

MEMORANDUM

TO: Laureen Borochaner, Chief, Engineering Division (USACE)
FROM: John Mitnik, Chief District Engineer (SFWMD)
Akin Owosina, Chief, Hydrology & Hydraulics Bureau (SFWMD)
DATE: March 17, 2022
SUBJECT: Operational Position Statement for March 15, 2022 to March 21, 2022

This Position Statement is to provide operational recommendations for the one-week period from for March 15, 2022 to March 21, 2022 based on system conditions and data observed during the previous Monday to Sunday 7-day period. On March 14, Lake Okeechobee stage was 14.15 feet NGVD, which places it within the Low Sub-band of the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS). Lake stage decreased by 0.20 feet during the preceding 7 days.

District March to date rainfall is near normal (~100% of normal). Rainfall forecast (issued March 16) predicts near to below-normal rainfall for the coming 7-day period. The following 7-day period is forecasted to have near to above-normal rainfall.

Precipitation Outlook: The most recent CPC precipitation outlooks for South Florida for March 2022 is for substantially increased chances of below-normal rainfall for most of the District area, with the Upper East Coast showing increased chances of below-normal rainfall. The outlook for the 3-month window of Mar – May indicates slightly increased chances of below normal rainfall. The outlook for the 3-month window Apr – Jun is for increased chances of below-normal rainfall. The outlook turns to equal chances of below, normal and above-normal rainfall for the 3-month windows spanning from May-Jul to Oct-Dec.

2008 LORS Release Guidance (Part C): With Lake Okeechobee stage within the Low Sub-band and the Tributary Hydrologic Conditions in the dry category, Part C of the 2008 LORS suggests “No releases to the WCAs”.

Over the 7-day period from March 7, 2022 to March 13, 2022, deliveries from Lake Okeechobee were 2,100 acre-feet to STA-2 and 3,000 acre-feet to A1FEB. No Lake regulatory releases reached the Lake Worth Lagoon through the C-51 canal. Stage in WCA-1 is above regulation schedule in Zone A1, stage in WCA-2A is above regulation schedule, and WCA-3A stage is below schedule (Zone B). For the coming operational period, the USACE is not requesting regulatory releases be sent south from Lake Okeechobee towards the WCAs.

2008 LORS Release Guidance (Part D): With Lake Okeechobee stage in the Low Sub-band and the Tributary Hydrologic Conditions in the dry category, Part D of the 2008 LORS suggests “S-79 Up to 450 cfs and S-80 Up to 200 cfs”.

For the 7-day period March 7, 2022 to March 13, 2022, total discharge to the St. Lucie Estuary was about 600 cfs with no flows coming from Lake Okeechobee. The 7-day average salinity at the US1 Bridge is in the good range for adult oysters. Total inflow to the Caloosahatchee Estuary averaged approximately 2,050 cfs over the past week with about 1,450 cfs coming from Lake Okeechobee. Salinity conditions are in the good range for Tape Grass at Val I-75 and at Ft. Myers. Salinity conditions for adult eastern oysters are in the good range at Shell Point and Cape Coral and in the fair range at Sanibel.

The District will continue to work with the USACE to manage Lake Okeechobee levels in an effort to curtail harmful discharges over this year. Generally speaking, the District and Corps should strive to move as much water out of the lake without harming natural resources and other critical resources. At this time, this involves releases that maintain appropriate salinity in the estuaries and ensuring the Stormwater Treatment Areas don’t sustain long term damage from extended high-volume flows. Current District operational objectives are to continue to move water south from Lake Okeechobee for delivery to the Everglades where opportunities exist.

The District recommends USACE continue lake discharges to the Caloosahatchee Estuary in a pulse release fashion, measured at S-79, at a non-damaging level of 2,000 cfs (7-day average), while continuing to monitor estuary conditions and make any adjustments as necessary. This decision should be reassessed as needed based on lake and estuarine conditions. The USACE typically implements the releases to the estuaries over a 7-day period starting on Saturday and ending on Friday.