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just the FACTS

This fact sheet is provided as a reference to encourage a greater understanding of the various issues related to managing water in South Florida.

MEDIA QUESTIONS

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LAKE OKEECHOBEE PROGRAM

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Muck Removal in Lake Okeechobee

Current drought conditions have presented a rare opportunity for habitat restoration along the shoreline of Lake Okeechobee. Low water levels have exposed large areas of lake bed where muck soils have accumulated. Emergency funds were released for extensive muck removal at six sites around the lake.

Background

- Lake Okeechobee's lakebed has accumulated 1-2 feet of muck soil, a type of soil containing highly decomposed organic material. This muck layer impairs growth of aquatic plants and increases water turbidity.
- Underwater muck removal is possible, but it is done easier and faster on dry ground. Low lake levels provide this opportunity.
- Lake Okeechobee's level on May 22 is 9.23 NGVD. Rainfall across the District has averaged just 41 inches in the past 12 months, more than 10 inches below the annual average.
- Drought conditions continue throughout most of South Florida, and emergency water restrictions remain in effect.
- Shoreline areas are vital for vegetation growth and wildlife habitat. Muck removal significantly benefits **habitat restoration** in the lake by:
 - Allowing native plants to grow and thrive on the lake's sandy bottom, without muck covering them (spike rush, bulrush)
 - Enhancing fish habitat through healthy vegetation
 - Improving water clarity
 - Lowering phosphorus content. Approximately 280 metric tons will be removed with this effort.
- When rains return, muck removal can continue until the lake rises to 10.5 feet NGVD.
- Total cost for muck removal at six sites is \$11.4 million.
- Environmental benefits of muck removal are long-lasting.

At Fisheating Bay

- Fisheating Bay is located on the lake's west side, approximately 15 miles north of Moore Haven.
- Muck removal will take off the top 1-1½ feet of lakebed to expose the sandy bottom. Work at this site will cover approximately 800 acres.
- Volume of muck removal at this site = 500,000 cubic yards
 - Will take 2 ½ to 3 months to complete
 - Total dump truck loads = 27,778 (18 cubic yards per truck)
- The material will be stored temporarily along the nearby Harney Pond canal and encircled by a berm. Final disposal will be coordinated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and regional landowners, who have expressed interest in applying the muck to their properties.
- Fisheating Bay project cost is \$1,016,000.



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