

In the Matter of Army Corps of Engineers:
LAKE OKEECHOBEE SYS OPERATING MANUAL

February 28, 2019

Brickell Key Court Reporting
701 Brickell Avenue, Suite 1550
Miami, Florida 33131
305.407.9933

www.brickellcourtreporting.com

MEETING CONDUCTED BEFORE E. TIMOTHY GYSAN, PE, PMP, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER, UNITED STATES ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS (USACE) JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT

In Re:

MEETING PROCEEDINGS

Lake Okeechobee System Operating the Central & Southern Florida (C&SF) System Operating Plan

Volume I

Pages 1-40 [Ed.: This file has been reformatted for readability, which has changed the page count.]

Miami Gardens, Florida

Monday, February 28, 2019

The following pages constitute Volume I of the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual Meeting. The meeting proceedings were held in the above-captioned matter before E. TIMOTHY GYSAN, located at the North Dade Regional Library, 2455 Northwest 183 Street, Miami Gardens, Florida, 33056; beginning at approximately 5:42 p.m.; transcribed by Dianne Sarkisian, Certified Court Reporter, Brickell Key Court Reporting, a Notary Public in and for the State of Florida.

PRESENTERS:

E. Timothy Gysan, · · Senior Project Manager, USACE - Jacksonville District

Lt. Colonel Jennifer Reynolds, Deputy District Director, USACE - Jacksonville District

Jason Engle, Chief, Water Resources Engineering Branch, USACE - Jacksonville District

Monday, February 28, 2019

Miami Gardens, Florida

5:42 p.m.

LT. REYNOLDS:· Okay, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you so much for your patience. Thank you for coming out this evening.

I'm Lieutenant Colonel Jennifer Reynolds. I'm the deputy district director for South Florida, for the Jacksonville District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and I just want to thank each and every one of you tonight for braving all of the traffic and coming out to spend a little bit of time with us tonight to talk about the Lake Okeechobee operating schedule.

So we are looking at a revision of the Lake Okeechobee Operating Manual, but we're not just looking at tweaking an old manual. We're fundamentally looking at the way that we operate the lake and move water within this system, and that's why we selected the name for this effort to be the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual, because this term is what we will need to be looking forward to as all of our certain projects come online is how we operate the system, not how we operate individual projects, although that's important, but how do these projects start to interact, and so our project manager is going to tell you a little bit more about that and talk about the process.

We have heard from over 1,600 people so far at our public meetings about this and we have gotten over a thousand written comments so far. Each and every one of those comments is critically important to the process, as are all of the ones that we'll receive tonight and all of the comments that we'll receive through the rest of the comment period, which runs through the month of March.

And I just want to thank each and every one of you for coming out and letting us know what's important to you as we look at this process. We've heard a lot of comments about concerns that people have, about desires on how we operate the system better, frustrations, anger about some of the situations, some of the results of our water management. Those are important for us to hear and we appreciate your feedback on those things. It's important that we hear those things, and it's important that we get your comments on record so that we can fully consider them as we look at the new operating schedule.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to Tim Gysan, who's going to introduce our team that's here and give you a brief overview of the project.

MR. GYSAN:· Thank you, Ma'am.

All right. Again, my name is Tim Gysan. I'm the project manager for the Corps on this effort. Thank you again for coming out tonight. Your participation throughout this process is vital to what we're doing and where we'll end at the end of this, so thank you for being here.

Rather than introduce everybody from our team, I'll just say, everybody from the Corps has a nametag on that's part of this team. Feel free to talk to them. If you have any specific questions, they'll try to answer for you outside of this public comment period. We also have several folks from our team with

the South Florida Water Management District here with us tonight as well. So I'll get into this pretty quick and cover what our process looks like and then let you guys have your time to make comments.

So just so everybody is aware — and you may already be — Lake Okeechobee and the Herbert Hoover Dike are part of the Central and Southern Florida Project. Lake Okeechobee is surrounded by the Herbert Hoover Dike, and which plays a vital part in the C&SF project.

Both of those beaches were developed in response to deadly flooding that occurred in the early part of the 20th century due to some severe storms. The project was put in place with the flood control project and works extremely well.

The Corps of Engineers are the operators and maintainers of the lake and the dike itself as opposed to the rest of the C&SF system, which we partner with the Water Management District to operate and maintain.

The way we operate the lake is according to an operating manual, which is developed through a public process. That is why we are here now is to review the operations and engage in that public process to develop a new operating manual.

It's important to remember as part of this effort, we're not recommending any new infrastructure, so we're not going to be recommending any new canals or structures or storage features or anything like that — this is an operating plan — but what we will do is look at future infrastructure that will be coming online as part of the CERP or the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, including things like C-43, C-44 reservoirs, which will allow additional flexibility within the system.

So why are we doing it now? There are a couple of main reasons. First, back when the existing schedule, the LORS 2008 was developed, the team that did that recognized two key points that would trigger a re-look at that schedule, the first being completion of the Herbert Hoover Dike rehab, and the second being completion of the CERP features which I mentioned, C-43 and C-44.

All of those things will be happening within the next four years, so now's the perfect time to start looking at that schedule and see how we can operate the lake in conjunction with those features.

The second and equally as important reason that we're doing it now is we received specific authorization from Congress last year in the Water Resources Development Act of 2018, which told the Corps: Look at a new schedule, expedite that effort, and finish it in conjunction with the completion of Herbert Hoover Dike rehab. That was partially in response to the lake releases and issues we've seen with those in the past few years as well as the algae issue, which everybody has seen in the news this past year.

As everybody understands the federal process, we're required to look at the impacts to the human environment under the NEPA policy, which is the National Environmental Policy Act, and that requires us, when we do any projects, any — any branch of the federal government, to look at what the impacts of those projects would be on, uh, on the human and the environment around the projects. The way we document that is through either an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement.

And this is... The first part of that process is the NEPA scoping meeting, which is the first phase of that. And you can see that on this timeline, which gives you an overall picture of when the schedule, overall

schedule looks like and the different phases that we'll be embarking on as we go. As you can see, this is about a four-year effort. We get a record of decision, which enables us to implement the new operations for the land.

We're now in the first phase, which is the public input and planning phase, and that's where we're out here listening to all of our stakeholders, all our interested parties who have concerns and issues that they would like to have us consider as we move forward in this process.

As part of that first phase, we'll also be holding some planning workshops, the first set in — later in May of this year and then later towards the end of the summer. And in those, what we'll do is take feedback, what we hear from these scoping meetings and provide answers to questions, work through the scope, start providing information that we feel people need to hear from the comments that we get, and then eventually start forming preliminary alternatives so we can start looking at different ideas on how we want to operate the lake differently and how that impacts different parts of the system and that will be during this planning phase.

We then move into alternative evaluation. That's where we actually look at different schedules and simulate those to computer models, provide data and feedback and performance metrics for everyone to consider, get feedback on those through public engagement such as this, so we can get input from everyone on what you think the best plan will be.

We'll then document that in the system operating manual as well as the NEPA document. That draft document will go out for review so everybody will have a chance to see what — what those documents look like, provide comments back to us. We will address those and then provide a final document for everyone's review.

So the main thing to take away from this slide — not all of this — is that there's going to be tons of opportunities for engagement throughout this process, and it's vital that you are part of that process because this is a collaborative effort. So we really need you to be part of this as we move forward.

And as everyone probably knows, the lake is used by lots of different stakeholders for lots of different reasons whether it be people counting on it for flood protection, for recreation, for water supply, for navigation — lots of different things — but all of those different uses and things that people count on the lake for don't necessarily have the same operations that are beneficial for those uses. So it makes it challenging to try to work through and come up with something that everybody gets a benefit from. This is something to just kind of be aware as we go through the process.

So as we're getting input during this phase or the scoping phase, we've come up with a few questions that we would like some feedback on. It would help us as we're developing the framework for the scope of this effort.

Now, you're not limited to talking about these things, but these are what we determined would really give us the best feedback, and that is:· What issues are important to you? What study outcomes do you want to see? And how would you measure success at the end of this study?

So keep those in mind as you're providing feedback, whether it's the public comment now or whether it's written comment as we're moving forward. But as I said, you're free to comment on anything you want, but these are just the things that we identified that are important to us.

So scoping comment opportunities, we'll be taking comments until March 31st, at the end of next month, and there's different ways that you can provide those comments, whether you choose to give a public statement right now or provide a written statement today. You can also send email comment in the email address above: LakeOComments@usace.army.mil and that will be an email address that will be taking comments throughout this process, and that's something you can always send us an email on things that you're thinking that relate to the project. You could also send a letter or written comments to Dr. Ann Hodgson, who's our environmental leader in this effort at the address above.

And then also throughout the process, I just want everybody to be aware of the website that you see in front of you here: <https://www.saj.usace.army.mil/LOSOM>.

And throughout this process, we'll be posting materials from engagements like this. The transcripts from these meetings will be available on the website. We'll be providing information on future meetings that we'll be having. So it will be a good place to go as a resource as we move forward in this effort.

And again, I just want to highlight that we will be having workshops following these public meetings starting towards — probably towards the end of May of this year, so be on the lookout for those. I look forward to having everyone participate in those.

And with that, that finishes up the presentation. So I will turn it over to Jason Engle, who is the chief of our Water Resources Engineering Branch in our Engineering Division to facilitate the public comment session.

And again, thank you for coming out today.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you, Tim.

So again, welcome. Thank you for coming out. As we said, this is our — this is our scoping period. This is your chance to have your voice heard.

The way that this process is going to work is that you'll have two minutes at the microphone. Make your statements. This is distinctive because this is us receiving feedback. This is us taking that down. It's not really a question-and-answer period. When we come back in May and again after that, we'll be prepared to have two-way interaction.

But right now, what we want to do is we want to hear what the concerns are. Get them all in our record so that we can go off, and when we come back, we will have gotten questions to all of the — or answers to all the questions. We will have looked at all the issues that are brought up.

So as we said, we have a court reporter. This is all going to be provided through our website later, so you'll have transcripts of these and all the other meetings. In fact, this is the, I think, ninth of meetings.

So with that, we'll start out with elected officials and we have one here today. We have from Senator Marco Rubio's office, Darius Redding.

MR. REDDING: I'm just here to listen to commentary.

MR. ENGLE: Very good. Thank you.

LT. REYNOLDS:· And Stephen Leahy's here from Congressman Mast's office as well.

MR. ENGLE:· Very good. Do you wish to make any comments?

MR. LEAHY:· No, sir.

MR. ENGLE:· First, uh... First name on the list tonight, Kellie Ralston.

And I'll just ask that when you come to the mic, obviously state your name and any affiliation you have, so that the court reporter can take that down.

MS. RALSTON:· Thank you. I don't know how I got honored to be first, but happy to be here.

I'm Kellie Ralston with the American Sportfishing Association. We are the trade association for the sport fishing industry nationwide. Florida is a huge part of our business. It is the "Fishing Capital of the World," a 9.6 billion dollar economic impact in the state in both freshwater and saltwater fishing, supporting 128,000 jobs in the state, so it's — it's a big business.

We would encourage the corps — and appreciate the opportunity to comment on this process — but as you develop this new operations schedule for the lake, we would urge you to consider ecological and fisheries impacts to both Lake Okeechobee, the estuaries, and to Florida Bay and consider science-based options to minimize impacts to those areas, both inland and coastal.

Perhaps looking at timing, volume, duration and mechanics of discharges are things that you could consider as well as lake level adjustments. And we certainly encourage options that send clean water south to Florida Bay; minimizing ecological harm while Everglades restoration projects proceed outside of this situation is critical for the continued success of our industry in the state.

And speaking about what success would look like, uh, healthy habitat and fisheries in both Lake Okeechobee, the estuaries, and the bay are important to us.

So appreciate the opportunity to comment and look forward to working with you throughout this process. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE:· Thank you.

Next, Troy Brown.

MR. BROWN:· Hello. My name is Troy Brown. I grew up and spent most of my life here in Miami. A few years ago I moved up to Port Saint Lucie and got to witness quite a horrific summer for our waters up there. So today, I'm speaking on behalf of the estuary.

The massive freshwater discharges that are sent our way, clean or not, are slowly destroying the natural defense systems of the estuary, and killing long stretches of seagrass beds, which are natural filters that clean out nutrients such as nitrogen from our water.

When discharges come in consecutive years, such as the past three years, it's disastrous for any hopes of rejuvenation. And then we have special discharges that contain cyanobacteria.

Does the Army Corps have any legal obligation to deem water safe for human contact before it is diverted to communities? It certainly seems like a moral obligation. Has the Army Corps made any official inquiries as to human health effects of the neurotoxin BMAA?

I would ask for this new LOSOM plan to be taken seriously for the welfare of the estuaries. The fact that our health and welfare are not currently factored into the current LORS system is a major flaw that needs to be remedied. With new water storage projects coming online, there's more opportunity than ever to get the water south of Florida Bay and manage the lake at lower levels to avoid these emergency discharges. I believe this can be done while still maintaining ecological health of Lake Okeechobee, which is also of great importance.

How much extra water are we keeping on a lake to ensure consistent profits for agricultural stakeholders? The sugarcane field south of the lake can count on perfect irrigation and drainage every year while coastal communities are forced to play [Ed.: Replace "pay" with "play."] Russian roulette, not knowing if their businesses will survive or if toxins are slowly poisoning their children.

I hope that lake lowering options can be seriously considered. Any extra water that is on the lake not needed for its ecological health is water that does not need to be artificially sent to our estuary. I think it's time to get the priorities in Florida into the correct order.

This is the Army Corps opportunity to do the right thing, to fix a horribly flawed and arguably criminal system of the past.

(Warning bell).

MR. BROWN:· Please create a fair and sensible plan that will help move us towards the goal of zero harmful discharges. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE:· Thank you. Next, Russell Isaacks.

DR. ISAACKS:· I did not come with a written statement to make, and I'm kind of surprised that my name was called, but let me give you just a little bit of perspective. As I look around this audience, I might be the senior citizen here.

I came to Miami in 1965. I began fishing in the Everglades in 1968 through early '70 with a couple friends, and I've continued to fish in Florida Bay, Everglades. And when I say Everglades, I'm talking about Flamingo.

I cannot describe to you how that area has changed. You might as well have dropped a huge bomb on it about 20 years ago. And the reasons for it are known:· Salinity of the water, constant flow of water to the Everglades.

Now, I'm delighted that the Corps of Engineers have decided to have these forums to allow people to express their thoughts, frustrations and angst as I'm doing, but there are monitors already throughout the park. NOAA has those monitors; monitored from satellites, telling you what the salinity of the water is in different areas of the park.

And as I look at the literature that's passed around, most of it is dealing with mid-state Lake Okeechobee, east and west. I want to tell you, there's a huge vast unique place south of there in

Everglades National Park that is unique to the world and it's almost destroyed. I'm convinced that it can be repaired, it can be restored, but it's going to take some changes and priorities. It's going to take a commitment to put water flow back into the Everglades that flows south through the park to Florida Bay and to Biscayne Bay.

(Warning bell.)

DR. ISAACKS:· Maintaining a constant sea of salinity would restore the grass beds, and I've seen it in the last two or three years in an area called Snakebite just out from Flamingo. It used to be a gorgeous flats area, grass a foot, foot and a half deep. Redfish, snook, other fish were all over the place.

(Warning bell.)

DR. ISAACKS:· You go there now and most of it, there is no grass. The grass is coming back in certain areas because there's been a reestablishment of some freshwater from the work that's already been done right now.

But I just, uh, without a written statement to you, make a plea to you to reevaluate those five priorities or six priorities. One of them now has become human health for the midpart of this state from the algae blooms that occur almost each year.

(Warning bell.)

DR. ISAACKS:· There's serious health problems, but the water flow to the south must be restored. And if it is, I would almost predict within five years you would see fisheries return like you've not seen before.

So gentlemen, whoever else has a need for water, fine. The park has been there a long time. It's a beautiful place and it serves more than just recreation for fishermen. It serves as a place for a unique ecosystem.

People all over the world come here in November through February to bird watch. There are over 300 species of birds in the park at that time. No place on earth has that many bird species at any one time. Some of them are going away.

We need to have the water flow restored to Biscayne Bay and to Florida Bay. That will take care of the rest of the problems that I think that we have.

Thank you for letting me mouth off.

(Applause.)

MR. ENGLE:· Thank you. Next, we have B.J. Chiszar.

MR. CHISZAR:· Greetings. Salutations, Everyone. My name is Benjamin John Chiszar. I live here in Miami. I'm the former chair of the 600,000 Democrats in this community.

If we're going to boil it down to what are the most important issues, I think the critical issue is not to separate how we look at South Florida's hydrology into compartmentalize — compartmentalization of compartmentalized projects.

The Kissimmee Valley, Lake O, south of the lake, the Everglades, Florida Bay, it's all part of one thing, and it's one of the natural wonders of the world and it belongs to us. And what we've done — and I will lay at the feet of anyone in this room the decisions made in the past — but those decisions are manifesting in severe consequences for each and every one of us and future generations.

You say, what is the most important thing? I would say, stopping the nastiness from getting in the water, doing what we can to mitigate the nastiness that's already in the water. Under no circumstances releasing nasty water to the east and west coasts. Under no circumstances should that even be an option. Let the sky fall, ma'am. Let the sky fall. Let's see what happens.

The idea of protecting private property rights enshrined in our great Constitution to the detriment of everyone else has a severe disutility to the overall health of our ecosystem, our freshwater, groundwater recharge, our endangered species and our very way of life. I'm not against agriculture. I'm not against living in a swamp. That is a choice our citizens make. What I'm against is accommodating them to the detriment of everyone else.

There is absolutely no excuse that this stuff takes four years just to talk about and nothing gets done and then it's no one's fault, and ma'am gets shifted to another assignment.

(Warning bell.)

MR. CHISZAR: We need to start deciding to put the environment first. And when we decide to put the environment first, like Mr. Isaacks said, you will see very quickly the benefits of a restored ecosystem.

So let's just have a spine for once in our meaningless lives and let's stand up for the environment. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next, Alex Gillen.

MR. GILLEN: Hello. Alex Gillen with Bullsugar Alliance here. I'm going to try to be quick, but I do have a few questions.

So, first, as an administrative matter, if we could hear, uh, have a meeting in Marathon? I've heard a lot of friends and colleagues say they would like to express how Florida Bay or Lake O management affects them.

Additionally, we've gotten quite a bit of feedback that the folks in Sanibel and Fort Myers feel the same way, they thought the first meeting was rather quick.

As another administrative matter, I would suggest that we finish this project here, this reevaluation under one colonel, Colonel Kelly. I think we can do that. I think it's a matter of good government.

As for the questions: Do fish that spawn in Florida Bay migrate to waters immediately surrounding Key West?

Do studies indicate that bonefish spawning is optimized in lower salinity conditions?

When Florida Bay is in hypersaline conditions, is there a corresponding reduction in bonefish spawning?

What is the economic impact of bonefish in the Florida Keys?

What is the maximum annual rate of flow to Florida Bay in the dry season for the last 10 water years?

What is the maximum annual rate of flow to Florida Bay in the wet season for the last 10 water years?

How do flows from Lake Okeechobee impact saltwater intrusion?

How many drinking water supply wells have been impacted by saltwater intrusion in the last 10 years in the C&SF project area?

Please provide a location for each of these wells.

How, uh... Has the USACE documented mangrove grove moving — mangrove growth moving inland as a result of saltwater intrusion?

What type of algal blooms form in Florida Bay when hypersaline conditions in Florida Bay exist and kill seagrass, as occurred in 2015?

Do these algal blooms pose a threat to human health and safety? If so, what is done to accommodate the human health and safety issues?

How many Floridians rely on flows from Lake Okeechobee to recharge the Biscayne aquifer for drinking water?

(Warning bell.)

MR. GILLEN:· What is the economic impact of recreational tourism and recreational fishing in the Florida Keys?

Has Florida Bay recovered from the seagrass die-off of 2015?

How long does seagrass take to recover?

What state and federal threatened and endangered species reside in and around Florida Bay?

How are these species in Florida Bay affected by hypersaline conditions?

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE:· Thank you. Next, Adriene Barmann.

MS. BARMANN:· Hi. Good afternoon.

My name's Adriene Barmann and I was born and bred in Miami Beach, 1960, so I've seen a lot of changes. I'm a passionate environmentalist. I'm a member of — I'm — I'm here. The Center for Biological Diversity asked me to come. I'm also a member of Sierra Club, Broward Sierra Club.

And I've loved the outdoors my whole life. I was a Girl Scout leader for 11 years. I took my troop camping all over the place. I now do camping trips for the Sierra Club. I love this state and it's killing me to see what's going on.

I — I go to the commissioner meetings and I see how they just allow these builders to speak for two hours, and then the environmentalist and activists get to speak for three minutes. And who wins at the end? We all know.

I went to the Audubon Assembly in October and, and listened to the director from the Corkscrew Swamp say how our wetlands are, are, are pretty much — I think they're at, uh, 40 percent is left. You know, we — we can't just keep abusing this environment and letting things go for profit.

I, I — I remember when the one little building — uh, I can't remember the name of it — on Biscayne Boulevard was the tallest building. Now, it's, it's — Bis — Downtown Miami, I don't even recognize it anymore. I can't even go in there. It, it — it breaks my heart to see just how politics and money has taken over the future of our Everglades.

Not only am I an environmentalist, but I'm a nurse and I'm an oncology nurse. And 25 years ago, when I used to work at Jackson, I used to have lunch with a girl who worked in the Epidemiology Department, and she used to tell me they were looking at rates of multiple myeloma, which is a killing cancer, okay, and they were around the Lake Okeechobee area. And what I'm wondering now is, what are the epidemiology studies showing now? What kind of cancers are coming out of this?

You know, cancers are, are caused not only by heredity, but by a change and exposure to toxic chemicals.

(Warning bell.)

MS. BARMANN:· And, and I could tell you, being an oncology nurse for 35 years, I can tell you, a lot of it is environmental exposure. And what we're putting and allowing to be put into our waters is dangerous. And without wetlands to clean it up and without the water being able to go south, what's gonna happen, okay? And — and I would love for somebody to do a, uh, the courts to do a study on cancer, epidemiology going on, or from the Lake Okeechobee.

(Warning bell.)

MS. BARMANN:· Also, I also get involved. I started making calls. I was in conversation with the HR director from — from Big Sugar and how he was telling me it was okay how the South Florida Water Management allowed the 36,000 acres to be released back to Big Sugar, and I know Governor DeSantis was on that and he wasn't happy with it. I don't even know what happened with that.

But can any of the discharges be released onto that land if we can get it back and let it, you know, be preserved as a wetland until the reservoir's being made? That's, that's — that's one of my questions.

(Warning bell.)

MS. BARMANN:· And also, Everglades has so many challenges besides water.

I went last night to an invasive species lecture that was put on by PBS. There's a quarter of a million pythons in our Everglades. There's no more mammals left. Now they're going after the birds. And I know, when the birders get involved with this, it's gonna get ugly.

(Laughter.)

MS. BARMANN:· You know, the thought of the constant wetland destruction, the lack of water, agricultural runoff, that these politicians just say:· Yes, yes, yes. Just keep paying my bank account so I could get reelected. You know, it's just sad, it's sad, 'cause I know Miami from the '60s, when I was growing up, and it's not the same.

(Warning bell.)

MS. BARMANN:· And I also dive and I also see pretty much no diversity left in the reefs here.

So that's my opinion. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE:· Thank you.

FROM THE AUDIENCE:· Point of order. Is there a time limit on speaking?

MR. ENGLE:· Yes, it's two minutes, but —

FROM THE AUDIENCE:· Oh, two minutes?

MR. ENGLE:· But we've got a limited number of people.

FROM THE AUDIENCE:· Could you find a less obnoxious way of announcing that to the speakers than that bell or whatever it is your buddy's ringing?

MR. ENGLE:· Well, sir, I think we're going to continue using the bell, honestly.

FROM THE AUDIENCE:· Well, there's always the next meeting. You could go digital.

MR. ENGLE:· Pardon me?

FROM THE AUDIENCE:· I said, at the next meeting you could go digital.

MR. ENGLE:· Well, yes. We can consider when we come in next time that we have a light.

FROM THE AUDIENCE:· Light?

MR. ENGLE:· Yes, sir. Next, Connie Washburn.

MS. WASHBURN:· Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I'm Connie Washburn. I am here, representing Friends of the Everglades. I've been on the board of directors for 25 years.

Hi. How are you?

FROM THE AUDIENCE:· I'm fine.

MS. WASHBURN:· I see a lot of familiar faces around here.

Friends of the Everglades, in case any of you do not know, was founded by Marjory Stoneman Douglas, who really started this whole thing. She is really the one who wrote her book and brought attention to what was thought of as a worthless swamp that needed to be drained so we could build houses and eventually condos, et cetera, et cetera, and Marjory would not —

Marjory came from somewhere else, just like I did, and she knew nothing about the Everglades, but a person came to her and asked her to write a book about a river and she chose the Everglades and called it the River of Grass, and that's how it got its name.

Marjory was very feisty and meaningful. And let me tell you, she told the Army Corps of Engineers many, many times what she thought of what they were doing or not doing.

And I too came from someplace else like Marjory. And back in the early '70s, I didn't know a thing about the Everglades. But then I started teaching school at a public school in Miami, fourth grade, and the study of the Everglades is a natural part of our curriculum.

I happened to get a class full of very environmentally interested and sensitive fourth- graders, and we started a group called Young Friends of the Everglades. We went to Marjory and we asked for her blessing. And she told those children a lot of very wonderful things to do to protect, preserve and restore the only Everglades in the world.

(Warning bell.)

MS. WASHBURN:· Young Friends has the same, uh, has the same mission as Friends does, only our mission statement says to protect, preserve and restore the only Everglades in the world, not just for us, but for future generations. And that is what we need to do.

We need to clean that water up before it goes south to the bay and certainly before it goes to the east and west coast, and we need to think of all the people in Florida:· Their industries, their health, their tourism, their chance to get out in a beautiful place filled with biodiversity and we need to put those people above the interests of a few and big business, Big Ag, and so forth.

So thank you very much, listening to me.

Friends of the Everglades will be celebrating our 50th anniversary on April 7th at Fairchild, where we will be honoring Marjory Stoneman Douglas. And go to our website if you're interested in knowing more about us because we're all about the Everglades.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE:· Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. ENGLE: Next, Jorge Abrey.

MR. ABREY: Good evening.

Dade County Farm Bureau encourages the Army Corps of Engineers to consistently maintain Lake Okeechobee's water level within the ecologically preferred operating band of 12.5 feet to 15.5 feet until an evaluation of Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule is completed. Recommendations have to be based on real science and engineering and not on political pressure or emotions.

The water table in South Dade has been raised to store water by the Army Corps in the past year. The groundwater is at the highest level we have seen for this time of the year. On February 13th, 2019, there was rainfall which flooded a planting of beans because our ground is already saturated from sending the water south. This is to consider that we are in the dry season.

There are 50 projects in the integrated delivery schedule that needs to be funded and completed before additional projects and land purchases are to be considered.

It is important for the Army Corps to balance all project purposes while it looks at considering a new regulation schedule. These projects are to include flood control, water supply, recreation, navigation, and environmental effects to the fish and wildlife.

The impact of lowering the lake to the suggested 10.5 feet would be:

Severe reduction in the capability to deliver water south of the lake for any beneficial purposes.

Increased risk of permanently compromising freshwater supplies in well fields due to saltwater intrusion in urban coastal areas, affecting the health and safety of the communities.

There will be water restrictions placed which will negatively impact businesses and a population of more than six million south of the lake and coastal communities, stretching down to Miami-Dade and the Florida Keys.

Wildlife and endangered species survival is affected, as water needs for water conservation areas will no longer be met.

A high risk of muck fires in the Everglades.

Dade County Farm Bureau encourages the Army Corps to maintain the level at 12.5 to 15.5 feet until the evaluation of Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule is completed, using real science and engineering. And what Alex had said, we need more — we should be down in South Dade and the Keys to get more input as well. You're in the middle of — or you're in the north part of the county.

Thank you for your time.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

That concludes the public comments that we have and we thank you for coming out.

I'll remind you that this is the first part of our long process. We are going to be coming back to the communities in the May time frame and then we'll have some meetings after that so this is not the end of your opportunity to comment and give us feedback.

Uh, meetings coming up would be in late May. Those will be workshops where we'll be able to sit and answer a lot of questions and concerns that we're discussing.

LT. REYNOLDS:· I just want to add one thing. We are having a public scoping meeting in Marathon. We will be publishing that public notice very shortly. We were confirming with date and time and location, and that's why that has not been published yet, but it looks like it will be on March 20th in Marathon at the city community center — I forget the actual name of it — but that will be going out in a public press release, if not this week, the next week. So you can look forward to that as well.

MR. ENGLE:· So thank you, everyone, for Lake Okeechobee Sys Operating Manual - February 28, 2019 coming out tonight and we look forward to talking to you in the future.

(Meeting concluded at 6:24 p.m.)

CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

THE STATE OF FLORIDA)
COUNTY OF MIAMI-DADE)

I, DIANNE N. SARKISIAN, a Court Reporter for the State of Florida at Large, do hereby certify that I was authorized to and did stenographically report the proceedings in the above-styled cause, at the time and place as set forth; that the foregoing constitute a true, complete record of my stenographic notes.

I further certify that I am not an attorney or counsel of any of the parties, nor related to any of the parties, nor financially interested in the action.

Dated this 6th day of April 2019.

[signed]

Dianne N. Sarkisian
Notary Public-State of Florida
My Commission No. FF948599
Expires: 01-06-2020

[Ed.: The file has been reformatted for readability, which has changed the page count. A word list/index was deleted at the project manager's direction.)