

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Laureen Borocharner, Chief, Engineering Division (USACE)  
**FROM:** John Mitnik, Chief District Engineer (SFWMD)  
Akin Owosina, Chief, Hydrology & Hydraulics Bureau (SFWMD)  
**DATE:** September 28, 2023  
**SUBJECT:** Operational Position Statement September 26, 2023 to October 2, 2023

This Position Statement is to provide operational input for the one-week period from September 26, 2023 to October 2, 2023 based on system conditions and data observed during the previous Monday to Sunday 7-day period. On September 25 Lake Okeechobee stage was 15.47 feet NGVD, which placed it within the Low Sub-band of the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS). Lake stage increased by 0.06 feet over the preceding 7-day period.

District September to date rainfall is near normal (~98% of normal). Rainfall District forecast (issued September 26) calls for much above normal rainfall for the coming 7-day period and below normal rainfall for the following one.

Precipitation Outlook: The most recent CPC precipitation outlook for South Florida for October 2023 shows equal chances of below normal, normal and above normal rainfall. The outlook for the 3-month window of Oct-Dec indicates increased chances of above normal rainfall. The 3-month window of Nov 2023-Jan 2024 shows substantially increased chances of above normal rainfall for areas north of the EAA and increased chances of above normal rainfall for the remaining areas south. The 3-month windows of Dec 2023-Feb 2024 and Jan 2024-Mar 2024 indicate substantially increased chances of above normal rainfall. The outlooks for the 3-month window Feb 2024-Apr 2024 Mar 2024 – May 2024 are for increased chances of above normal rainfall. The transition to and the first half of the 2024 wet season indicate equal chances of below normal, normal and above normal rainfall.

2008 LORS Release Guidance (Part C): With Lake Okeechobee stage within the Low Sub-band, the Tributary Hydrologic conditions in the Normal category, and the Multi-Seasonal Lake Okeechobee Net Inflow outlook in the Normal Category, Part C of the 2008 LORS suggests “Maximum Practicable Releases to the WCAs if desirable or with minimum Everglades impact; otherwise, no releases to the WCAs”.

Over the 7-day period from September 18 to September 24, 2023, 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. Stage in WCA-1 is 0.44 feet below regulation schedule, stage in WCA-2A is 0.60 feet above regulation schedule, and WCA-3A stage is 0.91 feet above regulation schedule, in Zone A. For the coming operational period, USACE is not requesting maximum practicable regulatory releases be sent south from Lake Okeechobee towards the WCAs.

2008 LORS Release Guidance (Part D): With Lake Okeechobee stage within the Low Sub-band, the Tributary Hydrologic conditions in the Normal category, the Seasonal Lake Okeechobee Net Inflow outlook in the Wet category, and the Multi-Seasonal Lake Okeechobee Net Inflow outlook in the Normal category, Part D of the 2008 LORS suggests “S-79 up to 450 cfs and S-80 up to 200 cfs”. In addition, Lake Okeechobee stage is 0.30 ft above elevation 15.17 feet NGVD which is the stage for the upper boundary of the Ecological Envelope for this time of the year.

For the 7-day period September 18 to September 24, 2023, total discharge to the St. Lucie Estuary was about 850 cfs with no releases coming from Lake Okeechobee. The 7-day average salinity in the middle estuary was in the optimal range (10-25) for adult eastern oysters. Total inflow to the Caloosahatchee Estuary averaged approximately 3,550 cfs with about 300 cfs coming from Lake Okeechobee through S-77. Salinities in the upper estuary were within the optimal range (0-10) for tape grass. The 7-day average salinities for adult eastern oysters were in the optimal range at Cape Coral and Shell Point (10-25), and in the upper stressed range at Sanibel (>25).

Since the end of November 2022, both local basin runoff in the Caloosahatchee Watershed and lake releases through S-77 have maintained salinity in the Caloosahatchee Estuary. The District recommends USACE implement a non-harmful release from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee Estuary with an average discharge of 2,000 cfs (7-day pulse) as measured at the S-79 structure and zero lake releases to the St. Lucie Estuary. The USACE typically implements the releases to the estuaries starting on Saturday and ending on Friday. The Corps should continue to track Red Tide and Blue Green Algae conditions, and should conditions change during this operational period, the Corps should look to reassess releases as needed.