



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Declining Lake Okeechobee Level Triggers Navigation Lock Closures

Lake access remains available at area boat ramps on the lake's north shore

Okeechobee, FL — Beginning on Monday, March 14, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) will close or limit the operation of five navigation locks on the north shore of Lake Okeechobee because of declining water levels in Lake Okeechobee and lock chambers. The locks will not have a locktender on duty when closed.

The navigation locks affected by this operational decision are:

- **S-135 at J&S Fish Camp, Martin County:** Closed.
- **S-127 at Buckhead Ridge, Glades County:** Closed.
- **S-131 at Lakeport, Glades County:** Closed.
- **G-36 at Henry Creek, Okeechobee County:** Closed.
- **S-193 at Taylor Creek, Okeechobee County:** Open Saturdays and Sundays only during regular hours (5:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.) until Lake Okeechobee's level reaches 11 feet NGVD.

While these navigation locks are out of operation, boaters will be able to continue accessing the lake from its north shore at local boat ramps.

The lock closures are part of a larger effort by the District to ensure South Florida's water resources are properly maintained throughout the remainder of the dry season. Lake Okeechobee's current level is 11.92 feet — more than two feet below the historical average for this time of year — and is declining at an accelerated rate.

The District operates navigation locks on the north shore of Lake Okeechobee to provide the greatest lake access possible for the boating public while maintaining flood control for the region. As the lake level reaches 12 feet NGVD and lower, the SFWMD closes the locks to maintain water levels in adjacent canals and protect groundwater availability. This operational decision also ensures that boats do not attempt to navigate

when water levels are insufficient to support safe travel and helps to prevent damage to manatee protection devices inside the lock chambers.

The S-193 lock has a lower floor elevation and a deeper channel leading to the Okeechobee Waterway than the other four north shore locks, which allows for boat traffic at lower lake levels. The District will close the lock to boat traffic on weekdays to maintain adjacent canals at levels higher than Lake Okeechobee.

On the south shore of the lake, the S-310 navigation lock at Clewiston is currently secured in the open position. The navigation lock is operational and manned by a locktender when Lake Okeechobee levels reach 15.5 feet NGVD and higher to provide flood protection upstream of the lock.

Navigation locks on the Okeechobee Waterway, which includes the Caloosahatchee River and St. Lucie Canal, are operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Information for those navigation locks may be obtained by calling the South Florida Operations Office at 863-983-8101.

For a guide to recreation sites on Lake Okeechobee, including boat ramps and public parks, please visit the District's website at www.sfwmd.gov. The information is also available at local bait and tackle shops as well as the SFWMD Okeechobee Service Center in the Bank of America building in downtown Okeechobee. For more information, please call the SFWMD Okeechobee Service Center at 863-462-5260.

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About the South Florida Water Management District

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.