



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Michael L. Connor
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
Department of the Army
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Subject: Submission of Final Section 203 Feasibility Study for North of Lake Okeechobee Storage Reservoir (Component A) of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP)

Dear Secretary Connor:

It is with great pleasure that the South Florida Water Management District (District) submits the Final Section 203 Feasibility Study (Study) for North of Lake Okeechobee Storage Reservoir (Component A) for above ground storage located north of Lake Okeechobee for your review, approval and transmittal to Congress for consideration in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2024. This Study is submitted in accordance with the provisions of Section 203 of WRDA of 1986, as amended.

Lake Okeechobee is the liquid heart of America's Everglades and an important natural resource to the people of Florida. As I write this letter, Lake Okeechobee water levels are high, and the lake is harmfully discharging excess water to reduce the lake's level. High lake levels significantly harm the lake's ecology, and harmful discharges to lower Lake Okeechobee also damage the delicate estuarine ecosystems of the Caloosahatchee Estuary, St. Lucie Estuary, and Lake Worth Lagoon. Addressing high water levels in Lake Okeechobee and the subsequent harmful Lake Okeechobee discharges to the coastal estuaries depends largely on building out the northern and southern storage envisioned in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP).

We were excited to join you, partners and stakeholders to celebrate the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) groundbreaking of the EAA Reservoir last year, and we look forward to this important project coming to life. The EAA Reservoir is capable of moving, on average, almost a foot of water south from Lake Okeechobee to lower lake levels, reduce the risk of harmful estuary discharges, and nourish the Everglades. **With southern storage underway, the next step is to move forward with constructing above and below ground storage north of Lake Okeechobee.** With northern storage, an additional foot of Lake Okeechobee can be stored to improve the lake's levels and further reduce the risk of harmful estuary discharges. In addition, creating more water storage provides improved water supply reliability for the region's water users.

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The Study submitted to you is for the above ground storage reservoir envisioned by Component A of the CERP Yellow Book, capable of capturing 200,000 acre-feet of water and lowering the lake by almost half a foot. With technical and federal activity assistance provided by the USACE Jacksonville District (SAJ), the Study is compliant with federal policy and technically compliant with pertinent Engineering regulations.

The District specifically appreciates the excellent work of SAJ for developing the Environmental Impact Statement on the Study as required under the National Environmental Policy Act including Section 7 consultation, Section 106 consultation, Government to Government coordination, performing a Screening Level Life Safety Risk Assessment and a certified cost estimate from the USACE center of expertise in USACE Walla Walla District.

The Feasibility Study for North of Lake Okeechobee Storage Reservoir (Component A) is a testament to what our partnership between the District and USACE can achieve. We appreciate all the USACE's work to advance Everglades restoration projects and look forward to advancing the CERP Yellow Book Component A for submission to Congress for authorization in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2024 as a part of CERP.

With the North of Lake Okeechobee Storage Reservoir (A), we have the opportunity to make a tangible difference for Lake Okeechobee, the Greater Everglades Ecosystem and the people of Florida. We thank you for your support, and we are proud to partner with the USACE to restore America's Everglades.

Sincerely,



Drew Bartlett
Executive Director