



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

GET THE FACTS

March 2016

Media outlets continue to falsely report that rare emergency pumping of water into Lake Okeechobee was orchestrated by farmers.

Pumping water into the lake from the south, known as “back pumping,” is used only in extreme emergency flooding situations by the South Florida Water Management District. Neither businesses nor farms have the authority or capability to pump water directly into the lake, as environmental groups such as the Sierra Club have incorrectly asserted in the media.

Here are the facts:

- The Florida Department of Environmental Protection permit and SFWMD Governing Board policy strictly limit pumping water into the lake only in extreme conditions to protect thousands of families and businesses living south of the lake.
- Back pumping is rare and is not the reason water is being discharged from the lake to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries – record rainfall is the cause.
- The emergency back pumping operation has been used only 9 times since 2008, four of which followed tropical storms.
- During the 96-hour back pumping operation triggered by the record rain this January, pumps moved 31,397 acre-feet of water.
- This 31,397 acre-feet of water pumped into the lake was *less than 1 percent* of the total volume water in the lake at the time.
- Projects that will reduce the need for emergency pumping and reduce harmful freshwater discharges to the estuaries are now operating or under construction:
 - A-1 Flow Equalization Basin in western Palm Beach County began storing water (to be cleaned in Stormwater Treatment Areas) directly from the lake on March 11 to help lower levels and benefit the coastal estuaries.
 - The 10,500 acre C-43 and 3,000 acre C-44 reservoirs in Hendry and Martin counties are now under construction to help capture excess stormwater flows.

###

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional governmental agency that manages water resources in the southern part of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. Our mission is to protect South Florida's water resources by balancing and improving flood control, water supply, water quality and natural systems.