



April 5, 2021

Colonel Andrew Kelly
Jacksonville District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Boulevard
Jacksonville, FL 32207

Dear Colonel Kelly,

As representatives for the Treasure Coast in the United States House of Representatives and the Florida Legislature, we write to urge you to seize the once-in-a-decade opportunity provided by the drafting of the Lake Okeechobee System Operation Manual (LOSOM) to stop poisoning our community.

As you know, as part of the Conceptual Plan Phase for the development of the new regulation schedule, the Army Corps and South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) presented more than 27,000 alternative schedules. This modeling data proved that it was possible to eliminate regulatory discharges to the St. Lucie within the operational band while at the same time improving performance for water supply, sending more water south to the Everglades and improving the ecology of the Caloosahatchee.

All of our constituents who have lived through a lost summer thanks to discharges from Lake Okeechobee can viscerally remember the look of guacamole thick algal blooms in our waterways and the stench of rotten eggs that accompanied the algae. Even worse, though, we all remember the shuttered businesses, jobs lost, animals dying and people getting sick. With discharges resuming again, we are all bracing for the worst.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has now quantified some of these impacts and determined that the water discharged into our community by the Army Corps was many times too toxic for human contact. According to their scientists, exposure to the toxins in our waterways can cause serious illness, liver or kidney failure, and even death. In other words, repeated yearly discharges of toxic water from Lake Okeechobee into our community is an unmitigated health disaster for the State of Florida.

Therefore, now that the Army Corps has determined that these discharges are unnecessary and that eliminating these discharges is actually beneficial to other Congressionally-authorized project purposes, we urge you to utilize the "4C-1" strategy in LOSOM that eliminates regulatory discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie Estuary. With this once in a decade opportunity in front of us, the Army Corps must not settle for incremental progress but rather should take the bold action needed to protect Floridians and stop government-sanctioned poisoning.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Brian Mast, consisting of a stylized 'B' and 'M'.

Brian Mast
Member of Congress

A blue ink signature of Gayle Harrell, written in a cursive style.

Gayle Harrell
State Senator

A blue ink signature of Tobin R. Overdorf, featuring a stylized 'T' and 'O'.

Tobin R. "Toby" Overdorf
State Representative

CC: Timothy Gysan, Senior Project Manager