ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
PUBLIC SCOPING HEARING

February 11, 2019

6:00 p.m.

John Boy Auditorium

1200 S WC Owen Ave

Clewiston, Florida 33440

ITEM: Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM)
a Component of the Central & Southern Florida (C&SF) System Operating Plan

ACCURATE REPORTERS, LLC

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Proceedings

LT. COL. REYNOLDS: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We are going to go ahead and get started.

First of all, I want to thank everyone for coming out. This is the largest public meeting that I've seen in Clewiston in the three-plus years that I've been with the Corps, so thank you very much to all of you taking time to come out and have your voices be heard.

It's really important that you're part of this process. We're very excited to be spending the evening with you, and to hear what you have to say.

The Lake Okeechobee regulations schedule that is in place now was done as a part of a public process, but it's been in place since 2008, and what we've learned is that there are some things that weren't fully considered when we considered the schedule in 2008. As you know from a lot of the newspaper articles and television reports that you've seen, and a bunch of letters from various people and stakeholders and constituents all across our state, some of the priorities have also changed, so it's really important that everyone's voice is heard.

We were in — on the north side of the lake in Okeechobee last week, and one of the things that I told people there is the coasts have a lot more people than the counties that are on the interior, and so it's doubly important to make sure that your voice is heard.

And I saw a newspaper article today, and I don't know if these numbers are accurate, but what the newspaper article about Okeechobee said is that we had about 200 people come out for a meeting up in Okeechobee, and that's like having about 20,000 people come out to a meeting on the coast. I think we have even more folks here tonight than we had in Okeechobee, so thank you so much for coming out and being part of this process.

What you'll see is a presentation that talks a little bit about how this process is going to unfold, but the most important part about tonight is having your voices heard, so we're going to limit our public comment period to two minutes per person. What we'd like to do is make sure that we get everybody's comments. If you choose not to make a comment tonight, you can also give us your comments by email, by letter, or come to one of our other meetings that are being held throughout the month.

And Tim's going to talk a little bit more about the rest of the process and how it unfolds, so I'll leave that to him. I am going to go find out how long we have this venue and see if we can stay late to make sure that we can get everybody's voices heard on the record. With that, I will turn it over to Tim.

MAYOR GARDNER: Yes, we can.

LT. COL. REYNOLDS: Oh, I'm sorry, one thing I forgot to mention. We have a lot of elected officials here tonight, and I just wanted to recognize Mayor Gardner, who just gave me permission to stay late and — so thank you, Mayor Gardner, from the City of Clewiston. We also have Commissioner Petersen from the City of Clewiston, if you can just raise your hands.

Thank you.

Commissioner Byrd from Hendry? No? Commissioner Ahern from Glades County; Commissioner Turner from Hendry County; Commissioner — Commissioner Strenth from Glades County. We have the mayor of Moore Haven; we have the mayor of Pahokee — Mayor Babb, I saw you come in — and we also have representatives from both Senator Rubio's office and also from — a representative of Diaz-Balart's office.

So thank you all for coming. If I missed anyone, I apologize.

We will be offering an opportunity for our elected officials to make their public comment first at the beginning of the public comment period, and then we'll go into the public comment cards.

So with that, I'll have somebody else hold the door so that Tim can start the presentation. Let me change places with him.

MR. GYSAN: All right. So before I get started, there's some empty seats up front here, and I see some scattered throughout here, so don't be shy, come up and take these empty seats.

So while they're getting set up, I'm going to introduce some of the folks that are here with us tonight from our team: Colonel Reynolds, and my name is Tim Gysan, I'm the project manager for the Lake Okeechobee operating manual effort. You'll see me around the next four years.

So I'd like to get the other folks from the Corps, since we've got a little time, why don't you guys come up here and stand. I'll introduce you. If you have any specific questions on anything that we don't cover tonight, feel free to talk to some of the team members that are here and get some of your questions answered.

All right. So starting here, Marci Jackson, she'll be the planning technical lead for this effort; next to her is Jessica Mallett, our lead engineer; next to her is Andrew Geller representing our operations manager; next to Andrew is Savannah Lacy, she is a water manager of the Corps; and next to her is Allie Joura, also a water manager.

Is there anyone else that wants to come up here? All right, thank you very much.

Like I said, feel free to ask them any questions that you don't hear answers to tonight. We'll be happy to talk to you.

(PowerPoint presentation shown and narrated, not transcribed per instruction of Mr. Gysan.)

MR. GYSAN: All right. And with that, I'm done. I'm going to get out of here. I'm going to turn it over to Jason Engle, and he's going to facilitate the comment period.

So please come up here. We're looking forward to hearing what everybody has to say tonight.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you, Tim.

Like I say, thank you for coming out tonight. This is a big group, biggest we've had. We're excited and looking forward to hearing your comments.

It's important that your voice is heard, as we've said. We're here to put your comments on the record. There's a court reporter here. There will be a record provided in the future on all the comments that are made here tonight. It's an opportunity to put your comments on that record.

In order to maintain consistency in our responses, we need time to ensure that all comments are heard today, so we're going to ask that you keep it to two minutes. We've got nearly fifty people that want to speak, so if we could really keep that to two minutes or less.

What I would say is we want all of your comments though, so if you have something more to say than you can say in two minutes, please submit it in writing. We don't want to limit anyone, but we want to give everyone here a chance to say what they have to say in public at the beginning of this process.

And one of the things is that we're here to listen tonight. This is not a question and answer session. There will be a lot — if we were here to do that, we might only get through three or four questions. So what we want to do is take all of your input tonight; the next step, the workshops that we spoke about, we'll come back, and we'll have — look through all the comments, we'll put the like ones together, and we'll come back with answers to those, and we'll have a two-way dialogue in our workshops; but tonight we're here to listen, and we want to have everyone have a chance to do that, so we'll get started.

First I want to invite our elected officials to come up, and so the first would be Mayor Mali Gardner of Clewiston. Following Mali will be Commissioner Petersen, City of Clewiston, and Commissioner Hendry of Clewiston (sic).

MAYOR GARDNER: Thank you so much.

MR. ENGLE: What I would ask is if you could go to — to the microphone in the middle there.

MAYOR GARDNER: Good evening, welcome to America's Sweetest Town. We're so happy to host the meeting today.

And as I welcome those in attendance tonight, there are some that are not here, and I want to address my statements to them. So to President Trump, Vice-President Pence, Senator Marco Rubio, Senator Rick Scott, and Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart, I am asking you today to not damn the town that I love with a new Lake Okeechobee water regulation schedule that will create economic devastation for both our fishing and farming communities.

Now is the time to address the water balance along with the state — Lake Okeechobee, the very heartbeat of the Everglades. Do not ignore that 95 percent of the water that enters Lake Okeechobee flows from the north. The lake has never produced the water. The lake never creates the water that discharges from it. Those discharges are a result of an engineering system that must have a well-balanced schedule, based on historical data, so that no further harm can befall us. Using arbitrary numbers for political expediency is not the answer for us, and that is, to us, one of the most important things. Please let the historical data, and the work that's being done on the projects, the billions of dollars that are being invested into the Herbert Hoover Dike, finishing the C-43, the C-44, the hydrology — the new hydrology for Lake Hicpochee, all of those are important in this whole process.

We're thankful that you're here today to hear from us and what's important; but, please, as you look at the data, as you look at the past experience, as you develop something new, don't forget that. When I

received the 2008 — when I received the email and saw that the 2008 LORS schedule was included in the link that was sent, I noticed for the first time "interim," and I'm thinking what was this interim from, and I realized that there was a schedule before the interim schedule. And so I'm asking you today, to the Corps and to all those who oversee, include that data. Don't just begin anew. That's historical data that will serve a purpose.

We've seen high numbers, and we have seen low numbers. We have seen boats on the bottom of Lake Okeechobee in 2000 when the lake was low; we have seen high numbers with Hurricane Wilma; and I realize that that's why the interim schedule came up, so all of those outcomes of the past need to be taken into account.

And so in closing, I would just like to encourage that all the projects that are being worked on right now, and will be completed, some of those, by 2022, and the historical water balance data that we have, the Corps has it, the Water Management has it, and they'll work together on it to develop the WSE, the water supply environmental study, please use that. Don't throw that out. I was going to say don't throw out the baby with the bathwater, but please use that, because I think — as I look around the room today, I see people from our community, I see people from the coast, and I believe it is important that this process not continue to sow — to sow discord, unnecessary discord, between the coastal communities, the inland communities, the farming communities, and the environmental communities.

Now is the time to get it right, but we just don't start new. We have to look at our history. We have to learn from our past so that we can prepare for a more viable future, and we are the sweetest town.

And as we look at preparing for the future, I want to formally invite the Corps of Engineers, the Water Management districts, whoever it may be, to hold the workshops here in Clewiston. We'd like to see — we're equal distance from each coast, equal distance between Okeechobee and Miami. We're the perfect location, so please have those workshops here. We'd love to host it.

Thank you so much for being here and hearing us.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next is Commissioner Petersen, City of Clewiston.

COMMISSIONER PETERSEN: Good evening. Mayor Gardner encapsulated that pretty comprehensively. Listen, there are tens of thousands of us in our area versus the millions that are on the coast. We're one of the last counties centrally located in the south that does not have a coastal boundary. We need to be heard.

There have been a lot of decisions that have been made along the way: the spraying of the grasses, the issues with the septic tanks, the level of the lake, so there are a number of issues that need to be incorporated in the conversations as we move forward. They need to remember that this is the breadbasket of Florida. This is where your vegetables come from. I'm an interloper — I came from New York about 35 years ago and fell in love with Hendry County — but those people who are lifelong farmers, who have put their blood, sweat, and tears into the Glades, absolutely need to be taken into consideration and need to be heard.

What happens as we move forward, not just talking about the — I'll start with the C-43 and C-44, some of the other issues that they are discussing along the way: the impact on the agriculture, the impact on the fishing on the lake, the impact on the daily lives of those of you that have been here forever. My dogs and I love where I live, at 213 South San Gabriel, and I don't want things to change; and if I have that love after 30 some years, those people who are lifelong investees are the ones that are important at this point.

Please make sure that you come to the workshops. Please make sure that you send those emails in. The record needs to reflect the hearts, the thoughts, and the concerns of everybody in this room. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you, Commissioner.

Next we have Commissioner Emma Byrd Hendry (sic) of Clewiston.

MS. BYRD: Thank you so much. We appreciate the opportunity for being heard today.

When I look back over the things that's important, we know lives are very important, and sometimes we forget that, we — being concerned about the water and the grass, but here in Hendry County, we're concerned about the lives that's around the lake. My grandparents are originally from Tuskee (phonetic), but they was raised here, and we was raised here, so we want you to know how important it is that you don't forget about us. We might be little people to you, but we're large people to us, and we want you to know that we are very important people, so we don't want you to push us to the side.

Another thing that's important, even around the Glades, when I look at the water that's coming down from the top, we always want to come to the bottom and be concerned about the bottom. It's coming from the top, and we want you to make sure that you recognize that. Don't forget about where the water is actually coming from, and don't you blame or throw blame, and let's not forget the work that was already done. We can't forget about that. We cannot forget what's going on around the lake. We want to start over, but don't start over. Look at the materials that you already have and work from that. Don't forget about it. Don't forget about the fishermen and the people that come, when our family come down, and they enjoy the lake, they enjoy the water, they enjoy the sunshine. We are just as important as the people that's around us. We want you to remember that.

Also, we want you to remember the process was already started. Let's not start something new, and then we start all over again.

We just want you to remember that we are important. The farmers are important. I worked in the field — I'm not from here, I'm from Michigan, but I came home every year, and I worked in the field, and I worked with them, and I want them to enjoy — my kids to come back home to enjoy Clewiston and the Glades and the surroundings.

Thank you for the opportunity. Get up and make sure you speak, make your voice heard. If you sit back and talk about it after the fact, it's not important. What's important now — if you don't want to come up to the podium and speak, make sure you send your emails out. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you, Commissioner.

Next is Commissioner John Ahern, Glades County. After Commissioner Ahern would be Commissioner Donald Strenth, Glades County.

COMMISSIONER AHERN: Thank you for everybody coming out, and hope you, you know, let your thoughts be heard and stuff. I'm really here — I'd like to say — what the previous elected officials have said, I echo that sentiment. I've been in Glades County my whole life. My mother went through the '26 and '28 storms, and we're, you know, invested in the community.

But I'm really here tonight to listen to what the public comments are and to educate myself so that — so that Glades County will be able to make an educated decision as we advise the Corps and everybody as we — as we move forward. But anyway, I'm just here to listen, and I'll take everything in, and if anybody would like to speak with me or something, I'd sure appreciate it. I'll try to visit with our customers, people that fish the lake every day, and how they — the changes they've seen, and the recommendations they have. My door is always open, and I will take everything into consideration as Glades County has its input into the future of the lake. Thank you.

(Applause)

Commissioner Donald Strenth.

COMMISSIONER STRENTH: Basically, I'll save some time, y'all have spoken for me.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you, sir.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Keith W. Babb, Jr., mayor of the City of Pahokee.

MAYOR BABB: Good evening, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to make some comments, particularly for the Glades community.

I'm the mayor of the City of Pahokee. We live and work directly on Lake Okeechobee. The State of Florida own our marina, but we have invested millions of dollars in our marina. We're making that a state-of-the-art marina.

And we are, as the City of Pahokee, unanimously opposed to the lowering of the lake to ten feet. That would have a devastating effect, a negative effect, on our community. We won't be able to get boats in and out of that marina if that happened.

Our community also is dependent on our agriculture community. In our community we have a high unemployment. I think the farming industry provide about 50 percent of our jobs. Our unemployment rate now is about 25 percent. If you lower the lake to ten feet, what going to happen when a drought come? The farmers are not going to be able to draw water to supply their crops. They're going to have to lay off employees. So it going to have a total effect on this community. So I just want to put that point out and emphasize that. There's a lot of things that have been done, scientifically studied. You take Senate Bill 10, there was a lot of compromise in that, and one of the protection was to protect the Glades and the Lake Region from the devastating effect of losing jobs. So our life matter, our livelihood

matter, and whatever plan you have, please consider the livelihood of the people living around the lake, because we are important. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you, Mayor.

Finally, we have Clara Murvin, Vice Mayor, City of Pahokee.

VICE MAYOR MURVIN: Good evening.

(Audience responds en masse.)

VICE MAYOR MURVIN: As — as someone who has been serving my City of Pahokee, I — they have made a point of being — being agricultural farming land as a reason for discharges. No, my city, and other 40,000 people around the lake, is why discharges happen, so that's why we don't want flood.

Thank you to the Army Corps of Engineer (sic) for protecting our rural communities from floods. Thank you to the Army Corps for making science-based decision and making it work on the Herbert Hoover Dike.

To Congressman Mast, I say your advocacy for low Lake Okeechobee levels leaves our city and our citizens from having access to water supply.

As a Pahokee city commissioner, I ask the Army Corps of Engineer to consider our citizens and many supporters of agriculture to have access to water by maintaining a reasonable lake level of our Lake Okeechobee. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Do we have any other elected officials that have come late, or who didn't put their name down, but would like to come up and speak?

Okay. So I'm going to get on to the public — public comments. What I would ask is just when you come up, state your name, state any group that you are affiliated with or want to be affiliated with, and start your comment. Please keep it to two minutes so — we heard we can stay long, we're going to stay here until all the comments are done, but we'll get through them if everybody can keep it to two minutes or And like I said, we want all your comments, you can submit anything you don't get a chance to say in writing, and it will carry the same weight.

So the first three names: Barbara Austin, Steve Nolin, Phillip Roland. Barbara Austin?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: She's out.

MR. ENGLE: Okay. Steve Nolin? Sir, do you want to come up?

MR. NOLIN: I'm Steve.

MR. ENGLE: I'm sorry.

MR. NOLIN: Good evening, friends. My name is Steve Nolin. I am the president of the Belle Glade Chamber of Commerce currently, and I also am proud to serve Community United Methodist Church as their senior pastor.

I — you know, pastors normally don't speak without telling a story, so I'm going to tell you a little story. I will take you back in time a little bit, a little bit of memories. Some of you may remember Apollo 13; some of you may not; but on the sixth day of their journey, they were in a bind. They had to turn off their computers that steered their ship. The only way they could get home was to find a point in space, focus on that point in space, and steer the ship manually for a 39-second main engine burn.

Jim Lovell, the commander of the ship, took the stick in his hand, focused on earth in the tiny little window, and for 39 harrowing seconds, he maintained earth in that window, focused solely on earth.

As we come together today, there are numerous things that we seem to be focused on, and I would submit to you that the primary and principal thing that we should be focused on is sitting in these chairs. The people and the lives of the people should be paramount and principal. It should be the first thing that's considered.

So we are discussing lake levels, and lake levels are everyone's concern. The integrity of the dike is everybody's concern, especially to us that live around the lake, but it — you know, that concern should not be driven by algae, red tide, water discharges, that you and I have absolutely no control over. Multiple foci wrapped in secrecy, hidden agendas, politics, and big money is not the answer for dealing with the issues that we face today. The lake level, water discharge, water quality are issues that impact each one of us.

We are a technologically advanced society. We have some of the smartest people in the world, and yet they haven't figured out that the — where the dirty water is coming from, and we have. We've heard it twice already tonight. Solve the problem there. Start at the top, work your way down.

Many people, whole cities, indeed the entire nation depends on this lake. It depends on its ecosystem, as well as the lake around it, and to harm any of them is not the focus that we should have in our window.

Our leaders are tasked with solving critical issues, and I don't think we can solve those critical issues without understanding that the most critical issue is the lives of the people around this lake and the lives of — of everybody. Our farmers are doing their best. Our cities are doing their best. We're doing what we're being asked to do.

To just quote — or bring up General David Eisenhower — some of you know him; some of you don't. But he used to demonstrate the art of leadership with a simple piece of string. He used to lay the string on a table and take hold of it, and he said this, and I quote, "Pull the string along with you, and it will follow you wherever you wish. Push it, and it will go nowhere at all."

And the last one — being a preacher, I can't leave this out — in the New Testament we were given a new command, "Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself." I ask you to see the people not only as the string, but, more importantly, as your neighbor.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Next?

MR. ROLAND: Thank you.

Phillip Roland, I think probably most of the people know me, but 45 years ago I was elected as a county commissioner, and so for 45 years I've been attending meetings about Lake Okeechobee, and I'd like to say there's very few times that the people have been listened to.

Honest to gracious, it's terrible to say, but we were plumbed backwards, and that's the honest-to-God truth. I mean, you've got three canals putting all the water into Lake Okeechobee, which is the Harney Pond, Kissimmee, and what's the other —

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's Indian Prairie.

MR. ROLAND: Indian Prairie. Those three canals put 5,500 square miles of water into a 700-square-mile lake; and that being said, we know that that just doesn't work.

But the other thing, Madam Colonel, what's the control of the lake right now? 12 and a half, is it 16 and a half, or something in that area?

LT. COL. REYNOLDS: 12 and a half to 15 and a half we consider the ideal level.

MR. ROLAND: Okay. I had a corpsman telling me, "It's over 16, Phillip"; and I said, "No, it's not."

But anyway, that being said, I heard 13 and a half — actually, I heard 13, 15 and a half, all my life. My father worked for the Corps of Engineers, and that worked for so, so many years. And then we went all the way to 17 and a half feet. 15 and a half to 17 and a half was one control number.

But as we hear these control numbers, what we can't hear is something like 10 and a half, because we've been to 9, so if we're controlling at 10 and a half, then we go to 6 and a half, and then everything dies. I'm telling you, everything.

Before we got the rains a week and a half ago, everything was burnt up. As that lake went to 12,4; 12,3; then everything starts to turn brown because you've lost your water table. It's gone. And at 10 and a half — you're not going to live with it anyway because you're going to have saltwater intrusion. If we go to 10 and a half, you're going to lose your Everglades because water — you know, we can't get it back once it's gone.

But that being said, thank y'all for coming. I hope that something will make a difference, and Congressman Mast doesn't get what he's looking for.

And one other thing: When I was a senior in high school, Stuart had one nine-hole golf course — one nine-hole course — then there was one in Vero, in Fort Pierce, and on down. Now I think Stuart has thirty inside the city limits, so do the math.

MR. ENGLE: Barbara Austin, Michael Burokas —

MR. BUROKAS: I pass.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you, sir. Len Lindahl, and then Roman (sic) Iglesias.

MR. LINDAHL: Hi, good evening. My name is Len Lindahl. I'm a Palm Beach County native. I'm a professional engineer, and I work for MacVicar Consulting.

I'd like to thank the Lieutenant Colonel, Corps staff, the Water Management staff for the very informative presentation.

When the current regulation schedule, which is called LORS, was adopted, as discussed earlier, it was adopted for an interim schedule, meaning it was only going to last for three years. The reason why it was adopted was because the dike needed to be repaired, so they lowered the lake so they could start repairing the dike.

What that had was a significant impact on the agricultural water supply, took the water supply away. So when the dike is repaired, we'd like to have that agricultural water supply restored. It's that simple.

So one of the things to look at is the previous schedule, before LORS '08, as was mentioned earlier called Water Supply and Environment, WSE — there's a board in the back I see that shows an illustration of the benefits of WSE. If you haven't seen it, please take the time to go look at it. There's benefits with regards to the management schedule that that went through and how that was managed, and it brought back the agricultural water supply.

Also, when we go through this schedule, we'd like to make sure that we have the protection that CERP provides with regards to water supply. There's protected language that's built into the CERP, so I'd like to make sure that that's reflected, as well.

We've mentioned droughts. Just one note: In 2006 — and I know previous speakers have talked about droughts — the lake had a target elevation of 12,5, not 10,5, but 12,5; and in 2006 it went to 12,6. Because of lack of rain, in 2007 it was at 8,8 in the middle of summer.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That's right.

MR. LINDAHL: So we need to make sure that the science drives the process. Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

And if I butcher someone's name, I apologize in advance. It says Raman Iglesias.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Ramon.

MR. ENGLE: Ramon, third time's the charm.

MR. IGLESIAS: So it seems we're expediting the LORS schedule for many reasons, but I think if we can just slow the flow of water coming into Lake Okeechobee, we wouldn't have this meeting today.

The LOSOM should be based on the science and not politics. There's a lot of discussion by the governor and a gentleman by the name of Brian Mast that are based on blame and their own agenda.

Before we dictate the level of Lake Okeechobee, the lake at the heart of Florida, you must look at your own backyard and ask why your beaches are closed due to fecal matter that have nothing to do with Lake Okeechobee. And I wonder why someone will continue to push a clean water agenda, yet never agree to their part of the problem.

A drought from time to time is healthy for the lake, yet creating a drought by forcing it to 10 and a half feet, what Mother Nature did not intend, must be temporary. You must back it up with burning and allow the natural filter of vegetation to grow.

The people south of the lake are sick and tired of being blamed for all the coastal problems. A permanent 10 and a half foot lake shouldn't even be an option.

Geologically it would be catastrophic, and navigation on Lake Okeechobee would be nonexistent from the big boats that cross the waterways, to recreational fishermen from across the country. You will kill the second largest freshwater lake in the country to appease population growth on the East and West Coast and the hidden agenda of a few. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Next Elizabeth Ross, Maynard Kuehl, and J.P. Sasser.

MS. ROSS: Hi, there. My name is Elizabeth Ross.

I'm with the Gunster law firm, and it's my pleasure tonight to speak on behalf of the United States Sugar Corporation.

And I have to say, I have been in this room for many decades, and this is the largest crowd I've ever seen, so thank you for coming.

(Applause)

MS. ROSS: I have a few points to make tonight, and I'll be brief.

The U.S. Sugar Corporation requests the Corps and District to perform strong technical and science-based analysis to develop a balanced new lake regulation schedule, one that is responsive to the needs of all South Florida.

This lake is truly the liquid heart of our region, and so the LOSOM must provide for the future economy and environment of that region.

As farmers, of course, the United States Sugar Corporation depends upon water supply from Lake Okeechobee. The lake supplies this water pursuant to consumptive use permits, which have been issued by the Water Management District to the United States Sugar Corporation.

This LOSOM schedule must be designed to assure U.S. Sugar and other water users of their water rights and recover their water supply performance that was temporarily lost when the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule of '08 was adopted, and which was to have been for a short interim period now nearly 11 years ago.

Water supply is one of the key congressionally authorized purposes of the federal project. We look forward to reviewing the technical analysis and modeling that will provide available water to all of the water needs of permitted users. U.S. Sugar is mindful that when Congress and the State of Florida invested in the C&SF project, it established this civil works infrastructure as a multipurpose project to serve the region of South Florida. It's a project that is challenged unless it meets the comprehensive balancing needs of all of this area to address the congressionally authorized purposes.

Tonight the Army Corps, in its opening statements, introduced that there's some real new opportunity here. They're seeking to do something different and calling this a first LOSOM. And we agree, this is a unique opportunity before us, and one we have to take advantage of. This opportunity exists because it's a first of its kind lake regulation schedule that can be adopted with the benefit of CERP, Everglades restoration projects. This schedule can and must include the foundational projects referenced that are first- and second-generation CERP projects, the C-43/44 reservoir, as well as the foundational project of the Kissimmee River restoration.

With these long awaited projects, we now have CERP infrastructure available to us, together with the repairs to the Herbert Hoover Dike. We think it's possible to optimize this new infrastructure, and the capabilities associated with it, to improve the lake stages, the lake's discharges, and ultimately create a balanced schedule that honors water supply protections, as provided in state and federal laws, and the consumptive use permits I just mentioned.

For decades the United States Sugar Corporation has supported Comprehensive Everglades Restoration, so it's exciting to see that we're finally on the brink of realizing the opportunity provided by these long investments. And we request that the Army Corps and Water Management District thoughtfully craft a new lake regulation schedule that is beneficial to the lake, the coastal estuaries, the Everglades, and the water supply users, and those are all dependent upon flood protection. This success depends upon the responsibilities and a full NEPA and alternatives analysis that will be undertaken by the Corps and Water Management District staff, together with all of the stakeholders. It is this — through this federal project infrastructure and the balancing of these interests, together with the WSE regulation schedule, and the options that it has provided us with in the past, that we'll be able to accomplish the opportunities available for us. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Maynard Kuehl, J.P. Sasser, and then Bob Willis.

MR. KUEHL: Thank you. I have a little bit of an interest in this lake. I'm a snowbird, and I represent the people that are coming to Florida for recreation and so forth. I have a home in Moore Haven; love to fish. I think we have to realize how much the snowbird, per se, means to the impact financially to the state of Florida. The way this history is treating us now, if you will, we're going to be losing our tournaments, we're going to be losing people to come here, they're going to go to other states, if they're fishermen, and this is going to have an effect on the whole economy.

So that's just a comment I wanted to make, but I have questions rather than comments. As we've been out there this last three, four years, we've noticed so much spraying going on. And living on a farm, I'm a little bit familiar with that we need to kill the weeds and so forth, but a question I have is what was the herbicide that was used, and what was the recommended rates that was used? And when you look

at the bottom of that lake now, you see all those plants that are deteriorating, which is usually not the oxygen. Now, has there been any test on what the oxygen level is in the lake right now?

And the next comment I have, the lake level, if we're going to go down to 10, we're going to have to probably have airboats to go out there and fish. It's not sustainable.

So I hope this is all taken into consideration.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: J.P. Sasser.

MR. SASSER: Good evening. I'm J.P. Sasser. I'm a former mayor of the City of Pahokee, and a board member of One Florida Foundation.

Back in 2002, the City of Pahokee decided, since we were the only city on Lake Okeechobee, we — our best hope to diversify our economy and create jobs was to rebuild our marina and our campground, which we started very earnestly to do.

What these people don't realize is the land under the levee belongs to the State of Florida. The levee belongs to the federal government. The water belongs to somebody else. So when we started this process, we had to work with the water district; we had to work with the Army Corps of Engineers; we had to work with the DEP; we had to work with Palm Beach County. We did it, okay? So these organizations that are pitting against each other, you can look at Pahokee and see that, yes, they can work together.

Now, the issue of lowering the lake I think eludes the people on the coast. Those very same marinas that complained about the algae now are not going to be able to use the Okeechobee waterway to go from one coast to the other. So now they're going to be — it's a $55 million a year business for those boats going back and forth. I got this off the Army Corps website by the way.

Loss of the Okeechobee waterway would deplete the local economy $22 million. I don't think none of us have got $22 million to spare, okay?

Now, none of that has ever dealt with whatever level of the lake — whether it's high, low, or whatever — has the Corps addressed dredging Route 1 and Route 2 and maintaining the lake at a lower level. Right now, on your website, they're telling people Lake Okeechobee is not navigable, so all these people that are coming down, like the snowbirds or whatever, are going "let's steer clear of Lake Okeechobee because our boats can't go through there."

The hurricanes filled Route 2 — for those of you that don't know, Route 1 goes from C-43, or the St. Lucie River, straight across the lake to Moore Haven. Route 2 is the southern route that comes by us, okay. Hurricane debris was identified by the Corps in three locations in Route 2. The City of Pahokee got a $3 million grant from Florida Inland Navigation District to dredge that so the boats could come into our marina. The Corps would not grant us a permit until after they had rehabbed the dike through our area, so we lost that $3 million.

So as everybody is talking about Lake Okeechobee and the problems that Lake Okeechobee causes and everything like that, they — basically what you're saying is they want to sacrifice the ecology of Lake

Okeechobee for ulterior motives. If the water is too high, we lose the ecology; if the water is too low, we create another set of problems. It's not navigable after — my understanding, after eight feet you can't even pull water out of the lake, okay? So there's a lot of factors that we need to deal with.

The other thing is, yes, Lake Okeechobee is a septic tank, but it's Orlando's you-know-what in the lake, okay? Now, it's a simple question. If all of this water is coming north and filling into the lake, and you don't want discharges east and west, but you want to keep the lake low, where are you going to put that water? You know, we're going to have to have discharges to keep the lake low, so somebody needs to shake some sense into some people. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

I just want to remind everybody, we've got a little alarm down here for two minutes. We want to hear everyone's comments. Please try to keep it to two minutes, if possible, so that everyone gets their chance tonight while we have the crowd here.

Next is Bob Willis, Janet Taylor, and Amy Perry.

MR. WILLIS: I'm Bob Willis, and I'm probably one of the least qualified to speak tonight. I also am a snowbird, but I've been coming to Okeechobee for quite a number of years, 1980s or early 1990s, and Okeechobee has changed. The lake has changed from one of the best lakes that I had ever been on, to one of the worst lakes I've been on; and it's all been because of different styles of management that has been forced upon the lake by the different organizations that manage the lake: the Corps, the Water District, Florida Wildlife, you name it.

They need to get together. And I understand this comment session is only for lake management for the Corps of Engineers, but you can't do it in a vacuum. All three of them have to operate together. We can't have Florida Wildlife killing all the vegetation on the lake, and then the water people trying to control the discharges so it doesn't cause algae everywhere. If you have no vegetation in the lake, you're going to have algae going out of the lake. So the organizations need to work together instead of doing just a control plan for lake elevation.

And I agree with everybody, if it gets much lower, we might as well forget it. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: After Janet Taylor and Amy Perry, we have Stephanie Busin.

MS. TAYLOR: My name is Janet Taylor, and I'm a former Hendry County commissioner and president of Glades Lives Matter.

It seems like in every debate over water, the coastal residents disregard the concerns of our Glades communities. During the Senate Bill 10 debate, they want to take our land. Flood the fields, they said, blow up the dike, and let the water flow the way it used to. Now they want to take our water. They want to keep Lake Okeechobee at 10.5, which makes no sense unless, of course, you want to punish the people living directly south of the lake who depend on this water for business and for recreation.

We had to form a group called Glades Lives Matter — you see us with our yellow shirts and our caps and whatever — because many of those activists living on the coast began to tell people like Brian Mast what they think is best for us. I can tell you what they want is wrong for us. We would hope that the Corps would see through yet another attempt by the coastal elites to discriminate against us out here in the Glades.

Please consider the needs of our community. Our jobs depend on access to water in Lake Okeechobee. It's not just our community. Other South Florida cities like West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami depend on fresh water from Lake Okeechobee for drinking. With the Herbert Hoover Dike repair done, we want to see more water stored in the lake so there aren't as many discharges. We want to see this problem solved, as well.

This form of environmental injustice has no place in whatever schedule the Army Corps decides on when this process is complete.

So we thank you for coming tonight, and we hope that you will listen to our concern and develop a Lake Okeechobee schedule that works for everyone, not just the people on the coast.

Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

After Amy Perry, Stephanie Busin and Donna Perry.

MS. PERRY: Hi, my name is Amy Perry. I'm from Moore Haven, Florida, from part of the Glades, and I'm proud to be here. I just want to mention that not only being a part of the Glades, I'm also very proud to say I'm a Glades farmer, and that I'm a fifth-generation farmer.

So I'm up here tonight talking on behalf of my family and my future generations of children, who I also would like to be farmers. We need this lake to stay at high levels and to retain the water in Lake Okeechobee to keep from having a drought. We have had a drought in the past, and it was devastating to our lake. I remember this drought. I was young when it happened.

This is a very important matter for our area, and I want everyone to remember that here in the Glades, we not only grow sugarcane, but we grow rice and many other vegetables, and we supply our nation with these vegetables, especially in the winter. So when you guys are thinking of the next schedule, think about how we need water here in the Glades.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Donna Perry — or, sorry, Ronda Perry and Pete Quasius — I'm sorry, I may be getting that wrong.

MR. QUASIUS: That's all right. I know who it is.

MS. PERRY: I'm going to be very brief.

We're a family farm in Moore Haven. That was my daughter, Amy Perry, that was speaking. We are unique. We — like she said, we're the fourth generation and fifth generation.

Our communities here are close-knit. Hendry County, Glades County, we're all together as a family. When you come here and start messing with us, we will — we will fight back.

But we need our water, we need our communities together, and I'm so proud of everyone tonight who has spoken and have spoken well.

Thank you so much.

MR. QUASIUS: I'm Pete Quasius. I'm with the Audubon of the Western Everglades, and I know that Glades lives matter. I know that when there is a shortage of water, it impacts all of us.

I've lived on the Caloosahatchee for over 25 years. I know what happens when we don't get enough water to keep our seabales (phonetic) alive. I know what happens when too much water comes down and devastates our homes. We need a balanced program that takes care of all of our interests, that looks after all of the stakeholders, and we all enjoy the resources that we have. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Ross Perry, Ardis Hammock, and Carl Peery — Perry, sorry.

MR. PERRY: My name is Ross Perry. I'm also from Moore Haven, Florida. I'm here tonight representing FFA. And for those of you that don't know what FFA is, it's a high school organization that is agriculture based; and as Lake Okeechobee is in the center of our district, many of our chapters have to do fundraising off of agriculture, which lowering the lake level would not only affect farms, but it will affect how — how our chapters fundraise and have — it will affect a lot of things through our school and — schools, and this is a different perspective of what everybody else is coming up here speaking.

And I can flip hats a little bit and talk a little bit, I'm also from a farming family, and I'd just like to add that, yes, it does affect farms, very much so, and it's a necessity for our communities, our schools, and everything we've got. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

MS. HAMMOCK: Good evening. My name is Ardis Hammock. Kristine Petersen talked about people who are lifelong investees. My husband, Alan, and I are that. Our farm celebrated a hundred years last year. That's pretty rare.

(Applause)

MS. HAMMOCK: We live on the shore of Lake Okeechobee. I can look out my house and see the lake.

Mayor Gardner talked about history, looking back at history. What I'd like to say, from all the years of having to stand up here and argue with people about what's right and wrong with the lakes, the Everglades of Florida published in 1911, it talks about the lake level being 19 to 22.5 feet in 1908, right

around the time our farm was founded. Could we live with that now? No. Can we live with 10 foot, 5? No.

Politics will make you do things wrong every single time. Let me say that again. Politics will make you do things wrong.

(Applause)

MS. HAMMOCK: We need in Florida and in the Glades a change to Lake Okeechobee that's done right. Mr. Sasser talked about two things: 10 foot — 10 foot, 5, and no discharges. That's an oxymoron. Those two things cannot go together. It's not possible.

Many folks continue to talk about how we move forward. Well, I believe that science needs to drive us in this process, and not radical decisions that somebody has put out as a sound byte. We cannot live with sound bytes.

You should develop a schedule that serves the multi-purposes of Lake Okeechobee, and remember, a 10 foot, 5, Lake Okeechobee is an arbitrary phrase that someone has thrown out that folks have latched onto, and it's not true.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Next is Carl Perry, Kaleb Hyslope, and Enrique Acosta.

MR. PERRY: First I'd like to say thank you for everybody coming out; and second, I am the last Perry, okay?

I'm just — I'm a farmer. Obviously I'm here to talk about the needs of the farmers, what they need for water. I'm not — I'm not just asking for what the farmers need. I'm asking for — I've got friends that fish. I've got friends that rely on fishing, the marinas. We have friends on the coast. But, look, our farmers need the water, a consistent supply of water. We can't — we can't have off years — we can't — I've dealt with the Corps. Sometimes the Corps tells you we'll have water later. When it gets to 8 feet — let's go with this. When it gets to 8 feet, we're done pumping water. We can't get any more water. So I don't know if some folks think there's more water there, why don't — why don't we go to zero, we can't pump out forever, okay? We need water at — at that time. We can't wait a month for water because our crop's dead after that.

When y'all are looking at the data — which we want you to use science data, but please remember, you know, you start leveling all this out and adding it up and dividing it, if we don't have water for a month, our crops have already suffered. The damage is done.

I happen to grow sugarcane, so I plant that one time, and I expect that crop to last for four years. If y'all damage one year's crop, you've damaged me for four years, not just me, but all the people that work on the farm with me. It hurts.

I don't grow corn, beans, some of these other crops, but my neighbors do, and they — they rent land, and that helps us, helps the people that works on the farm. Those guys darn sure can't have off years.

These packing sheds, they can't — they can't get a bank to finance them for most of the years. They've got to have a good year — a reasonable year every year, and they certainly can't let lake water be the reason that they didn't make the crop. Thanks.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Kaleb Hyslope, Enrique Acosta, and then Kalei Sutton.

MR. HYSLOPE: My name is Kaleb Hyslope. I'm the sitting treasurer for the CCHS FFA chapter. I'm a seventh-generation Floridian, as well as a third-generation farmer. I got my first job on a farm when I was 15, and I've worked on three other farms since, including Mr. Perry's.

I'm currently employed on JH Farms, where I help to grow 120 acres of watermelon. Agriculture employs both my parents and feeds my entire family, as it does most families in my community. Easy access to lake water is crucial in growing healthy crops. Congressman Mast's plan to lower the lake level will be extremely detrimental to the farms and the EAA.

As most of you know, Southwest Florida can get fairly dry at times, and natural irrigation is just simply too unpredictable to count on. Without the lake, farmers could lose their entire crops, leaving them in debt and hungry.

Lake Okeechobee is the heart of the Everglades. Without her, my way of life wouldn't be the same. I urge you to consider this when making a decision.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Enrique Acosta, Kalei Sutton, Mitchell Hutchcraft.

Enrique? Kalei Sutton?

MS. SUTTON: Good evening, I'm Kalei Sutton, president of the Clewiston Christian FFA chapter.

I would like to touch on the proposal that Congressman Mast brought to you concerning the water quality issues in South Florida. He believes that we should discharge extreme amounts of water from Lake Okeechobee, keeping lake levels at or below 10 feet. We have seen lake levels low at times, most recently in 2008 due to natural causes, wintertime drought. Around this time, we had a few years of incredibly low lake levels due to dry winter conditions. The lake being dry ended up causing restrictions on irrigation for crops across south Florida.

If Congressman Mast's proposal is pursued, the consequences will be dire to the lives of those in South Florida. Such low lake levels will put many out of jobs, including those who plan to pursue agriculture in their futures, including myself. Not only would it cost many locals their incomes and future, it may also affect wildlife, potentially causing wildfires in the Everglades or Lake Okeechobee, and endangering many species of animals.

Lowering the level of Lake Okeechobee will ultimately cause more harm than good. I strongly urge you to consider these issues when deciding your plan of action concerning Lake Okeechobee. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Mitch Hutchcraft, Steve Smith, and Allie Biggs.

MR. HUTCHCRAFT: Good evening. My name is Mitch Hutchcraft, and I'm here on behalf of King Ranch. King Ranch is a landowner and producer in multiple counties: Lee, Hendry, Martin, and Palm Beach County. We also consider ourselves one of the first stewards of land, along with all of the good farmers in this room tonight.

For expediency, I'll just second the comments of Mayor Gardner because she hit a lot of points that I wanted to, but I'll move on and touch on a couple of other issues.

First, I think it's important to state that we all in this room care about water and that we want it managed as wisely as possible. We also agree that you should consider the input of everybody, from the heartland to the coast. But in this community, we recognize this is a modified system that was designed to achieve a number of complicated outcomes — water supply, flood protection, agriculture, and the environment — and, unfortunately, I'm not sure that everybody understands the demands and constraints of a manmade system like we have.

But as you initiate your research, I ask you to remember that the lake is subject to decades of science, and that science is based on data and studies and modeling and project planning, and I'd ask that you please rely on this work, as well as the need for completing the other suite of foundational CERP and CEP projects.

And at this point I just want to say thank you to the hard-working people at the Water Management District. You're doing awesome work in challenging times, and I urge you to keep your heads up and keep doing the right thing.

As you start your planning, I want to just encourage you to recognize the commitments that were made in the LORS of '08, particularly the savings clause which protects permitted users that rely on the lake water supply, in addition to the communities and growers. These promises were a result of dropping the lake level in LORS, and we shouldn't just start at the lower level. We need to recognize the savings clause.

As you start considering setting the schedule, please recognize that in addition to the communities, agriculture, lake littoral shelves, the SDA south of the lake, the Caloosahatchee MFLs, they all require wisely-managed lake levels, and we can't get it wrong for the sake of political outcomes.

And finally, I encourage you to look north to ensure that any lake schedule incorporates necessary retention, storage, and treatment closer to the source of the 90 percent — 95 percent inflows into the lake, because if you don't, your only option will be continued discharge to the coast. So thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Next is Steve Smith, Allie Biggs, and John Ahern.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Allie Biggs is (unintelligible).

MR. SMITH: Good evening. I'm Steve Smith with Gulf Citrus Growers Association, and I just want to reiterate a lot of things that have been said tonight.

There have been a lot of good points made. There are a lot of families and stakeholders affected by this lake schedule. It's a daunting task to create a schedule to try to balance all the effects, and the Gulf Citrus Growers Association, we support a balanced approach based on science and not emotion or politics. All the stakeholders have to be considered. We understand that the water supply, environmental effects, recreation, it's all part of the equation.

We just ask that you please take your time and perform a comprehensive analysis to create a schedule that's responsive to all the needs of the region based on — based on the data and not the emotion or political pressure. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

John Ahern, Donald Strenth.

COMMISSIONER AHERN: I spoke at the beginning of the meeting.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you, sir.

Chip Douthit, Mary Franklin, Skip Simmonds.

MS. FRANKLIN: I pass.

MR. DOUTHIT: I've been out here on this lake for 35 years —

THE REPORTER: Excuse me, sir, who are you?

MR. DOUTHIT: Chip Douthit.

I've fished tournaments all over the country, and we've had the greatest lake in the United States here for years and years, and it's not that way anymore. I've seen a low down to 8.75. It does bring the grass back if the water is clear. But as silly and messed up as this lake is because we don't have vegetation in it — you've got to have photosynthesis in the water for grass to grow. I don't know whether to raise it up — I don't want to lower it down. Raising it up I think would help us more than anything.

But we're just in tough shape on the lake the way it is right now, so I hate to see it, the best lake in the world, go downhill like it has, but we need to do something. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

MR. SIMMONDS: Hi, my name is Skip Simmonds, and the issue that's most important to me is, just like everybody else, the water quality, of course. We live on the second largest lake in the continental United States, however, the fish is kind of small. We're all part of a fishing team here at the Roland Martin Marina, Mary Ann Martin's marina, and the important issue here is for the fisherman.

The grass that was blown out during Hurricane Irma, the spray issue, all these things that take the fishing areas away — the fish are out there. I disagree that this lake is the worst — there's still a lot of fish to be caught on Lake Okeechobee. Some of our fishermen may not be able to catch them, but the fish are there, and I can attest to that firsthand, the fish are there. They may be in open water, they just need to come into the grass, but there's less grass now.

So the issue here is stop the spraying, let the grass grow. If the water is going to be 12 feet, 12 and a half feet, then it will clear up. I think it will clear up at that level. 10 feet, I don't see that to be a good — a good thing for our lake here.

I've been here almost 40 years. I'm not from Florida. Some of you know me; some of you don't. But I enjoy all the fishing that we get to do here, and people — one of the first things that people ask when they come to be guided on Lake Okeechobee, "What about all this poisonous water?" You take them out on the lake, they say, "Man, this looks pretty good." This is not like what they see on TV.

So water quality is important to all of us; it's important to the fishermen, also. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Captain Doug Harris, Cris Costello, John Henshaw.

CAPTAIN HARRIS: Good evening, everyone, Captain Doug Harris.

What we have here is we have an economic gem. This whole lake is one big economic boon for all the surrounding communities; and when this water is down to 10; 10,8; there's nothing you can do with it. You can't boat on it; you can't fish on it; big boats can't come through it. Every one of those marinas around that lake will be inaccessible, every single one of them. Mary Ann's and Pahokee, they'll be dead. They'll just — they'll be decimated, this whole community all the way around this lake, and there's a trickle-down effect. It's not just the immediate communities. It's the farmers, it's the packers, it's the guides, it's everybody involved with this whole system. It just — it will kill it.

Now, we've got to keep this lake somewhere between — I'd say 12 and a half to 14 and a half foot is perfect, because it can clean up, the weeds can grow — the noxious weeds, they're going to grow. We're going to have to spot treat them.

If we drop it back down to 10 feet again, we're going to be right back to square one, because the entirety of Bay Bottom, Harney Pond, all these tens of thousands of acres of marsh that are in there are just going to be overcome by bullrush again, and here we are, we're going to be back to square one, spray, spray, spray. And we keep putting all this poison in it.

There's 732 square miles of water there. There's plenty of water for everybody, and we just need to utilize it and control it correctly. We have the ability; we have the technology; and it can be done. We need to do it that way. Thanks.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Cris Costello, John Henshaw, and then Tammy Jackson-Moore.

MS. COSTELLO: I'm short.

Hello everyone, Cris Costello from the Sierra Club.

We have — we will supply the Corps with written comments at some point before the 31st of March, but we have a couple of requests. The next time there are public meetings, we would request that detailed information on the safety rating of the dike as it is now, and what it will be when the repairs are finished, is done in really serious detail. Considering the fact that today you're in front of many folks who live along the shore of Lake Okeechobee, and there are many more around the lake, the safety rating is something that is very important to the club, and I think very important to everyone who is at risk of the — the hurricanes that can be produced here in Florida or come to Florida. That's request number one.

Request number two is that we're very happy, the club is very happy that you're having a meeting here in Clewiston, because lots of people around the lake are so much more impacted than so many people around the state, but Clewiston is only one community on the southern border of the lake. Moore Haven — there are a lot of folks that won't drive from Moore Haven to Clewiston, and there are many more folks that won't drive from Belle Glade or South Bay to Clewiston, and we would request that you have a meeting in Moore Haven, and you have a meeting in South Glade — South Bay, so those folks can — can also participate to the fullest extent. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Raise your hand if you're from the Glades.

(Audience responds en masse.)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

MR. HENSHAW: Good afternoon, and I want to thank you very much for the opportunity to speak tonight. I'm not a politician. I'm not an elected official. I'm just a citizen. However, I live on the West Coast, and so I apologize — I wasn't able to make the meetings on the West Coast, so I thought I'd come here.

After listening to everybody here tonight, I've learned an awful lot; and what I've learned is the water in Okeechobee and the distribution of that water impacts all of us. It's not just East Coast; it's not just West Coast; and it's not just this is community. It's all of Southwest Florida.

And I think the Army Corps — I think this is the right process to make sure that we use this water the most effective way as we can, because all lives matter, whether it's the Glades or whether it's Fort Myers or whether — I don't know Stuart so I can't say, but Stuart, whatever, the entire state or lower part of the state requires adequate water.

We have the wherewithal using the right science, using the right history — as the mayor properly stated, we have a long record of what's going on and how to properly manage our water. We ought to take advantage of all of that. Coming from the West Coast, coming from the East Coast, coming from south or this region, all of us can work together, and, believe me, no one should point fingers at anyone. All of us have a stake in this, all of us have a responsibility to fix it, and I think we have the wherewithal to do that. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Tammy Jackson-Moore, Bob Gallic, Scott Martin.

MS. JACKSON-MOORE: My comments have already been made, thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you, ma'am.

When you come up to the mic, just remember to state your name, please, for the record.

MR. GALLIC: My name — my name is Bob Gallic. I've been a fisherman on Okeechobee for about 35 years.

I happen to live over in — over in Delray Beach, Florida, so — but I happen to also live in a place that depends on water to keep saltwater intrusion from happening, because I'm the last body of water before you get to salt — saltwater, so I realize how important it is to have a certain amount of water.

It seems to me, looking at it from an outsider's point of view, that it seems pretty simple. We need to get the lake level down for a while, get the virgin grass to come up again — and I never heard complain — and this is probably the — probably the last thing that I'd like to — to make a comment, I've never heard anyone, whether they be from the eastern/western communities, the farmers, or anyone complain if the water was around 13 foot, so around 13 foot seems to be a very good area. And I know it has to go up and down in — in — in order to stay healthy, but I think the lake would clear up around 13 feet, and everyone would be happy, from what I'm hearing of the people that — the agriculture, the farmers, the people on the East and West Coast, I think everyone would be happy about that.

So I think everybody can work together and get this thing done, and I think around 13 foot would probably be about what we need in order to keep Okeechobee — keep the fisherman and everybody else happy.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Scott Martin, Judy Sanchez, and Barbara Dykes.

MR. MARTIN: How are you-all this evening? Great to see everybody come out and support the lake and support our communities around the lake.

You know, I hear about a 10-foot lake schedule. Let me tell you what a 10-foot lake schedule does. It makes the lake unusable, because we're going to have droughts, and we're going to have waters that drop below the level that any boat can get around Lake Okeechobee, any tourist or snowbird can use the lake, or any farmer can pull water out of the lake to use to grow their crops. And it seems like maybe someone that's supporting that would be somebody who wants to kill tourism around Lake Okeechobee and also kill farming, so I totally reject that level. I think a level of 12 and a half or 13 to around 15 is a good level.

I think the problem that we've all dealt with over the years is mismanagement of those water levels because the Army Corps of Engineers, you have a lot of red tape you go through.

I would propose that you guys, when we come up with a study, first of all, that you promote that or you make your decision on that study based on the people in this room and around this lake, not people that — that have never been on this lake.

Secondly, also to be a little bit more proactive, to make adjustments to those levels. I don't hear a lot of people talking about, say, fishing vegetation.

Now the question for you, how much money will be spent on the restoration of the levee? Billions, right? You've probably got that number somewhere, I would imagine.

I have a question for you though, another one. How many acres of submerged vegetation is in Lake Okeechobee right now?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: About 5,000.

MR. MARTIN: You know that, but they don't. That's my point.

The coast complains about water quality and discharges. I've grown up here my whole life, and I remember vegetation growing a mile out in the lake. We don't have that anymore. I challenge any of you, if you come back tomorrow with a handful of submerged vegetation from this lake, I'll give you a hundred dollars, because there isn't any. There's none, and that's never happened before, but yet we're dealing with some of the biggest — some of the biggest issues on both coasts, and we have a gigantic lake that's a circle, and we have no filter in this lake.

So what is the right lake level? It's 12 and a half to 13 to 15, but it requires management, and the water levels need be based on the amount of submerged vegetation that's in Lake Okeechobee. So if we have a lot of grass in the lake — there are times that you might want to bring it up because of a hurricane, and we can kind of survive that issue, and vice versa, but being able to manage the lake based on vegetation is very important.

And also slow the flow. The Kissimmee River is not the Kissimmee River anymore. It's a canal that flows right into the lake, flows in faster than it can go out, and that's a bad problem.

There's also been proposed wells, storage wells underground up north of the lake that will slow some of that flow, as well, and I ask everyone to support that.

But we need to base our decisions on not a 10-foot lake. We need to base our decisions on how to get submerged vegetation back in Lake Okeechobee. That is a giant fish tank, and we have no filter. A 10-foot lake will make it unusable.

And let me say this, last thing. A high lake, we haven't talked about that. Don't be fooled, because this lake is being — this levee is being rebuilt, that someone couldn't say let's just make the lake 16 or 17 foot, 19 foot when we need to, and then the coast doesn't have to get water, because a 16- or 17-foot lake will kill the lake. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Judy Sanchez, Barbara Dykes, and Carlos Garcia.

MS. SANCHEZ: Good evening. Judy Sanchez, I represent U.S. Sugar, but I'm also a lifelong resident of the Glades. I live in Belle Glade.

I'm going to say how happy I am to see so many of our Glades people out here tonight, also to welcome those who came over from the coast and other areas around the lake. I'm also happy that the Corps of Engineers is holding these meetings.

I think it's important to remember why they're holding these meetings in so many places, and that's because there are so many areas of South Florida that depend on Lake Okeechobee, not just those of us around the lake who depend upon the lake regulation schedule for the flood control risk, but also water supply. And you've heard a lot of our farmers here tonight talk about water supply for agriculture, but the lake also provides water supply for the municipalities of the southeast coast, water supply for the environment, the Everglades, the Caloosahatchee River. It also provides water supply for our Native American tribes, who depend on Lake Okeechobee. Also for navigation that you've heard, the boats that depend on it to come across the lake. The fish and wildlife depend on Lake Okeechobee, not only in the lake but in the Everglades, the endangered species, the fish and wildlife along the Caloosahatchee and in their estuaries, and also recreation.

Not just on the lake — you see a lot of our fishermen here — but if that water goes down the Caloosahatchee River and all the associated wildlife, recreation, the river that keeps out the saltwater intrusion — the Caloosahatchee depends on water flow from Lake Okeechobee, and if we have extremely low levels in Lake Okeechobee, that also limits the amount of water that can be sent down the Caloosahatchee, and beneficial uses, because — and I love Reverend Nolin who was up here, the minister of our church. You talked a little bit about some scripture from the Bible — and this is not in the Bible, but I like to remind people, if you want to hear God laugh, tell him your plans. If man plans to take that lake down to 10,5 — we see what Mother Nature does when we dry that lake down, then Mother Nature takes it down another 2 or 3 or 4 feet. That's devastation to everything around the lake.

So please, if you didn't speak tonight, send in your comments, there is an email — if you don't do email, they'll take it in written form. There's a snail mail address.

But again, thank you, people of the Glades, for coming out. We thank our coastal residents. We're all in this together. Send your comments in, because this is not about making it better for you, or making it better for us. This is about getting the water right for all of us. Thank you for coming out tonight.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Barbara Dykes, Carlos Garcia, and Mary Ann Martin.

Barbara Dykes? Carlos Garcia? Carlos? Mary Ann Martin?

MS. MARTIN: Well, I don't know about you, but I'm upset. I'm angry, frustrated, and I don't know what to tell you.

This lake is the love of my life. I saw it 40 years ago. It was the most beautiful lake I'd ever seen. It was solid pepper grass. All the way across there were lanes for the boats to run; and on the horizon, I'll never forget this, there were boats, and every boat had a pole in the water, and it was bent. They were out there shellcracker fishing. I never knew what a shellcracker was. This lake spoke to me at the time, and it's totally different now than it was then.

We have let agencies come into our lake, and they've poisoned it. They have sprayed chemicals; they have taken this key filtration system of this lake, and it's gone. The grass is gone. The shrimp grass is gone; the pepper grass is gone; the bullrushes are gone. It's all gone. You've got a mudhole out there.

And all of these chemicals they spray has gone to the bottom, and you have this black jelly all over the bottom of our lake, all over the white sand. It's covered. You stir it up with the wind, and it turns as black as that curtain. No sunlight can penetrate that water.

The fish can't survive because their habitat is gone. Everything is gone. *Hydrilla* is gone. They said *hydrilla* was bad. *Hydrilla* is great. Anything that can grow in this lake is good. It's the filtration system that we need.

There's a lot of things that we need on this lake. We need ASR wells, we need deep well injection wells on this lake so these devastating discharges aren't going down the Caloosahatchee River. We need to have these wells up along the Kissimmee River to take the water that they pump into our pristine lake and poison it. We have the capability of doing this, but everybody sits around and talks, and they talk about it. Nothing gets done, and I'm sick of it. I'm sad. I feel like I've lost my best friend out on that lake. I don't know what our future is. I don't know what these guys are going to do. I don't know, but who does know? The Corps? South Florida Water Management? Who — who — who's the one that makes these decisions?

We've had sprayers out there. I want to know how many pounds, how many tons of Roundup has been put in our lake. Does anybody know? No, they don't, but they sure order the chemicals.

I want to know why we're killing a lake that has given us so much, and it's given me a great life. My children, they've all been raised here. We have tourism that comes from all over the world just to see this lake, and I don't want them to see it. I want to hide it. I want them to go somewhere else, because I know this lake doesn't have the potential that it used to have, and it's all man's problems. It is. We've done this. We've let them done (sic) it.

I have been at these meetings in South Florida Water Management, and I have literally taken my shoe off and beat it on the table because I'm so angry. But you know what? There's nothing we can do. They have their agendas, and I don't know what the agenda is, but it's not for the lake.

The lake is in the worst condition right now it has ever been. The lake level is crucial to us. Getting rid of this black, snotty gunk on the bottom is crucial for us. There's so many things that we have to do, and we have to stand up right now, everybody around this lake has got to stand up and say, "We've had enough. Stop it." Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Taren Wadley, Earthalene Boldin —

MS. BOLDIN: Pass.

MR. ENGLE: — Pauline West.

MS. WEST: Pass.

MR. ENGLE: Taren? Lon Fleming? Clayton Humphries? Nyla Pipes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Nyla.

MR. ENGLE: Nyla, I'm sorry.

MR. HUMPHRIES: Good evening. I'm Clayton Humphries. I live up in St. Lucie, and I grew up in Okeechobee.

One of the questions I see up here tonight is what would we measure success at. Earlier, the first public speaker said this message, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." Well, that comment is hard for a lot of us, it's hard for me, but it's true. I've already heard a few of you-all say this tonight, and this is the real answer. If we're going to solve this, we have to work with the coastal communities.

The governor wants it to be a success and finally get to put most, possibly all of this, behind us. Well, we've got to try to make most of us as happy as possible. It's not just about our own communities. It's about them, too. It's a really big page to look at. Whether we like it or not, working with the coastal communities is the only way to make that happen.

Let's make it known that we aren't the problem. These communities down here aren't what's caused all this. Let's make it known that Orlando, and what it's done to our state with its watershed, is falling only on the blame of our communities (sic).

Today I listened to the eastern coastal communities, and we were all invited to a meeting. I commented this one thing, "Why wasn't the communities of Okeechobee invited?" I said if you want to make this a real success, these people need to be considered in every meeting just as much as communities here are. We don't need to be pitted against each other like we're fighting each other. We're fighting for the same thing.

A lot of you talk about the lake staying at about 13 feet, 14, 15 feet. I agree with that. I remember falling in off the dock when I was a kid the first time I came to it. It was beautiful, white sand on the bottom.

What I'm saying is I truly believe this is our chance to stand here together, a chance to stand as a whole state, as one Florida, figure out exactly what's going to affect us to the best, not the worst, not just ourselves, something selfish. It affects our communities, sure, but it affects theirs, too.

So, again, if we can work with our neighbor, we really can come to the best outcome. Our state is currently at 22 million people shoved on a peninsula, saltwater intrusion coming in from three sides. The lake is what makes us a utopia, an ideal place for growing food and crops. Our lives and our jobs

have no less value than those on the coast. Well, let's remember that those jobs and lives on the coast have no less value than ours.

It's going to be hard, and it's going to take an effort for it to work, but I think that all of us around here know exactly what hard work is.

So what would make this a success? The least number of people and acres negatively impacted by what we do. So I encourage you, the Army Corps of Engineers, to listen to us as the public, but to work with us, as well, and we'll work with you. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

MS. PIPES: He's a hard act to follow.

Nyla Pipes, One Florida Foundation, and I also am a coastal resident. I also started my day at a meeting in Stuart, Martin County, with Congressman Brian Mast, where he encouraged our coastal communities to get together and fight for 10 and a half feet.

I have spent a lot of time studying and working really hard on all of our water issues, and I tried really hard to encourage everybody to not get into these parochial silos where we meet in Clewiston and talk about Clewiston issues; and we meet in Stuart, and we talk about Stuart issues.

And to sit there this morning and hear people rallying behind 10 and a half feet, when I know that evaporation is the number one way that we lose water off the lake; and when I know that Grassy Waters Preserve to the south of us for municipal water supply needs that freshwater head that comes from Lake

Okeechobee; and when I know that my neighbors, my neighbors in Okeechobee County, have problems with saltwater intrusion in their wells when the lake is too low; when I know that our water table is becoming higher and higher, whether you believe in climate change or not. Sea level rising really is proving itself to be true around here.

So we have some problems, and a lot of them are political. People get something into their head, and they think they're right. And I encourage each and every one of us to really look in the mirror and to really examine whether we're basing the things we say and the things we do on emotion or science.

We have lots of science. This is not the first time we've looked at lake levels. This is not the first time communities have been pitted against each other with rhetoric and politics. I think this time we can do better.

So I ask you all, get out of your comfort zone. Don't just meet in Clewiston or Okeechobee because it's easy. Come to Stuart on February 19th, show up, meet your neighbors, make some friends, talk over coffee, really compare notes, bring your history to meet their history, because that's the only way we're going to get through all of this.

And as far as the Army Corps goes, you know, I cannot really add much to the facts that have been given tonight, but the facts are already there, so let's just follow them. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

Clayton Humphries?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: He just spoke.

MR. ENGLE: Sorry. Lon Fleming?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: He left.

MR. ENGLE: That's the last comment card that I have.

What I'd like to say is thank you so much for coming out. If anyone has something to say that they thought of tonight, submit it in writing. As you heard some of the folks say, you can submit it in writing to us tonight; you can write it and mail it in; you can email it in; and we'll hear all of it. All of the people count.

So thank you for coming out, and have a good evening.

(Proceedings concluded at 8:02 p.m.)

CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

STATE OF FLORIDA

COUNTY OF LEE

I, Deborah Bruns, Certified Shorthand Reporter, do hereby certify that I was authorized to and did report the foregoing proceedings, and that the transcript, pages 1 through 71, is a true and correct record of my stenographic notes to the best of my skill and training.

Dated this 20th day of February, 2019.

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Deborah M. Bruns, CSR

(This transcript was electronically signed.)

(*Reformatted by Guy Ivie, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which reduced number of pages to 31*.)