Repair project by providing \$1.8 billion, which will give the Corps' greater flexibility in managing the lake's levels while also balancing all of the water needs of users throughout the system. This is a significant investment of taxpayer dollars, which is why we expect any plan chosen by the Corps will take advantage of the additional capacity provided once the dike is completely fortified.

In the South Florida Region, municipalities, their residents, and businesses depend on a healthy and resilient Lake Okeechobee for many uses. Boaters, anglers and eco-tourists depend on the lake's water for recreation, while farmers and other businesses need the lake's water to operate. More than 6 million people in South Florida depend on the lake as a direct source for drinking water, or to replenish municipal wellfields. Ensuring robust water supply by taking advantage of added Lake capacity is also critical to the health of the Everglades and critically important for managing salinity in coastal estuaries. We hope you will take all of these important uses into consideration as a new lake schedule is developed.

Like many of the stakeholders engaging in the development of LOSOM, many of the cities and counties in our districts have retained qualified expert consultants, including hydrologists and modeling experts to advise on the technical aspects of LOSOM planning. In accordance with the law, we expect the input provided by these lakeside communities will be given equal consideration and not excluded from the process as the schedule is developed.

Developing a balanced Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule that meets all of the Lake's project purposes equally is extremely important to Florida's economy and the future of our state. We urge you to ensure a schedule is adopted that will provide the greatest benefits to the greatest number of Floridians.

Sincerely,



W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress



Mario Díaz-Balart
Member of Congress



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress



Daniel Webster
Member of Congress



Byron Donalds
Member of Congress