MEMORANDUM

TO: Jason Engle, Chief, Engineering Division (USACE)

FROM: John Mitnik, Chief District Engineer (SFWMD)

DATE: September 25, 2025

SUBJECT: System Operational Position Statement September 23, 2025 to September 29, 2025

This Position Statement is to provide operational input for the one-week period from September 23, 2025 to September 29, 2025 based on system conditions and data observed during the previous Monday to Sunday 7-day period.

Current climate conditions: District September rainfall to date is above normal (116% normal). The rainfall forecast (issued September 24) calls for below normal rainfall for the coming 7-day period and above normal for the following period.

Climate and weather forecasts: The most recent CPC precipitation outlook for Oct 2025 is increased chance (40-50%) in the likelihood of above normal rainfall for South Florida. A transition from ENSO-neutral to La Niña is likely in the next couple of months, with a 71% chance of La Niña during October - December 2025. Thereafter, La Niña is favored but chances decrease to 54% in December 2025 - February 2026. The 3-month window of Oct 2025 – Dec 2025 indicates increased chances (40-50%) of above Normal rainfall for the Lake Okeechobee and south, and slightly increased chances (33-40%) of above Normal rainfall for the remainder of the District. The transition into the 2025 – 2026 Dry Season goes through the 3-month window of Nov 2025 – Jan 2026 showing equal chances of below, normal and above normal rainfall (EC) for the entire District. The outlooks for the 3-month windows from Dec 2025 – Feb 2026 to Feb 2026 – Apr 2026 indicate increased chances (40-50%) 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 transition into the 2026 wet season shows slightly increased chances (30-40%) of above normal rainfall for the state of Florida.

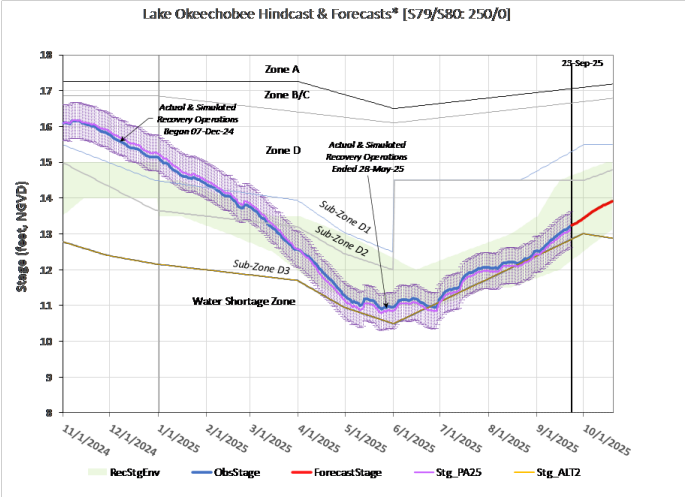
Hydrologic and tropical outlooks: Current climatological conditions are Normal. Current hydrological conditions are Wet. The lake stage is projected to remain in Zone D3 for the next 2 months.

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

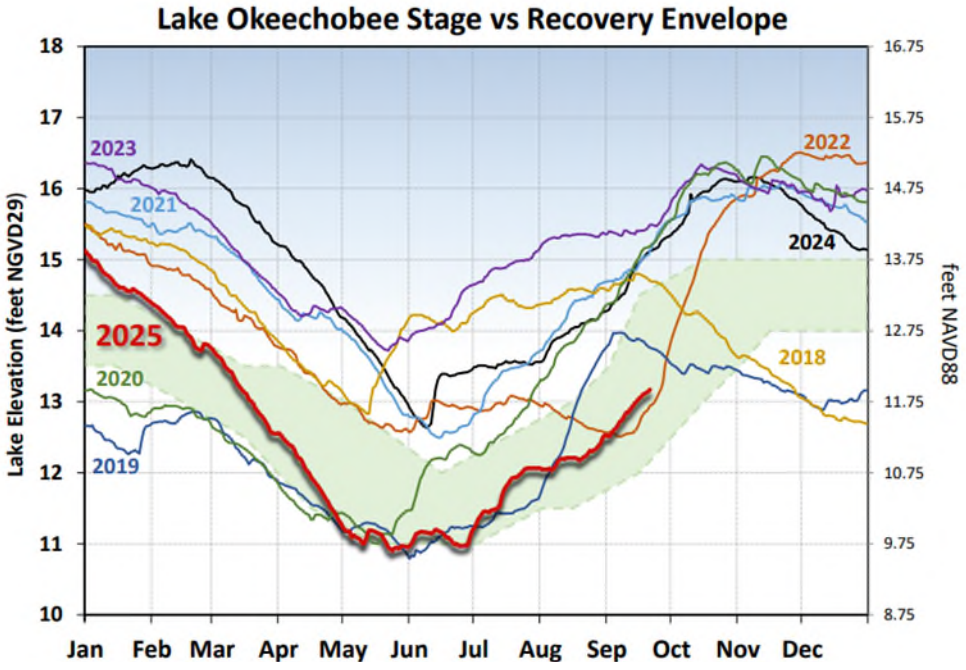
Estuary conditions: For the 7-day period, September 15 to 21, 2025, total inflow to the Caloosahatchee Estuary averaged approximately 7,350 cfs with no flow coming from Lake Okeechobee through S-77. The mean salinities were in the optimal range (0-10) for tape grass in the upper estuary. Salinities were in the optimal range (10-25) for adult eastern oysters at Shell Point and in the upper stressed range (>25) at Sanibel, and in the damaging range (<5) at Cape Coral. Total discharge to the St. Lucie Estuary was about 1,050 cfs with no flow coming from Lake Okeechobee and the C-44 Basin, about 150 cfs coming from the C-23 Basin, about 350 cfs coming from the C-24 Basin, about 100 cfs coming from Ten Mile Creek, and about 500 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:

Forecast Modeling Based on PA25 Simulation



On September 21 the daily average Lake Okeechobee stage was 11.87 feet NAVD88 (13.18 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 increased by 0.18 feet over the preceding 7-day period. A transition from ENSO-neutral to La Niña is likely in the next couple of months. The District will continue to monitor conditions in the estuaries, as well as the systemwide conditions, as the wet season progresses. With the initiation of the wet season, Normal Lake Operations have resumed pursuant to the considerations in LOSOM as informed by PA25. To maintain favorable salinity levels in the estuaries and continue to conserve water, it is recommended that flow targets for the Caloosahatchee Estuary should rely on rainy season basin flows which are expected to occur over the next week 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 250 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 to assess whether further reductions are warranted in future operational recommendations. The USACE typically implements the releases to the estuaries over a 7-day period starting on Saturday and ending on Friday.



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.

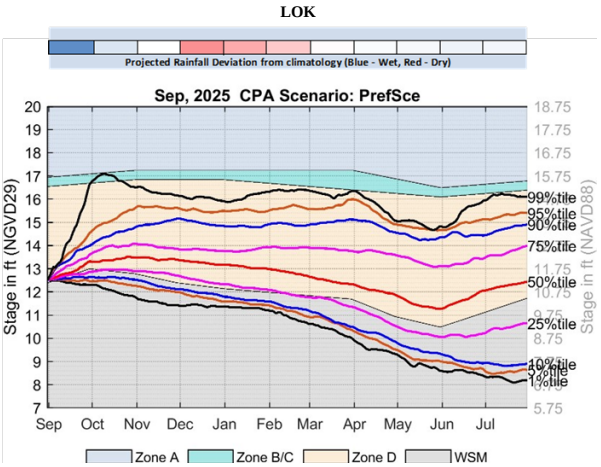
Algal Bloom conditions: The Fish and Wildlife Research Institute reported on September 19, 2025, that *Karenia brevis*, the Florida red tide dinoflagellate, was not observed at bloom concentrations in any samples collected within the District region. In the most recent non-obscured satellite image from September 21, 2025, NOAA's Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring System suggests moderate cyanobacteria potential along much of the western side of the lake.

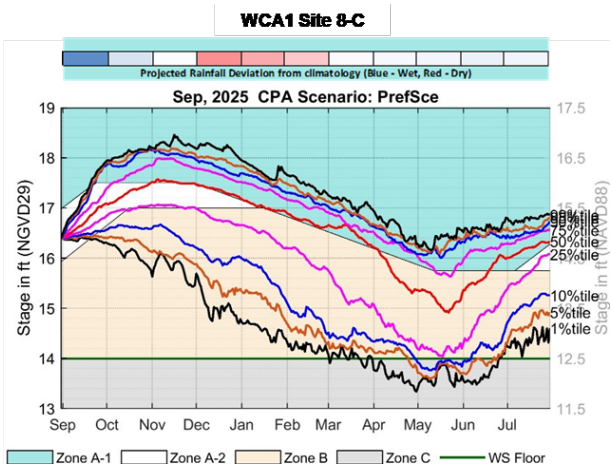
STA conditions: In STA-1E, Central Flow-way is offline for construction activities. An operational restriction is in place in the Western Flow-way for post-construction vegetation grow-in. Online SAV treatment cells are at target stage, EAV cells are slightly above target stage. In STA-1W, Eastern Flow-way is online with restrictions for G-253 structure replacements. 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 Northern Flow-ways are below 1.0 $g/m^2/yr$. The 365-day PLR for the Western Flow-way is high (≥ 1.0 $g/m^2/yr$). In STA-2, operational restriction is in place in Flow-way 3 for post-drawdown vegetation grow-in and in Flow-ways 2 and 4 for vegetation management activities. Treatment cells are above target stage. The 365-day PLRs for all flow-ways are below 1.0 $g/m^2/yr$. In STA-3/4, Eastern Flow-way is under limitations for post-drawdown vegetation grow-in. Treatment cells are above target stage, vegetation in the Central flow-ways is highly stressed, and the 365-day PLRs for the Eastern, Central and Western Flow-ways are below 1.0 $g/m^2/yr$. 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.

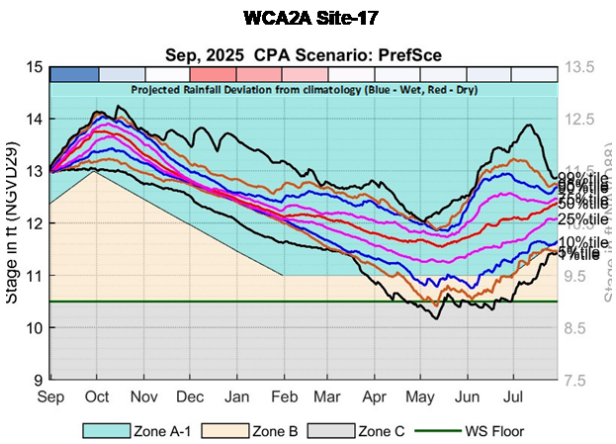
WCA conditions: On September 21 the daily average stage in WCA-1 was at 15.26 feet NAVD88 (16.86 feet NGVD29), in Zone A2 and 0.57 feet below regulation schedule. The daily average stage in WCA-2A was at 12.27 feet NAVD88 (13.78 feet NGVD29), in Zone A and 0.98 feet above regulation schedule. The daily average stage in WCA-3A was at 7.95 feet NAVD88 (9.47 feet NGVD29), in Zone B and 0.76 feet below regulation schedule. Over the 7-day period, September 15 to 21, 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.

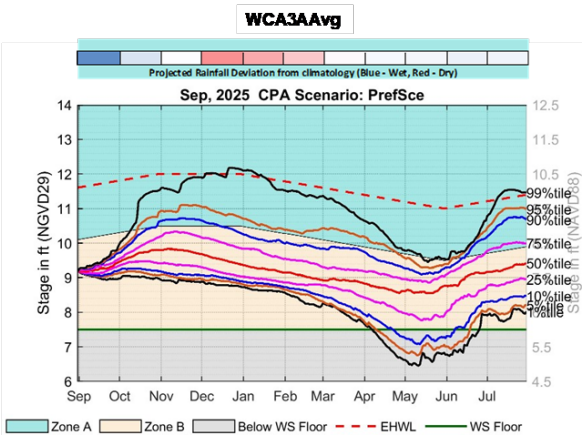
ENP conditions: Releases from WCA-3A to the ENP continue through the S-12s and S333 structures. Hydrologic connectivity has improved compared to one month ago in all three of the major sloughs within ENP. The SFWDAT model output illustrates a continued rehydration of WCA-1. Drier conditions persist in Northeastern WCA-3A along the L-38W canal. Depths increased in WCA-3A North but remain relatively low in WCA-3A South which is limiting key aquatic prey production in this region. Big Cypress Basin near the Tamiami trail is drier than last month. Stages decreased in Taylor Slough last week are now above the recent average. Salinity decreased on average in Florida Bay compared to last week and is above the estimated historical average and below the WY2001-2016 Interquartile Range (IQR) 75th percentile in all three regions. The Tamiami Trail Flow Formula (TTFF) recommends 817 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.

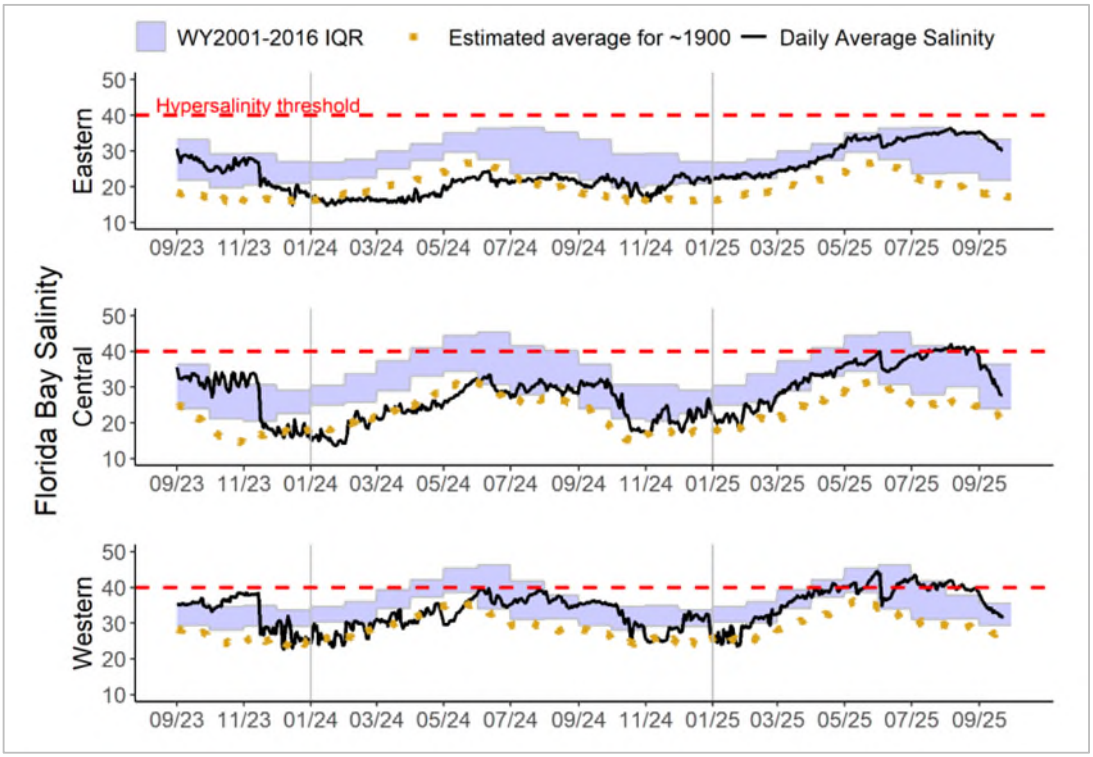
September 2025 Conditional Position Analysis (CPA) results for Lake Okeechobee, WCA-1, WCA-2A and WCA-3A under LOSOM Recovery Operations.











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 hyper salinity threshold indicates the level at which salinities start to become harmful to seagrass.