

MEMORANDUM

TO: Laureen Borocharner, Chief, Engineering Division (USACE)
FROM: John Mitnik, Chief District Engineer (SFWMD)
Akin Owosina, Chief, Hydrology & Hydraulics Bureau (SFWMD)
DATE: February 25, 2021
SUBJECT: Operational Position Statement for February 23, 2021 to March 1, 2021

This Position Statement is to provide operational recommendations for the one-week period from February 23, 2021 to March 1, 2021 based on system conditions and data observed during the last Monday to Sunday 7-day period. On February 22, Lake Okeechobee stage was 15.40 feet NGVD, which places it within the Low Sub-band of the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS). Lake stage decreased by 0.03 feet during the preceding 7 days.

February District rainfall to date is above average (115% of normal), with large spatial variability among different basins. Central Everglades, EAA, Palm Beach and West Coast report well below normal rainfall, while the remainder of the areas are higher than 120% of average. Rainfall forecast (issued February 23) predicts below to well below average rainfall for the District for the coming 7-day and near to below average rainfall for the following 7-day period.

Precipitation Outlook: The most recent CPC precipitation outlook for March 2021 and for the 3-month window Mar-May call for increased chances of below-normal rainfall. The outlook for the 3-month window Apr-Jun is for slightly increased chances of below-normal rainfall. The forecast for the May-Jul window is for equal chances of above-normal, normal, and below-normal rainfall. The outlook for most of the 2021 wet season is for slightly increased chances of 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 "Up to Maximum Practicable Releases to WCAs if desirable or with minimum Everglades Impact; otherwise no releases to the Everglades".

Over the 7-day period from February 15, 2021 to February 21, 2021, regulatory releases in the amount of 2,100 acre-feet were sent from Lake Okeechobee to the FEBs/STAs. No Lake regulatory releases were sent to the Lake Worth Lagoon through the C-51 canal. Stage in WCA-1 is above schedule (Zone A1), stage in WCA-2A is above schedule (Zone A), and WCA-3A stage is above schedule (Zone A). For the coming operational period, the USACE is requesting maximum practical 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, the Tributary Hydrologic Conditions in the Normal category and the Seasonal Lake Okeechobee Net Inflow Outlook 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 February 15, 2021 to February 21, 2021, total discharge to the St. Lucie Estuary was around 750 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 around 1,000 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 but in the fair range at Sanibel. Additionally, *Karenia brevis* continue to be observed off the mouth of the Caloosahatchee Estuary but counts are smaller than before.

The District will continue to work with the USACE to manage Lake Okeechobee levels in an effort to curtail harmful discharges over this year. Given the seasonal dry forecast condition for south Florida, and current lake levels, the District recommends USACE continue discharge to the estuaries at a non-harmful level of 2,000 cfs to the Caloosahatchee Estuary, measured at S-79, in a steady release fashion. In addition, this decision should be reassessed on a weekly basis. The USACE typically implements the releases to the estuaries over a 7-day period starting on Saturday and ending on Friday.