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Lake Okeechobee water dumping alternatives explored

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The South Florida Water Management District is exploring temporary water storage alternatives to dumping Lake Okeechobee water out to sea. (July 29, 2013)

By Andy Reid
Sun Sentinel

4:40 p.m. EDT, July 29, 2013

Emergency pumping started Monday to lessen the environmentally-damaging effects of dumping **Lake Okeechobee** water out to sea.

Dumping Lake Okeechobee water out to sea protects South Florida from flooding, but

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About the authors



DAVID FLESHLER is environmental reporter for the Sun Sentinel, where his beat covers endangered species, the ocean, the Everglades, environmental health and lots of other issues. Before taking the environmental reporting job, he covered the city of Hollywood and the Broward County Commission. Originally from Buffalo, he has a bachelor's degree in philosophy from New York University and a master's in journalism from Columbia University. In his free time he listens to classical music, teaches himself German and spends time with his family. He lives in Boca Raton with his wife Amy, stepson Henry and three cats.



ANDY REID has covered government, growth and development, and environmental issues in

damages coastal fishing grounds and can make waterways unsafe for swimming.

The move announced Monday by the **South Florida Water Management District** is aimed at redirecting some of the flood-control lake discharges west of the lake that since May have been flowing toward the Caloosahatchee estuary.

The district on Monday started pumping water from the Caloosahatchee River onto 3,500 acres southwest of the lake in Hendry County, where the district eventually plans to build a reservoir on former farmland.

The district is also working on similar alternatives to store more of the lake water that is now flowing east and overwhelming the St. Lucie River Estuary.

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The emergency pumping that started Monday is a repeat of a water storage technique used last year, when the district spent about \$250,000 and pumped about 3 billion gallons of water that otherwise would have ended up in the estuary.

“This won’t solve the problem, but every little bit helps,” district spokesman Gabe Margasak said.

Rising water levels during a rainier-than-usual summer have prompted the draining of billions of gallons of lake water out to sea each day to ease the strain on the lake’s dike, which is considered one of the country’s most at risk of a breach.

The problem is that flushing lake water west into the Caloosahatchee River and east into the St. Lucie River throws off the mix of salt and fresh water in the delicate estuaries and bring an influx of pollutants that fouls coastal water quality.

This year’s lake draining is already killing off oyster reefs and sea grass beds, scaring off fish, clouding waters and triggering warnings that water in some areas is unsafe for human contact.

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Florida since 1996. He joined the Sun Sentinel in 2005 and covers Palm Beach County government as well as South Florida water and environmental issues, with an emphasis on Everglades restoration. He previously worked at the Tampa Tribune, Stuart News and the News Chief in Winter Haven. A native of Tampa, Reid graduated from Florida State University where he majored in communications. He is a father of three and lives with his wife, Jennifer, in Royal Palm Beach.

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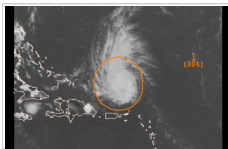
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