

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jason Engle, Chief, Engineering Division (USACE)
FROM: John Mitnik, Chief District Engineer (SFWMD)
DATE: December 18, 2025
SUBJECT: System Operational Position Statement December 16, 2025 to January 5, 2026

This Position Statement is to provide operational input for the three-week period from December 16, 2025 to January 5, 2026 based on system conditions and data observed during the previous Monday to Sunday 7-day period.

Current climate conditions: District December rainfall to date is below normal (77% normal). The rainfall forecast (issued December 17) calls for much below normal rainfall for the coming 7-day period and the following one.

Climate and weather forecasts: The most recent CPC precipitation outlook for Dec 2025 is increased chances (40-50%) of below Normal rainfall for the entire District. La Niña conditions are present and favored to continue into the Northern Hemisphere winter, with a transition to ENSO-neutral most likely in Jan - Mar 2026. The 3-month windows from Dec 2025 – Feb 2026 to Feb 2026 – Apr 2026 indicate slightly increased chances (30-40%) of below normal rainfall for the entire District. The 3-month window Mar 2026 – May 2026 shows equal chances of below, normal and above normal rainfall (EC) for the entire District. The 3-month windows from Apr 2026 – Jun 2026 to Jun 2026 – Aug 2026 indicate slightly increased chances (30-40%) of above Normal rainfall for the state of Florida. The outlooks for the 3-month windows from Jul 2026 – Sep 2026 to Nov 2026 – Jan 2027 signal equal chances of below, normal and above normal rainfall (EC) for south Florida.

Hydrologic and tropical outlooks: Current climatological conditions are Normal. Current hydrological conditions are Normal. The lake stage is projected to remain in Zone D3 for the next 2 months.

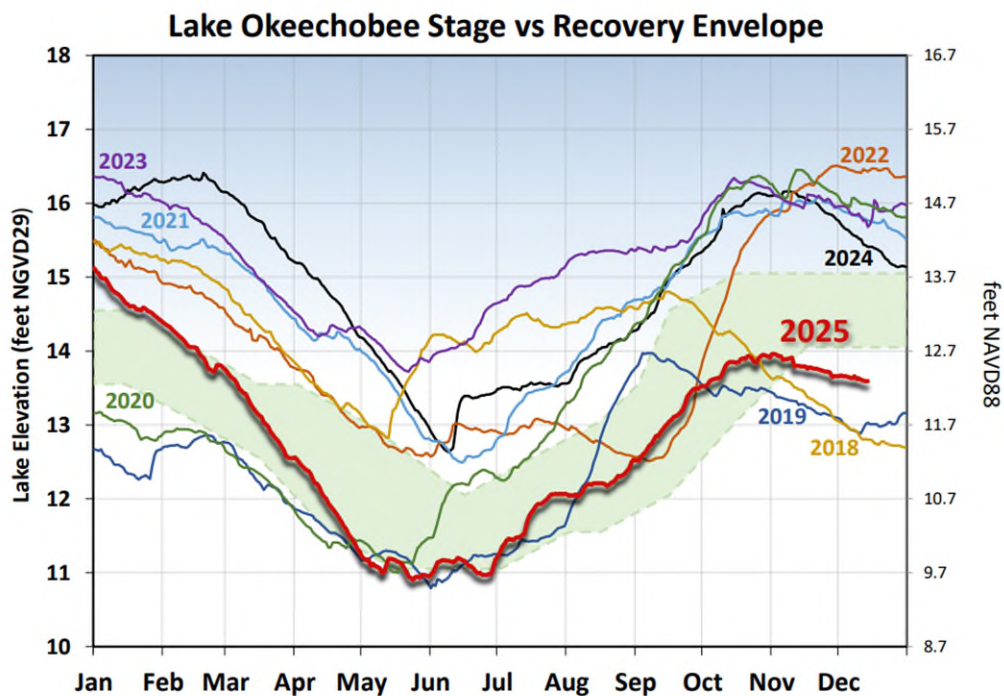
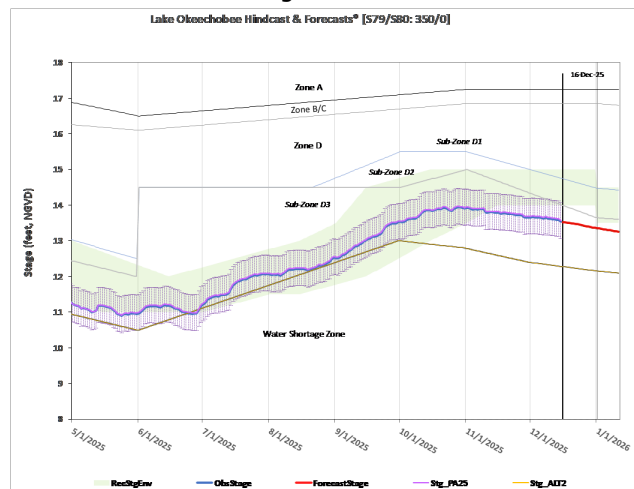
Water-supply conditions: The Lake Okeechobee seasonal net inflow outlook is Extremely Dry and at High risk for water supply. The multi-seasonal net inflow outlook is Normal and at Moderate risk for water supply.

Estuary conditions: For the 7-day periods, December 8 to December 14, 2025, total inflow to the Caloosahatchee Estuary averaged approximately 550 cfs with 150 cfs coming from Lake Okeechobee through S-77. The mean salinities were in the optimal range (0-10) for tape grass at S-79 and Val I-75 and in the stressed range (10-15) at Ft. Myers. Salinities were in the optimal range (10-25) for adult eastern oysters at Cape Coral, and in the upper stressed range (>25) at Sanibel and Shell Point. Total discharge to the St. Lucie Estuary was about 200 cfs with no flow coming from Lake Okeechobee and the C-44/C-23/C-24 Basins and about 50 cfs coming from Ten Mile Creek and about 150 cfs coming from the Tidal Basin. The average salinity in the middle estuary was within the optimal range (10-25) for adult eastern oysters.

Lake Okeechobee stage and ecological conditions:

On December 14 the daily average Lake Okeechobee stage was 12.28 feet NAVD88 (13.59 feet NGVD29), which placed it within the lower portion of Zone D (Zone D3 of the PA25 simulation) of the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM). Lake stage decreased by 0.04 feet over the preceding 7-day period. La Niña conditions are present and favored to persist for the next couple of months. The District will continue to monitor conditions in the estuaries, as well as the systemwide conditions. With the initiation of the dry season, Normal Lake Operations continue pursuant to the considerations in LOSOM as informed by PA25. It is recommended that flow targets for the Caloosahatchee Estuary should rely on basin flows to ensure the delivery of the Minimum Flow and Level, but use Lake Okeechobee flows from S-77 to ensure S-79 flows remain above a targeted steady release of 350 cfs; flow targets for the St. Lucie Estuary and Lake Worth Lagoon should remain at 0 cfs consistent with Normal Operations within Zone D. The District will continue to monitor salinity conditions in the estuaries and water supply conditions within the Lake Okeechobee Service Area as well as the Lower East Coast. The USACE typically implements the releases to the estuaries over a 7-day period starting on Saturday and ending on Friday.

Forecast Modeling Based on PA25 Simulation



The current and seven prior years' annual stage hydrographs for Lake Okeechobee in comparison to the recovery envelope (light green). A shift from the normal ecological envelope to the recovery envelope occurred because the 30-day minimum lake stage (elevations exposed for at least 30 days, nonconsecutively) in the June 1 – July 31, 2023 window was >11.75 feet NAVD88 (13 feet NGVD29).

Navigation and recreation conditions: Currently, there are no planned deviation or declared water shortage impacting navigation or lockages.

STOF water supply conditions: Current Lake Okeechobee stage is sufficiently high that water supply deliveries to the Seminole Tribe of Florida (STOF) Brighton Reservation, if needed, will not be impacted. When Lake Okeechobee stage recedes below 8.75 feet NAVD88 (10 feet NGVD29) and 6.75 feet NAVD88 (8 feet NGVD29), water supply delivery is not achievable via Pump Station G-207 on the Harney Pond Canal and Pump Station G-208 on the Indian Prairie Canal, respectively, as the respective canals become disconnected from Lake Okeechobee.

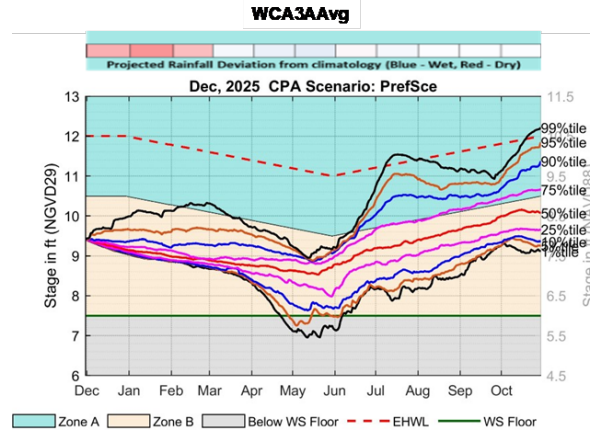
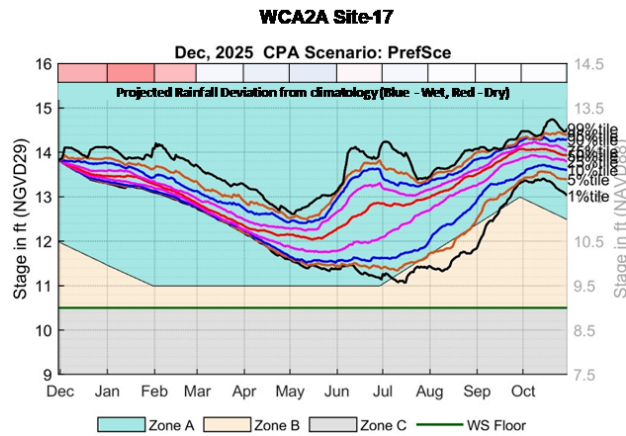
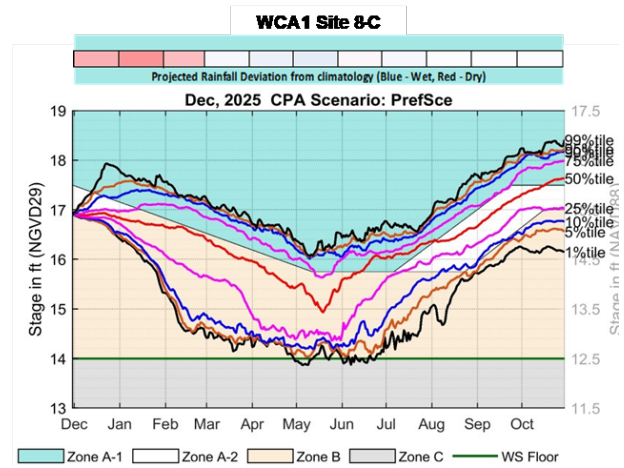
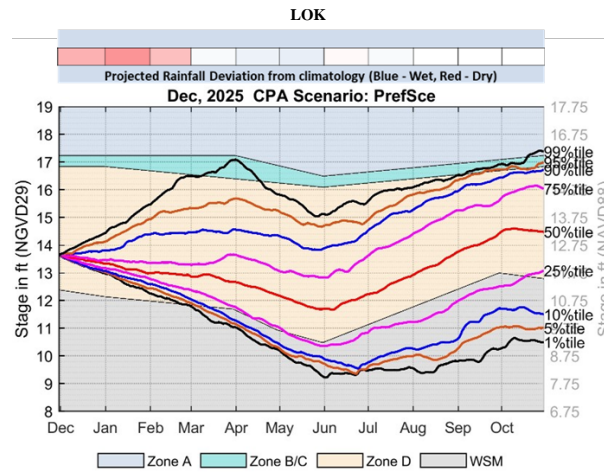
Algal Bloom conditions: The Fish and Wildlife Research Institute reported on December 12, 2025, that *Karenia brevis*, the Florida red tide dinoflagellate, was not observed in any samples collected within the District region. In the most recent non-obscured satellite image from December 12, 2025, NOAA's Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring System suggests continued moderate cyanobacteria potential in the southern and western regions of the lake.

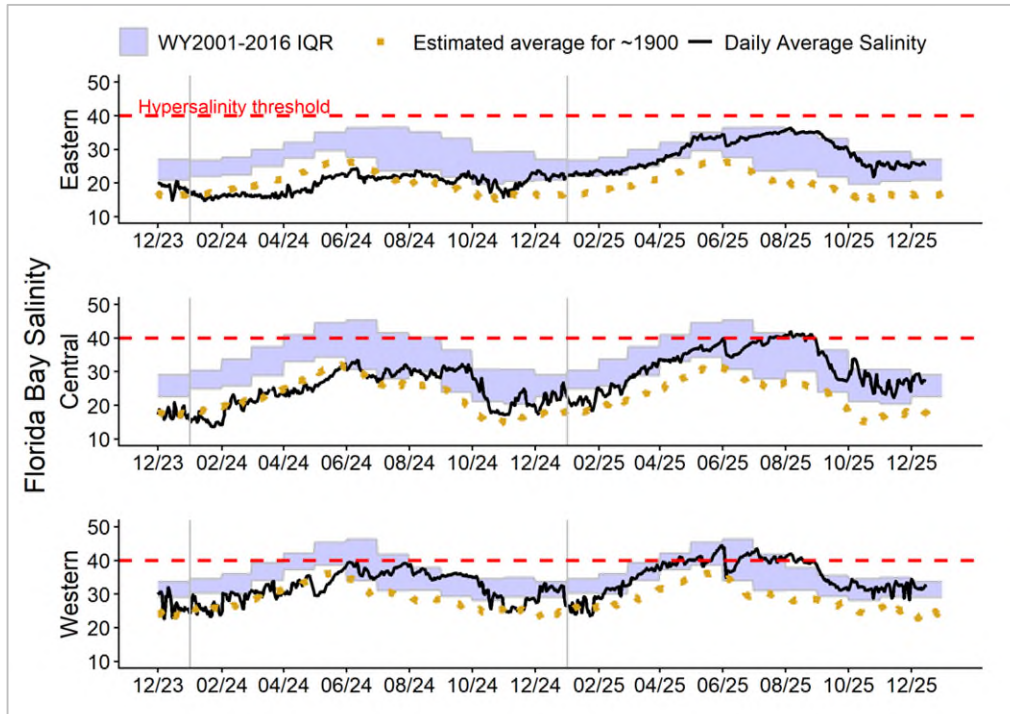
STA conditions: In STA-1E, Central Flow-way is offline for construction activities. An operational restriction is in place in the Western Flow-way for post-construction vegetation grow-in. Online treatment cells are at or slightly above target stage. In STA-1W, Eastern Flow-way is offline for vegetation management activities. Most treatment cells are at target stage. Vegetation in the Western and Eastern Flow-ways is highly stressed. The 365-day PLRs for the Eastern and Western Flow-ways are below 1.0 g/m²/year. The 365-day PLR for the Northern Flow-way is high (≥ 1.0 g/m²/yr). In STA-2, operational restrictions are in place in Flow-ways 2, 3, and 4 for vegetation management activities. Treatment cells are at target stage. The 365-day PLRs for all Flow-ways are below 1.0 g/m²/yr. In STA-3/4, an operational restriction is in place in the Eastern Flow-way for vegetation management activities. Treatment cells are slightly above target stage. Vegetation in the Central Flow-way is highly stressed. The 365-day PLR for the Eastern, Central, and Western Flow-ways are below 1.0 g/m²/yr. For the current operational period, USACE is not requesting flows south from Lake Okeechobee towards the WCAs. The District will continue to work with the USACE to manage Lake Okeechobee levels in an effort to curtail harmful discharges over this year. To help with this objective the District will move as much water south through the Stormwater Treatment Areas as possible under the current permits as regional conditions allow.

WCA conditions: On December 14 the daily average stage in WCA-1 was at 15.20 feet NAVD88 (16.80 feet NGVD29), in Zone B and 0.55 feet below regulation schedule. The daily average stage in WCA-2A was at 12.10 feet NAVD88 (13.61 feet NGVD29), in Zone A and 1.84 feet above regulation schedule. The daily average stage in WCA-3A was at 7.83 feet NAVD88 (9.35 feet NGVD29), in Zone B and 1.15 feet below regulation schedule. Over the 7-day period, December 8 to December 14, 2025, no regulatory releases were sent from Lake Okeechobee south to the STAs. No Lake regulatory releases reached the Lake Worth Lagoon through the C-51 canal during this period.

ENP conditions: Releases from WCA-3A to the ENP continue through the S-12D and S333 structures. Hydrologic connectivity has been declining throughout the dry season across the major sloughs of the ENP, but it remains intact in Shark River and Taylor Slough. The SFWDAT model output illustrates a slow recession in WCA-1 over the last two months, with conditions driest in the north. The southern half of WCA-2A remains deep for this time of year. Drier-than-normal conditions continue to expand across much WCA-3A. Depths across WCA-3A and -3B remain low for this time of year. Stages decreased in Taylor Slough over the past week, and are now below the recent average. Salinity decreased on average in Florida Bay compared to last week and remains above the estimated average for 1900 and is just below the WY2001-2016 Interquartile Range (IQR) 75th percentile in the eastern and central regions of the bay, and closer to the 50th percentile in the western region. The Tamiami Trail Flow Formula (TTFF) recommends 820 cfs of daily target releases from WCA-3A to ENP. The District recommends continuing with the current operations for the releases from WCA-3A in accordance with the Combined Operating Plan.

December 2025 Conditional Position Analysis (CPA) results for Lake Okeechobee, WCA-1, WCA-2A and WCA-3A under LOSOM Recovery Operations.





Eastern (top panel), Central (middle panel) and Western (bottom panel) Florida Bay daily average salinities with WY2001-2016 interquartile (25-75 percentile) ranges (IQR) and estimated historical daily average salinities. The hypersalinity threshold indicates the level at which salinities start to become harmful to seagrass.