

Merritt Matheson  
Commissioner  
City of Stuart  
121 SW Flagler Ave  
Commission Meeting  
1/13/20 5:30pm

Discussion and deliberation regarding responsive action to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (ACOE) proposed 2020 Lake Okeechobee dry season management plan.

Background: For nearly a century Stuart residents have suffered destructive impacts resulting from the creation of the St. Lucie Canal (construction 1916-1924). This manmade canal was constructed with the purpose of managing flood control in Lake Okeechobee. The detrimental impacts of discharges from the canal affect nearly every aspect of the quality of life of Stuart residents, including residents' health and safety in the recent decade.

"Nine of the last eleven (now 12) years in the name of flood control, water has been discharged out of Lake Okeechobee to Florida's East and West Coast," Congressman Brian Mast stated during congressional testimony with the ACOE in July 2019 in Washington. During this session Congressman Mast also asked the ACOE if they had transferred "toxic" water into the St. Lucie and through the St. Lucie Canal. The straightforward answer the ACOE representative gave was, "Yes."

With proper management during the dry season, flood control can be achieved without risking the health and human safety of Stuart residents. This was proven in 2019 when the ACOE exercised its operational flexibility in a "common sense" manner. By continuing discharges to the natural areas needing water during the dry season, Lake Okeechobee can enter the wet season with enough storage capacity to prevent "toxic" discharges. "In addition to maintaining course and lowering the lake for ecological reasons, we believed releasing more water then, when algae was absent from the lake, would reduce the risk of another season of significant blue-green algae issues in the estuaries. We were able to absorb heavy rains during the month of August that caused the lake stage to rise two feet," stated Colonel Andrew Kelly, Commander and District Engineer of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District (TC Palm).

The summer of 2019 was one of the best summers in recent years for Stuart residents and the estuary. Yet, after a summer with no “toxic” discharges, the ACOE plans to once again manage Lake Okeechobee at a higher level during the dry season, effectively removing the critical storage capacity for flood control during the wet season.

The ACOE’s “common sense” management prioritizing flood control, health and human safety, and ecology was not a proper balance for all stakeholders. US Sugar sued the ACOE for exercising its operational flexibility in 2019. The case was dismissed. The actions may have worked though. “US Sugar has no intention of appealing this ruling, because we accomplished what we set out to do: rein in the Army Corps’ rogue operations outside the existing, publicly approved Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule.” (US Sugar representatives, *Florida Politics*)

The “toxic” discharges from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie River have overarching impacts on ecology, economy, tourism, pets, real estate, quality of life, and--above all--the health and human safety of Stuart residents. Responsive action must be considered for the ACOE’s proposed 2020 dry season management plan which will greatly increase the likelihood of “toxic” discharges. Time is critical while we are in the dry season. Stuart’s top priority must be the health and safety of our residents. Stuart deserves a repeat of the operational success of 2019 not another toxic 2018.

Sources:

US Representative Brian Mast questions ACOE:

<https://www.tcpalm.com/videos/news/local/indian-river-lagoon/politics/2019/07/12/mast-army-corps-answers-toxic-water-lake-okeechobee/1716487001/>

Army Corps Col. Andrew Kelly: A successful year for Lake Okeechobee | OpinionTC Palm:

<https://www.tcpalm.com/story/opinion/contributors/2019/12/03/army-corps-col-kelly-successful-year-lake-okeechobee-opinion/4331854002/>

Why the Army Corps is changing its dry-season approach for Lake Okeechobee | Opinion TC Palm:

<https://www.tcpalm.com/story/opinion/contributors/2019/12/20/col-kelly-army-corps-changing-its-approach-lake-okeechobee/2713772001/>

U.S. Sugar won't appeal court ruling and trusts Army Corps won't go 'rogue' with discharge schedule: Florida Politics

<https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2ffloridapolitics.com%2farchives%2f314259-u-s-sugar-wont-appear-court-ruling-and-trusts-army-corps-wont-go-rogue-with-discharge-schedule&c=E,1,J9J7gZ9iRS-Hrr1AsCvd9ost2sQ1LKshy843HyDguyxnxZ5iYFSxm1haVr5hVfAqcIsPUBxPHiYinG8RaZEUewMc-CfFnC1n8YqFYxxGCdAIC9HDabDBwxAXuOC&typo=1>

Army Corps' plan for Lake Okeechobee might not prevent discharges if 2020 is like 2019: TC Palm

<https://www.tcpalm.com/story/news/local/indian-river-lagoon/health/2019/12/23/army-corps-plan-lake-o-wont-stop-summer-discharges-st-lucie-river/2732264001/>