

**ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
LAKE OKEECHOBEE SYSTEM OPERATING MANUAL (LOSOM)**

**PUBLIC NEPA SCOPING MEETING**

Wednesday, February 27th, 2019

6:00 p.m. -9:00 p.m.

3301 Gun Club Road

West Palm Beach, Florida

Examination of the witness taken before:

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COLONEL REYNOLDS [Ed.: Corrected name spelling.]: Good evening, everyone. I'm Lieutenant Colonel Jennifer Reynolds. I'm the Deputy District Manager for South Florida, one of the Jacksonville districts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

I want to thank you all for coming out tonight. I really appreciate everyone taking the time to come out and spend a couple of hours with us to talk about the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule.

There are a few seats that are still open up here in front, so please make your way up here. And I've got two, four, six, eight, ten, 12, 13, 14, 14 seats --14 seats in the front. Great.

So want to let you all know tonight, before we get started with our formal presentation, is that we know that there's a lot of differing opinions, a lot of concerns. We hear and have heard from about 1,600 people in person, so far, during our public meetings. We've heard from about another thousand folks in written comments. Some of those may be duplications, but we haven't sifted through everything yet. We anticipate hearing from thousands more and we welcome all of the comments.

The reason that the comments are important is because what we are doing right now is fundamentally changing the way we think about the lake.

And what do I mean by that? I don't mean that we're going to scrap everything, how we've always done it, because a lot of what we're doing has been working for a lot of people for a lot of decades.

But there are some things that haven't been working so well for some people. And what we're doing is taking a look at what we've done that works; what we've done that doesn't work; and what the future holds, both in terms of the environment and the built environment; and how we can take a look at all of the priorities, all of the needs, and balance those in the best way possible using the best science and engineering available.

But your comments, your concerns, your questions, and your ideas are a critical piece of how we do that. And so tonight we hope to hear from many of you about your ideas about those things.

We're going to give a brief overview of what the system operating manual process entails, what's gotten us to this part of the process, and where we go from here. And then we'll maximize the time tonight with public comments.

So thank you, again, for your time.

We have a number of elected officials here. We will offer you the opportunity to speak first at the beginning of the public comment period, and then go into comment cards after that.

So, again, thank you for coming out tonight. I know it's a rainy, wet night, and so we'll go through public comments as expeditiously as possible and get you home as early as we can. But we want to make sure to give everyone an opportunity at the microphone tonight.

Thank you.

MR. GYSAN: All right, good evening, everyone. My name is Tim Gysan. I'm the project manager for the Corps of Engineers for this effort. Unfortunately, I'm going to be stuck behind the podium while I give this presentation.

But I want to, again, thank everybody for coming out tonight. This is a really important part of the process, is the public involvement throughout. I want to acknowledge we have quite a few of our team members here from the Corps. We all have nametags on. So if you have any questions, feel free to grab one of them on the outside of this room.

And also, I want to say thank you to our teammates from the Water Management District here for hosting us tonight.

All right. So quick overview, most of you people probably already know this, but I just want to get us all on, kind of, the same page here.

Lake Okeechobee is part of the Central and Southern Florida project, surrounded by Herbert Hoover Dike. And the C&SF project and the dike itself are all part of the same effort to combat deadly flooding that occurred back in the early part of the 20th century.

The Corps of Engineers operate and maintain the lake and the dike itself, as opposed to the rest of the system, which we work in conjunction with the Water Management District to operate.

The way we operate the lake is through an operations manual. This is developed through a public process, which is why we are here, is to review that lake schedule and develop a new operating plan.

This effort is not recommending any new infrastructure. That's an important point. This is an operating plan to figure out how to better operate the lake and the caltex (phonetic) of the system. So we won't be looking at any new structures, new canals, things like that.

However, what we will be doing is looking at new infrastructure that will be coming online as part of the Herbert Hoover Dike restoration plan, things like the C-43, C-43 reservoir, and understanding how the lake operations play into the entire system.

Why are we doing it right now? Well, there are a couple of reasons why, the first being back when the current schedule of the LORS in 2008 was developed, there were a couple of points that were recognized that would trigger a re-look at the schedule, first being completion of the Herbert Hoover Dike rehab; the second being completion of the CERP projects, C-43, C-43.

All of these things are happening within the next few years, so it makes this the perfect time to start this process. So when that infrastructure comes online we're ready to operate with it in mind.

The second reason, equally important, is last year congress authorized the Corps and awarded in 2018 the Water Resources Development Act, a specific authorization to look at the lake schedule in conjunction with completion of Herbert Hoover Dike, but also, very importantly, to look at CERP infrastructure that is going online. So specific authority to do that.

And that authority was granted to us in part to --addressing the concerns that a lot of folks have had over the lake releases over the past few years and the algae that's been a big concern recently, as well.

So that everybody understands, we're also operating under the NEPA process, which is the National Environmental Policy Act. So this is the first part of that. This is the NEPA scoping meeting.

So what NEPA requires is that for all federal actions, we look at the impacts of the human environment for all of the alternatives and the plan that we end up with.

So this is the first part of that, is coming out and getting comments from all of the public and our stakeholders, taking all of that into account. So we will be following the NEPA process throughout this effort.

All right, there's a lot going on in this slide, but the point is, this is about a four-year effort to develop this new system operating manual and there's lots of public engagement plans along the way.

As you can see, there's multiple phases to this effort, first being the public input and planning. So that's where we are starting at right now with the scoping meetings. And then we'll have alternative evaluation, public feedback, and finally, a decision and public comment of the documents.

Throughout that process there's going to be lots of points where we have public involvement, which is partly why it's going to take us four years to get to a final manual at the end of this, because this interaction and collaboration throughout the process is very important.

So this is the first point of that effort, but we'll be coming back out in May to do some initial workshops, taking the feedback and comments that we've heard at these scoping meetings and presenting information back to everyone and answering some of those questions that take a look at some screening, ideas that we hear during this process, and start the process of moving into alternative development.

So we'll be doing that, like I said, in May, and then again in August as we're getting to the point where we're actually developing alternatives, performance metrics and things like that. So lots of engagement up front in the process.

We're also going to be looking at alternatives for how we manage the lake. We'll come back out with actual data from model runs, performance metrics, and present that to everyone so we can get feedback on what the best plan to move forward with the lake will be.

Once we have that determined, we'll put all that into the system operating manual document itself along with the NEPA document. That will go out for public review. We'll take comments on that, incorporate those into the final document before a final decision is actually made.

So again, I know that's a lot --maybe point of this, lots of public involvement, lots of engagement opportunities throughout this process.

And as Colonel Reynolds acknowledged, there are lots of different staples or interests and uses for the lake, whether it be for flood protection, water supply, recreation, you name it. Lots of people use the lake for lots of different things and count on it for lots of different reasons. Not all of those things have the same lake operations which are beneficial for those uses.

So that's what makes this a challenging process, is to try to get everyone to come together and look at all those different needs and come up with an operational plan that balances this to the best of our ability.

All right. So as we're taking input on this during the scoping phase, there are few things that we've thought that will really help us put together the framework for the scope of this effort and how we're going to look at it moving forward. And those things are: What issues are important to you? What study outcomes do you want to see? And how do you measure success at the end of this with the new system operating manual?

So we'll take any comments that you have, any topics. These are the things that we identify that will really help us as we move forward from this initial point.

And to that end, we'll be taking comments during the scoping period, which is just that initial phase, until March 31st. And there are different ways that we are taking those comments, whether you give a public statement tonight or provide a written comment.

We also take comments via our email address, which you can see at [lakeocomments@usace.army.mil](mailto:lakeocomments@usace.army.mil). You can also mail in comments through traditional methods, to Dr. Ann Hodgson, who is our environmental lead for this project at the address above.

And throughout this process, you can always go to our website, which is listed up here, [www.saj.usace.army.mil/LOSOM](http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/LOSOM) [Ed.: Corrected URL.], to get information on the project, upcoming meetings, presentation materials. We'll be posting the transcript and videos from these public meetings on the website along with lots of other things. So that will be a useful thing as we move forward in the process.

Again, we'll take comments on scoping through the end of March. That doesn't mean that's the only opportunity to provide feedback. Going back to the schedule slide. Lots of public involvement. Lots of time to comment throughout this process.

Again, thank you for coming out tonight and participating. This is going to be a fun effort in moving forward, and I look forward to working with all of you. And I will turn it over to Jason Engle, our water resources and branch chief engineer division. He's going to facilitate the public comment period.

Again, thanks for coming out tonight.

MR. ENGLE: Good evening, ladies and gentleman. Thank you again for coming out.

I think that Lieutenant Colonel Reynolds and Sam --you guys set the stage pretty well. I just want to lay down a couple ground rules and then we'll get started with the public comments.

It's important that your voice is heard. We've said that. You can have your voice heard here tonight at the podium, you can give us written comments, you can email them in. And all of this can take place up through the 31st of March.

But it's important to know, too, other steps that's in the slide, we'll be taking input moving forward. This is just the scoping process. But we're going to be soliciting feedback throughout the process. And so this will not be the last opportunity to engage.

One of the things that I will point out tonight is that this is for us to hear your comments. This is not really a question-and-answer period. We're going to take all the comments. We're going to take them back --and questions --and we're going to come back with responses to the questions. We'll do that at

our workshops. But we'll also do it in a written format. Your comments are being recorded tonight and that record will be published.

And so we have almost 60 people to speak tonight. Actually, with elected officials, over 60. So we have a two-minute limit.

There are lights on top of the podium for the speakers. Obviously, when it goes to orange you've got a little bit of time left, and red is last.

You're going to see --you're going to hear, rather, an alarm bell. That is also a sign that it's time. Please respect that time, because we want everyone to have a chance. We are obviously going to go over our two-hour limit tonight. That's okay. We will stay here until you're done.

The other thing I would say is that we have folks in other locations in the building here on this floor who didn't come in because of the space limitations and if they want to make a comment --so I would ask that as you make your comment, if you've heard everything you want to hear and you've had a chance, please exit the room. You can listen from outside and other folks can come in and make their comments.

I don't know how many people we have waiting out there. Hopefully, most of those are on speaker right now. So with that, I would announce that we have elected officials here tonight. And then I'm going to give the elected officials the first opportunity to come up.

So first I'm going to list their names. Not all have asked to speak tonight. I'll start with the speakers.

So we have Mali Gardner, Mayor of Clewiston; Joseph Sophie for Melissa McKinley, Palm Beach County Commissioner; Betty Barnard, Commissioner in South Bay; Anne Gerwig, Mayor, Wellington; Joe Kyles, Mayor, South Bay; Charity Lewis, Congressional Outreach Coordinator for Congressman Lois Frankel; Joel Flores, Mayor, City of Green Acres; Mack Bernard, Mayor, Palm Beach County; Joe Kyles, Mayor, City of South Bay; Marcia Andrews, School Board Member, District 6, Palm Beach County; Chip Block, Vice Mayor, Jupiter Inlet Colony; and Rob Long, Palm Beach County Salt and Water Conservation District.

So as I said, I've got a few of the elected officials that would like to go. We're going to bring them up first. So first is Anne Gerwig, Mayor of Wellington.

MAYOR GERWIG: Where would you like me? Up here?

MR. ENGLE: Yes. I'm sorry. At the podium here in the center is where we're going to have the commenters tonight.

MAYOR GERWIG: Okay.

MR. ENGLE: That way you're close to the court reporter.

MAYOR GERWIG: I'm used to being on the other side of this.

So I am Anne Gerwig. I am the mayor of Wellington.

The Village of Wellington is a municipality located within western Palm Beach County. It services approximately 65,000 residents. Our local responsibilities include providing potable water to our residents, both within and outside of the Village of Wellington.

We also own and operate the Acme Improvement District that manages all of the service water within the Village of Wellington for the benefits of water supply, storm and water management, recreation, and wildlife.

It is our understanding that the Army Corps is seeking input in the development of a new LOSOM, which proposes to modify the current Lake Okeechobee operating levels of between 12-1/2 to 15-1/2 feet to 10.5 feet.

The Village of Wellington currently holds a diversion and impoundment permit from the South Florida Water Management District, which permits the Village to withdraw 413 million gallons annually from the regional system, C-51 and L-40 canals.

This allocation represents the amount of water required to meet the water demands as a result of rainfall deficit during a drought with the probability of recurring in a 1-in-10-year-drought event.

Additionally, the Village currently holds a consumptive use permit from the South Florida Water Management District, which permits a withdrawal of 2,926 million gallons annually from this surficial water aquifer system for water supply --for public water supply.

The Village has many concerns that lowering the level of Lake Okeechobee to 10.5 feet will prevent our ability to conduct permitted withdrawals to provide a public water supply and recharge the surficial aquifer system during periods of drought and low rainfall.

We encourage the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a schedule based on science that considers all means, including flood risk management; water supply; recreation; tourism; navigation; and the environment.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next we have Betty Barnard, Commissioner of the City of South Bay.

COMMISSIONER BARNARD: Good evening. Again, I'm Betty Barnard, Commissioner of South Bay.

First of all, we want to thank you, the Army Corps, for your work on the Herbert Hoover Dike. It protects the City of South Bay from flooding. It seems like some of that common sense has been lost or in absence in conversations and in the news.

When the Army Corps started repairs, the Army Corps changed the lake schedule to keep our citizens safe from flooding. We have all heard the negativity from the Treasure Coast that seeks to point a finger in this direction by confusing its closed beaches with lake discharge.

The fact of the matter is, it rains a lot, which causes the waterway of the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon to close from saltwater run-off. And yet, that has nothing to do with the lake because the lake isn't discharging.

We what ask now of the Army Corps is to finish the dike improvements and return the lake to its normal schedule that ensures water is available to all citizens from our families and home, as well as ensures that water is available for the farmers' crops to provide food for Floridians and the country, as well as provide jobs for our Glade community. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next is Joel Flores, Mayor of the City of Green Acres.

MAYOR FLORES: Good evening. My name is Joel Flores. I'm the mayor of the City of Green Acres, who's home to about 40,000 residents, nine schools, and a community that is surely concerned about some of the rumors that we've been hearing.

I'm here today because I'm concerned about the future levels of water maintained at Lake Okeechobee.

Today I not only speak for myself, but I also speak on behalf of my residents and the communities around me who are all concerned about the healthy flow of water moving South.

We all know the importance of water and the impact of not having enough. I implore you here today to maintain Lake Okeechobee at healthy water levels, and that must be above 10 and a half feet.

Our communities and ecosystems cannot afford us to make a mistake. The risk is far too great for you to gamble lowering our water levels.

In summary, our community's reliance on water for its business, families, and school necessities necessitates healthy water levels at Lake Okeechobee.

I thank you for your time and I appreciate your support in this matter.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next we have Mack Bernard, Mayor of Palm Beach County.

MAYOR BARNARD: You said Jack Bernard. I've been called a lot, but not Jack.

My name is Mack Bernard and I am the mayor for Palm Beach County. We have over 1.4 million residents in Palm Beach County. I want to thank the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for allowing me to speak today in preparation of your operating manual.

I represent District 7 on the county commission. My district includes all of the downtown of West Palm Beach. It goes north to Lake Park and it includes a portion of the Town of Palm Beach, of Mar-a-Lago, and it continues southward to our southern costal communities of Lake Worth, Lantana, Boynton Beach, and Delray Beach.

As the Mayor of Palm Beach County, I'm honored to represent all of Palm Beach County's residents in protecting their basic human right to water.

My constituents in West Palm Beach and the Town of Palm Beach directly depend on the lake for their drinking water, while to the south, the lake is vital for backup water supplies through the Lake Worth Drainage District.

As someone who represents citizens from all walks of life in the coastal communities of Palm Beach County, we fulfill our public service by having a reliable water supply for our places of worship, schools, businesses, and homes.

Palm Beach County has undertaken a lengthy and transparent planning to secure its infrastructure so that critical, basic human needs like water can be supplied to all of its residents.

We will fight Washington. We will fight the Army Corps of Engineers, we will fight the governor, we'll fight Congressman Mast, DEP, to protect our drinking water. Our drinking water should never be put in jeopardy.

I urge the Army Corps to protect this precious right as you create your operating manual.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Next, Marcia Andrews, Palm Beach County School Board Member, District 6.

MS. ANDREWS: Good evening. I'm Marcia Andrews, School Board Member, District 6.

I'm speaking on behalf of my stakeholders in District 6, which covers {Ed.: Corrected misspelling.] the western communities, especially the region around Lake Okeechobee, Canal Point, Pahokee, Belle Glade and South Bay.

And tonight, I am speaking as an individual. It is important that we do not lower the lake levels. This will have a potential impact in the economics of the Glades region.

As a school board member, we've invested a great deal of finance and funding to elevate programs for career training for many of the adults in the region.

Deteriorating economics will impact educational goals in the Glades, because students, as well as their parents, will be negatively impacted.

Many of our families either rely on the lake for their livelihoods or are employed on the lake.

It's important that these families and the children have jobs, have schools, have a way of life that's conducive for success.

It's important that we do not impact the economics of adults. When you impact economics of adults, you impact the youth. It's important that we do not lower the levels of the lake. We must have water, we must have jobs, and we must have a future for our children and our families in the Glades region.

And I speak on their behalf and as their school board member. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Those are all the cards that I have for elected officials. Are there any other elected officials that would like to come forward?

MAYOR GARDNER: Good evening. My name is Mali Gardner and I'm the mayor of Clewiston.

Last week I made public comments in Clewiston, but I'm here tonight because I continued to do some research, and, again, I wanted to make sure that my public comments were taken into account. And so

I'm asking all of the federal officials and state officials to please remember that when this regulation schedule is set, do not damn our town to economic devastation.

We are a proud farming and fishing community. And communities that have a security of water have the opportunity to reach their full potential. And that's what I'm asking in this process.

A LOSOM schedule that does not take into consideration the years of documented evidence that are stored right here in this building, particularly information detailing in the impacts of operating Lake Okeechobee at lower water levels than we all know that historical facts were ignored for political expediency that requested an arbitrary number for political gain.

On this list it tells you exactly at 12-1/2 to 10-1/2 feet what will happen, at 10-1/2 to 9-1/2 feet what will happen. And this is not just for Glades communities. This is north, south, east, and west of Lake Okeechobee.

When I received the first email, I got to thinking about it. I know the infrastructure is not included in this. But we cannot ignore that 95 percent of the water flows from the north into Lake Okeechobee.

Lake Okeechobee does not produce the water. The discharges come from an engineered system that starts in Orlando and flows south. Please keep that in mind.

When I received the email, like I said, I started to read the document entitled Central and Southern Florida Project Water Control Plan for Lake Okeechobee and EAA, dated March 2008. As you know, the LORS is an interim schedule for 2008. This report has historical data from 1931 regarding Lake Okeechobee and takes into account a climate-based approach to water management.

Please use this valuable data in the LOSOM schedule and also compare the performances of all the schedules previously.

I realize that the interim schedule was brought up and used because of the weakening of the Herbert Hoover Dike. But now, thanks to Governor Scott --Senator Scott, and his state legislators, we're expedited for the Herbert Hoover Dike completion.

So please take into account, along with the C-43, the C-44, the Lake Hitchcock hydrological work that's being done, and, of course, the Senate Bill 10 EAA Reservoir, and along with any approved CERP projects in the 16 County area.

What do I consider successful for this LOSOM schedule? That it's honorable, that it takes into account the Glades communities and our economic viability to realize our full potential that our water's future is secure for farming and fishing and water supply.

If Lake Okeechobee water levels that are thrown out of the panacea are used and not supported by historical water data going back to 1931, then we will not create a better water future.

And to the elected officials involved in this process, I ask you to please look at that. There is no reason to sew unnecessary discord between the inland and the coastal communities, between the environmental and the farming communities. It will set up Lake Okeechobee for failure, the liquid heart of the Everglades. And I do not believe that anyone wants to see that.

In closing, please remember what I've said today. The economic future of the town that I love is at stake. And this need for process will have failed us in the Glades communities if it does not take into account our concerns.

We must secure a water future --a secure water future to reach our full potential.

Tonight, I noticed that there's cameras in the back of the room. And I realize that some are for state and federal agencies, some are the media. But some, I believe, are probably here because of special interests. And tonight, I say, we will not be silenced. We will not give up on our towns. And do not use our words to belittle what we hold dear.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: And for the speakers coming up, just continue to announce yourselves and your affiliation, please, because we don't have chart for it.

MR. SOPHIE: Good evening. Joseph Sophie, representing Palm Beach County Commissioner Melissa McKinley.

On behalf of Ms. McKinley --whose district includes the cities around Lake Okeechobee, Belle Glade, Pahokee and South Bay --I want to thank you for the opportunity to allow us to comment on the proposed schedule. I want to be brief, because Margaret Andrews very eloquently spoke about the importance of Lake Okeechobee to those communities around Lake Okeechobee.

I just want to stress how imperative it is that any operational changes that are considered be carefully evaluated because it can have a significant impact on Palm Beach County communities, our businesses, and our water utilities.

So I also want to thank County Mayor Mack Bernard for speaking so forcefully in defending Palm Beach County's interests. And Palm Beach County is preparing comments and will be submitted to the Army Corps.

And our water resources manager, Jeremy McBryan, is here tonight, and I'm going to allow him to go into further details about these concerns. So thank you all very much.

MAYOR KYLES: Good morning, good afternoon and good evening to each and everyone of you all.

I want to thank the Corps --my name is Joe. I'm the mayor of the city of South Bay. I want to thank the Corps for the wonderful work that you're doing in sense of timing, in particular on the Herbert Hoover Dike.

As I travel from Port Mayaca into the North Haven area, I can see the wonderful work they're doing in that particular area.

Also, South Florida Water Management, thank you for the work that you're doing, as well.

But we as a whole, we have to take into consideration --we have to stop blame --the blame game, because when we stop blaming each one, instead of us coming together, we will never be able to resolve the issue that we're having around the lake there.

The fact that we've pointing fingers at each and every one of you from north, east, south and west -- when those fingers move back, just stop pointing, and we come together, maybe that's a solution that we resolve.

You're talking about lowering the lake. It's not essential to lower the lake. I've been around the lake for almost 40 years and I've seen the sites there when it comes down to a drought.

But we in the Glades area, we have to come together as well, the one in Port Lucie, the one in Fort Myers [Ed.: Corrected misspelling.] and other areas there. When we come together, I know that we will be successful, and technically, according to the water management, to resolve the issue in reference to the algae that has been taking place in the east and the west and also in Lake Okeechobee, as well.

That problem will resolve and we will not have to lower the lake and everything will be successful if we come together and continue to look forward to everything that God has blessed each and every one of us.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank You. Any other elected officials?

MR. LONG: Good evening. My name is Rob Long. I'm chair of the Palm Beach County Soil and Water Conservation District.

First of all, I'd like to thank the Army Corps of Engineers for hosting this meeting tonight. I'd like to thank all of our dedicated elected officials who came and spoke out tonight. And thanks to all the concerned Palm Beach County residents who are here tonight to voice their concerns.

Regulating Lake Okeechobee at the depth proposed, 10 and half feet, is an extremely dangerous proposition. At best, the strategy temporarily mitigates the algae bloom issues on the Treasure Coast in Martin and St. Lucie Counties, while creating dangerous drought-like conditions for Palm Beach County and potentially triggering an ecological crisis around the lake's ecosystem and in other environmentally sensitive areas, such as the Grassy Waters Preserve down here in Palm Beach County.

This proposition is driven by political expediency, not on sound science. That's why our board of county commissioners yesterday unanimously agreed that a reduced lake level will have longstanding detrimental impacts on our environment. And our Palm Beach County mayor was here tonight to reiterate that.

Tomorrow is the monthly Soil and Water Conservation District meeting, the board that I chair. At that point, I'll be proposing a resolution to the Army Corps of Engineers to recommend a responsible regulation schedule for Lake Okeechobee that emphasizes water storage, given the expedited rehab project to the Herbert Hoover Dike infrastructure. And I'm anticipating approval of this resolution at our meeting.

I'd like to give you a couple of quick, very brief, highlights. Lowering lake water levels in Lake Okeechobee to this depth could create drought-like conditions throughout Palm Beach County, affecting Palm Beach County residents as well as businesses. This plan could drastically increase the risk of permanently compromising fresh water supplies in well wheels due to saltwater intrusion.

Drought restrictions could impact crops and the Lake Okeechobee and lower east side coast surface areas, potentially causing --impacting nationwide crop prices and domestic availability.

This plan could compromise the capacity of city water distribution systems in areas such as the City of West Palm Beach to meet the pressure demands of fire sprinklers and impede fire rescue efforts during the event of a fire. That's a real problem.

I inspect fire pumps as part of my job. And if the city water pressure drops below a certain point, the pressure cannot meet the demand of the sprinklers that are on the second-and third-floor units of buildings.

Folks, we all want solutions to the algae bloom problem. But it's not going to be corrected that quick, especially when our public safety, economy, and environment hang in the balance.

Thank you.

MAYOR WILSON: Good evening. I bring you greetings from the city of the Belle Glade, in the Glades community. My name is Steve Wilson, where I serve as the mayor.

Now, I realize in this room alone that perhaps a lot of folks don't know about the Glades or the city of Belle Glade. Belle Glade was established in 1925. But in 1928 many of you know what happened. A great storm came our way, and that's how the Herbert Hoover Dike came around.

Now, here we are again talking about water issues. I know there's concerns and a lot of emotionalism that's going on, good, bad and the ugly.

The reality of it all, as my colleague from South Bay indicated, if we don't think outside of the box, if we continue to cast blame, we will never get it resolved.

We appreciate what the Corps has been trying to do, but we know that decision-makers, politics does play a role. We don't like to admit that, but it's a part of the equation.

The city of Belle Glade is diversified in its industries down in the Glades, but we will not --again, we will not turn away from our bread-and-butter that is farming in our community, because farming brings what you need at your dinner tables, that is, the vegetables that are so needed throughout this country.

So when we're thinking about, how do we solve this problem, think about human lives as well. Thank you so much.

VICE MAYOR BLOCK: All right. My name is Chip Block. I'm the vice mayor of Jupiter Inlet Colony. And I am chairman of the Water Resources Board, which is the advisory to Mayor Bernard and the county commissioners.

I'm not a water expert. The first thing I have to say is, as a Navy man, I hate to trust the Army with this, but the Colonel assures me that she's married to a retired Navy, so she must be okay.

What I'd like to see --I live on the Indian River in the far north part of Palm Beach County. We're all horrified by the algae infestations on our neighbors. We don't want to see that.

When I look at this, what issues are important to you, I will ask my friend Jeremy McBryan, water resources manager for Palm Beach County, to address specific issues.

What set of outcomes do you want? I don't know what the right lake levels are. What I ask is to take the politics out of it. Let the scientists, the hydrologists, the engineers and the scientific hydrologists model this and figure it out.

I have been assured by people I trust, by water experts here in Palm Beach County, that the proposed lake level --lower level --is much too low for our needs. We have to protect our waterways.

If you look around, the only two reasons any of us are in South Florida are weather and water.

Now, I don't know how much we can do about the weather and climate change, but there's a lot we can do about water.

The other thing is, long-term. We're talking about a polluted lake. Long-term we need sep and sewer to be implemented. We need the lake not to be infested with pollutions. That's what we need to fight for the long term.

In the short term, we have to find the effects of the fact that the lake has got some problems that we all have to live with. Let's not make our neighbors' problems our own. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Are there any other elected officials who would like to come up and say anything?

Okay. So we'll start the public comment period. As I said, please, when you get up, state your name. And I'm going to call groups of people down so we can facilitate the process with minimal gaps in between people so that we can get people walking through.

Please keep your comments to two minutes to respect the other folks that are here to make sure that everybody's voice is heard.

And, again, consider that when you're done with your comments, if you leave the room, that might leave room for someone else to come in, although, I don't know how much overflow capacity we may actually need after a while. But, just keep that in mind.

So the first three names: Newton Cook, Paul Grose, and John Hundley.

MR. COOK: I want to say thanks to the Corps for putting this together. The Hebert Hoover Dike, some of us actually lived this back in the 2005 storms when the lake was in horrible shape.

Again, a lot of work went into it when Katrina came along and really squashed some things. And the lake was lowered on the top end, unintended consequences. Also (inaudible) and we had drought and an eight-foot lake. The eight-foot lake was a disaster.

Now, let me tell you, the Colonel sat at the Rivers Coalition meeting and told the people of Stuart that if you take this lake down --and it may be taken down --to 10.5 feet at the end of the wet season you're going to get more discharge, not less. And then the Caloosahatchee people --they will tell them and you're not going to have any water --fresh water for your estuary. This is not rocket science.

Today the lake is at 12.712 feet. But if the Corps is running water --you know why they're running water? Because Tom (inaudible) stood right here at the county board meeting and said, Come May 1, we are going to have 13-plus feet of water and the schedule says 12.5 feet high. There you go.

If it was a 10.5 from that one that's proposed --and it is a really dumb proposal --they would have to pump another million acres per water into the St. Lucie/ Caloosahatchee in the next three weeks. A million acres, people, in both of those beautiful estuaries out of here. Be careful what you ask for.

Don't pay attention to politicians and amateurs. Pay attention to the Colonel, who actually knows what he's doing. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank You. After Paul Grose and John Hundley, we have David Goodlett.

MR. GROSE: Good afternoon. My name is Paul Grose. I've lived here in Palm Beach County for 32 years. Lived in Belle Glade, lived in Loxahatchee, lived in Wellington. During that time, I've been working for a company called King Ranch. We grow food, including sugarcane, sweet corn, rice and corn silage for dairies. We also grow turfgrass.

My grandfather, who was a small farmer in Southeast Georgia, was my inspiration for wanting to become a farmer.

We're going to talk about how the Army Corps will manage the level of Lake Okeechobee in the future years and these are my comments: Lowering the lake's schedule will naturally increase damaging discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries, rather than reduce them. We know that from our computer models.

Lowering the lake schedule from 12 and a half to 10 and half feet will jeopardize the water supply in ways of South Florida residents. Lowering the lake's schedule will increase the risk of damaging man-made droughts by 250 percent. I've experienced first-hand growing crops with results of these man-made droughts.

Palm Beach County is one of the largest agricultural counties in the United States with a value in its product exceeding \$1.4 billion annually, nearly double the number of the highest Florida county, which is Miami-Dade.

Lowering the lake's schedule will jeopardize this wonderful economic engine we have in Palm Beach County. Because the AA has contributed only 6 percent of the total phosphorous in the lake since 1974, less than 1 percent in 2001, part of the solution should be to clean up the water as it's coming in from the north before it enters the lake.

The solution to reduce the unwanted discharge in the coastal estuaries should include finishing the refurbishment of the Hebert Hoover Dike and return it to the WSE schedule under which the Corps operated prior to 2008.

The WSE lake management schedule will allow the lake to fluctuate between 12 and a half, and 15 and a half for most of the year, allow the lake to exceed 15 and a half for short periods and provide a dependable water supply while reducing harmful discharges to coastal estuaries.

Thank you.

MR. HUNDLEY: My name is John Hundley. I own Hundley Farms. I'm the chairman of the Board of Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative in Belle Glade and I'm a former board member of the South Florida Water Management.

And as a former board member, I think I understand the system and the district, how it works and operates from the ground up. It's important that we don't go to a lake level anywhere near a 10.5, for all the reasons all of the people here have spoken about tonight. It needs to be somewhere at least near or at where it is now, at least at 12.5.

And all of the cities from West Palm, Jupiter, all the way to Homestead depend on the lake for their water supply, particularly in drought. The conservation areas, the SGAs, Everglades National Park, the health of the Everglades National Park all depend on it. The cities around Lake Okeechobee, as the representatives said, depend on it. Caloosahatchee estuary depends on it to control salinity.

So particularly in times of drought, by lowering the lake level anywhere near 10.5, you're going to have much more severity more often in droughts. The net effect, at some point, will be an ecological disaster for all of South Florida, not just the Glades.

The completion of the Herbert [Ed.: Corrected misspelling.] Hoover Dike, C-43, C-44, and other projects that they're planning in the Glades would help solve this problem on a very balanced basis in trying to meet everyone's concerns.

Thank you, Lieutenant Colonel Reynolds, and thank you all.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. After David Goodlett is Gregg Weiss, Palm Beach County Commissioner.

MR. GOODLETT: Good evening, ladies and gentleman, Colonel. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you tonight on behalf of the growers at Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative. We are predominantly located in the Everglades agricultural area. There are approximately 45 members of our cooperative that are made up of the small-and medium-sized growers in the Everglades agricultural area.

This year, we'll harvest sugarcane on approximately 70,000 acres, maybe a little less. We intend to end the harvest in the next three weeks.

I am a lifelong resident of Palm Beach County. I grew up and lived in Belle Glade my entire life. I have 28 years in at Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative.

One of the privileges of my lifetime was also the ability to serve on the Lake Worth Drainage District, since I was a resident in the eastern part of the community. So I have some limited experience of water resources, both in the urban and in the rural areas. And I can tell you from my experience that I believe and my growers believe that previous speakers are exactly right. To reduce the lake to a level anywhere below 11 feet down into where it was seven feet one time during a drought --a friend of mine and I put a John Deere Gator in what we call Boy Scout Island in Belle Glade and drove nine miles with that Gator out into the lake bottom collecting old Coke bottles, engines that had fallen off of boats, rods and reels.

Forward pumps will have to be employed. The folks on the lower east coast and the backup water supply for the city of West Palm Beach and others will be severely impaired if we find ourself in that position again.

So we appreciate the opportunity to participate in this public process. And, we implore you to keep the level of the lake at its current stage.

COMMISSIONER WEISS: Good evening. My name is Gregg Weiss and I am a Palm Beach County Commissioner for District 2, and I'm here to speak on behalf of the people I represent.

I urge the Corps to follow an evidence-based approach that considers multiple stakeholders in adjusting the Lake Okeechobee operating schedule. And I ask you to reject the proposal to lower lake levels to 10 and a half feet.

The suggestion that the Corps reduces the current operating level from 12 and a half feet to 10 and a half feet elevation is deeply concerning.

If the Corps were to approve this change, it could have devastating impacts to area's health and safety, the local economy, and would likely do irreversible damage to our water supply and our environment.

Those advocating the reduction of the operating level to 10 and a half feet hope this will reduce harmful algal blooms and algal discharges in the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Rivers.

I, too, hope that we can find a solution that will help prevent harmful algal discharges, but I don't believe that a complex problem like this have simple fixes.

Lowering the lake level does not address the underlying cause of blooming algal discharges, which are excess nutrients that enter the lake from the north.

I thank you for your time and for your consideration.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next three names are Bryan Cain, Kymberly Hurchalla, and Grant Lanham.

MR. CAIN: I'm a retired construction worker and a full-time fisherman. I'm from a family that's been decimated from polluted water that actually brought one of America's corporations to its knees. And I have a real concern with the red and green algae. And it's nice to see a few people starting to talk about the level of blooms that are in Lake Okeechobee that are coming from the north.

We've got everybody here talking about lake levels and all that stuff, but if the people up north can clean their water, then Lake O can take and spend a lot less money to try to send clean water to the Everglades and less algae-infested water to both the Loxahatchee and Caloosahatchee.

That is in their LOSOM from 2008. They have the responsibility to not only take care of the water coming into the lake, but also the water coming out of the lake. And there just hasn't been that much talk about trying to have people who are dumping into the Kissimmee River to clean up their water before it gets to Lake O.

Your sweps (phonetic) and your 43 west basin is designed on an amount of water that you can send into it to try to get rid of a certain amount of solids that are suspended in the water.

If you get the suspended levels in water down to lower level, then all these apathments (phonetic) that you're coming up with can be a heck of a lot less in size and cost. And that's a zoning --something for Caloosahatchee. The people that are on the St. Lucie, they need the same thing.

And Kimberly Mitchell from Everglades, she needs fresh water down there. And we're working with a polluted system that's taking us too much money to try to fix to send water in these different directions.

So I think we need to get the people up north to work with everybody down here to fix their problem.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Just remember when you come up to the mic, announce your name and any affiliation you have, please.

MS. HURCHALLA: Hi. I'm Kymberly Hurchalla for Bullsugar and I'm here representing Bullsugar.

I want to encourage support to include all of the negative impacts of cyanobacteria in the scope of the lake management. You know that toxin kills dogs. You know that contact with the blooms sends people to the emergency room. You know that long-term exposure to eating the fish or simply breathing in the air anywhere near an infected water body is going to expose people to really scary health risks.

Around the St. Lucie and the Caloosahatchee, it's the summer discharges from the lake that are causing a real and present danger to the health of exposed residents.

Your scope should include a goal of zero discharge into the St. Lucie, and at the very least, a goal of zero assigning the bacteria-laden water to either estuary. You may not be able to meet that goal, but it is irresponsible not to try, not to set human health as a top priority.

This is not just about the discharges to the coastal estuaries. It is very much about what is happening in the Palm Beach County areas.

The city of West Palm Beach has, like, an L-8 canal and discharges from Lake Okeechobee for potable water. Last summer those discharges to Grassy Waters had dangerous levels of cyanobacteria and the L-8 canal was closed.

You need to look at that impact in managing the lake. The goal needs to be clean water for the city. But that can only happen when there is clean water in the lake.

That brings us to the worst problem we have right now. It's not the estuaries. It's not the cities' water supply. It is the Palm Beach and Hendry County children swimming in algae blooms and eating the fish from the lake and being told the blooms in the lake are not toxic. That is criminal negligence on the part of everyone who is letting it happen. You need to set a goal that avoids both high and low lake levels that destroy marshes and increase cyanobacteria blooms in the lake.

Balancing all those goals will be difficult, but all of them are about human health. The only way to meet them will be to send more clean waters out.

Palm Beach County is considering an emergency resolution to the Corps asking them not to lower the lake because Palm Beach County might need the water. My fellow Floridians in Palm Beach County need to understand that demanding higher lake levels can hurt residents of Palm Beach County.

Higher levels mean marsh destruction and more intense toxic blooms. That means that while there will be enough water in the lake, they can't use it. This means that their residents near the lake will be

exposed, not only to Microcystis and consequential liver damage, but to Anatoxin-a from algal blooms known as Very Fast Death Factor.

If we knew there would be a drought, water management would be easy. If we keep water levels high whenever there might be a drought, we'll end up with high water levels in hurricane season and serious impacts to the health of Palm Beach County residents. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. After Grant Lanham, we have James Alderman and Becky Harris.

MR. LANHAM: My name is Grant Lanham. I'm a resident of Jupiter. I have a background in environmental compliance and environmental engineering, specifically in lake water, storm water and drinking water issues.

There's been a lot of discussion on lowering the lake level for Okeechobee to an artificially low level. Some people believe that by setting the target level of 10.5 feet, the lake will --at that level that will allow the Corps to stop or greatly reduce the discharges to the coastal estuaries during the wet season.

However, lowering the lake to those levels could lead to devastating impacts on the ecology of the lake and the communities surrounding the lake and the agricultural needs of the region.

When the June 1st target state was 15.5 feet in 1980, the lake level on June 1st was 15.46 feet. The following year the lake dropped 9.79 feet because of drought.

When the June 1st target state was 12.5 feet in 2006, the lake level on June 1st was 12.67 feet. The following year, the lake dropped to 8.82 feet because of the drought. Think about repeating those scenarios with a starting lake level of 10.5 feet.

Droughts will occur in the future. And if the lake drops to less than five feet, it would be an ecological disaster. Communities such as Belle Glade, Pahokee, South Bay, Clewiston, and West Palm Beach depend on the lake for their drinking water. If you have a drought that occurs after the lake has been forced to an extremely low level, you run the risk of creating a humanitarian crisis.

The Corps needs to prioritize and accelerate the timetable for fixing the dikes so that the lake can safely retain more water. With the ability to hold more water, the Corps would have more options available on maintaining the lake levels based on the needs of all stakeholders. My hope is that the Corps will let science and historical weather records guide them in making their final determination on release schedules, and not lower the June 1st target level below 12.5.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. James Alderman, Becky Harris, and then Kalyn Hartley.

MR. ALDERMAN: Good evening. My name is Jim Alderman. I reside in Delray Beach, Florida. I'm a farmer over on the east coast, in particularly AgReserves.

I just want to say I'm definitely against lowering the lake two and a half feet. I'm not a scientist, but I've been watching the water levels for 43 years that I've been farming.

I used to be the youngest guy in the room, now I'm getting to be one of the oldest. Droughts seem to come about every 10 years, and without the rains we started having three weeks ago, we would be in a pretty bad drought coming April 15th. It just --you can see the charts, the curves. It's in that direction.

South Florida Water Management has this information. It's published. You just have to look it up. So I'm definitely against it.

I'm also a board member of the Lake Worth Drainage District, and I have a big fear of going into the summer at 10.5 feet. We cannot predict the weather, but if we have a dry summer, a real dry summer, we will be in a drought condition.

And the problem with having a major drought --it's not only for agriculture, but it's for the 1.47 million people that live in Palm Beach County and 28 million every day in this county.

So, we have well fields in every city. The counties all have well fields. Who recharges that well field? The drinking water that you drink, it comes from Lake Okeechobee through the Lake Worth Drainage District and recharges the well fields of Boynton, Belle Glade --not West Palm. They get their own water from their own lake.

But, we've got to have a maintained water table, or we have a chance of getting saltwater intrusion in all our well fields. If that happens, you lose the fresh water.

The desalination plants, we looked at that a few years ago when we had a bad drought about 10 years ago. It's very, very expensive. We can't afford it. The taxes will cost 10 times what the water district —

I'm not a scientist. I don't know all the facts, but I can tell you the observations that I have seen. And without maintaining the water --if we don't go into November 15th with an elevation of the lake at 15.5 to 16 feet, we're going to have a drought. It's just --we're going to have a drought. We're draining the lake now, for what reason, I don't know. It's all political.

If we want to talk about the blue-green algae, we need to pay attention to some of the science that's not been published, like everything else has, in the newspaper. There's some articles, some science about --it might be all largely caused by the --Martin County's backyard.

Specific-type situation in Martin County is a major influence on the nitrogen, the E-coli levels going out to the estuary. It happened three or four weeks ago when we had a big rain that saved us --finish one more thought --there was no discharge from the lake and we had to close the beaches over in Martin County because the nitrogen level was so high and the E-coli was so high. That water did not come from Lake Okeechobee. It came from the backyards of Martin County.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you.

I just want to make note of the fact --we have over 80 people that want to speak tonight, so please try to keep your comments to two minutes, or we will be here until midnight. We will stay through your comments, but please respect your --respect the other folks here and finish within your allotted time.

Thank you.

MS. HARRIS: Hi. I'm Becky Harris. I'm from Stuart, Florida. And I would like to address shared adversity.

First of all, thank you for --Army Corps, again, to be able to speak. This sentence is from LORS 2008: Consideration of the concern for public health and safety is the Corp's highest priority.

But since LORS 2008 has been in effect, the Corps has intentionally discharged toxic waters from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries endangering public health and safety.

The adversity that the coastal communities have experienced is real and has been for years. I saw this first-hand as Pandora and five other dogs became deathly ill from microcystis from the blue-green algae. I have shared with you the autopsy and lab reports that confirmed the dogs went into liver failure from microcystis poisoning. The four vets who treated this dog said she should be dead.

Additionally, BMAA was found in Finn's brain. Finn was the dog that died. And I have that report to give to you as well. I have liver and neurotoxins in my backyard. And I think that's some serious adversity. The scare tactics floating around Palm Beach that lower lake levels mean water shortages is just that: scare tactics.

In 2001 and 2008 when lake levels were in the eight-foot range, everyone got their water. Forward pumps were installed to ensure that all got their water, even if lake levels fell to seven feet.

The coastal communities can no longer take all the adversity. The health of one body of water should not take precedent over another body of water. Human health and safety in one community should not take precedent over another. The picking of winners and losers has to stop.

I'm not here to tell you what to do. But I ask you if the human health and safety of people living on the east and west coast is as important as the human health and safety of those living south of the lake who are threatened by potential failure of the dike.

As you consider your revisions, please consider all communities, because all lives matter.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next Kalyn Hartley, Kelsey Kennedy, Peyton Pelham.

MS. HARTLEY: Good evening, everybody. My name is Kalyn Hartley, and I'm the agri-science teacher at Glades Day School. I'm the FFA advisor there in Belle Glade, Florida. I was born and raised in Belle Glade, and now I'm teaching back there and I'm a current resident of Clewiston, Florida.

I had a speech prepared, but at this point, I think I've heard enough to go off quite a bit. And I want to say first off to everybody that's involved in making these decisions that we would appreciate your observations about our communities as well.

I understand that there are some special interests here and that a lot of people from the coast, as well, that are affected by these algae blooms. And that is horrible. It is. But it's not a solution that would be provided by lowering the lake levels six and a half feet.

A drought is inevitable. It's Florida. It will happen. And when it does, you're mentioning trading the safety and the well-being of one community for another. You're basically asking us to give up our well-being, our safety, our livelihood.

I love the Glades area. I grew up there, and I have no intention of leaving, as many of the Glades' residents do not, because it holds a strong place in our heart. And I would encourage you to please remember that we are humans, too. We have lives here, too. We have families, too, that need consideration.

I'm raising my family there. And I would love to stay there considering my family has been there for a couple of generations now.

I'll finally say in my last statement that I implore you to consider the science that is presented to you, as well as the Water Management District; the comments that have been made here tonight and in other previous meetings; and most importantly, the fact that people that you are affecting when you make this decision is not just the coastal residents. Please do not let political pressure to solve one crisis push you into creating another one.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next Kelsey Kennedy, Peyton Pelham, and Eric Hopkins.

MS. KENNEDY: Hi. My name is Kelsey Kennedy. I'm the treasurer of the Glades Day Middle School FFA Chapter. I'm a sixth generation farmer of our family-owned farm, Kennedy Farms. We have been producing sugarcane and sweet corn since the 1960s.

The lowering of the lake levels would have an economic effect on our ability to successfully keep producing our products in the Glades area.

We need fresh water, more than two and a half feet, to provide us. Not only will it impact our agriculturists' ability to irrigate crops during drought conditions, we are seriously worried about the salinity levels and the fresh water rising, which would make it unsuitable for food production.

I strongly urge you when making your final decision to consider the next generation of agriculturists. Our generation will be largely impacted.

Thank you.

MS. PELHAM: My name is Peyton Pelham. I'm from Glades Day School and the president of the Glades Day Middle School FFA Chapter.

I have lived in the Glades my whole life and both of my parents are employed in the agriculture business. Lowering the Lake levels to 10.5 feet will severely affect the local economy. Agriculture is the backbone of our community, and lower lake levels would make it nearly impossible for agriculturists to be successful in the Glades area.

This will, in turn, cause the shutdown of numerous family farms and small businesses. These small businesses not only rely on agriculture, but also the tourism industry that Lake Okeechobee provides.

There are numerous boaters that utilize the lake as fishing guides and recreational uses, and they would be forced to stay in the channels at 10 and a half feet.

Most importantly, according to the South Florida Management District, water use, cutbacks, and mandatory restrictions are enacted when the lake reaches 12.5 to 10.5 feet, and at 9.5 to 8 feet. If there is a drought, the majority of Lake Okeechobee could be a dry lake bed, which would be catastrophic to our drinking water.

Thank you for considering these matters when making your final decision.

MR. ENGLE: We have Marti LaTour and Lisa Wilson-Davis.

MR. HOPKINS: That's a tough act to follow. Good job, ladies.

My name is Eric Hopkins and I've been a resident of North Palm Beach for 47 years. Over those years, I've seen the extremes in weather. I've seen the hurricanes, the floods and the droughts. And they're all devastating. They're devastating to people in the western communities, eastern communities, and the south. It affects everybody.

A lot of the suggestions that are made regarding the lake seem to be very extreme. In most cases, extremism is not a good solution. It's either you don't want it too high, you don't want it too low. The Corps are the experts. They know, along with water management district, where to maintain the lake. Ten and a half feet will not work. It's just too low.

I've been out there. And when we're in a drought situation everyone's gonna feel it. And it just doesn't make sense. You just can't pull a number out of thin air and expect it to be the right number.

Dike improvements will help the situation greatly. They'll be able to pump more water in the lake and maybe pump out less to the east and to the west.

None of us want to see blue-green algae. We all enjoy the water as much as everyone else and it's -- that's all of our enemies.

The Corps should base their decisions on science, facts, engineering, and common sense. Do not yield to political pressure, emotions or hate groups. Operate the lake at effective levels for all South Florida.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Marti LaTour, Lisa Wilson-Davis and then Jarrod Lowe.

MS. LaTOUR: Good evening. My name is Marti LaTour. I'm here tonight representing the Palm Beach County Food Bank in --as the chairman of the board. And I'm also a Florida resident and a U.S. citizen.

The Palm Beach County Food Bank distributes over 5 million pounds of food annually. It relies almost exclusively on our Amish county agricultural farmers for the produce that we distribute.

This year we are forecasted to distribute approximately 1.5 million pounds of fresh produce, and that makes produce 20 percent of all the food that we distribute.

We receive these in-kind donations of produce from 12 growers in Palm Beach County. We distribute to almost 130 soup kitchens, food pantries, schools and homeless shelters exclusively throughout Palm Beach County.

But for this important decision, I don't think we should be good talking about Palm Beach County Food Bank or Palm Beach County. Florida ranks first, second, and fourth in distribution to the United States of various groups of produce, and they export almost three million dollars' worth of produce to other countries around the world. When you consider that, Florida agriculture is not just important to Palm Beach County, Florida, or to the United States, but to the world.

That being said, I'm not an expert on the effects of water levels nor an expert on where the algae is truly originating from. I don't think there should be a public opinion debate, although it's nice to be able to give our opinions. I don't think this should be done --should be an issue between Palm Beach County versus Martin County, or agriculture versus environment. I think this should be resolved with all the scientists as experts in the field and labs coming up with the facts. And only the facts should be used in making this decision.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. After Lisa Wilson-Davis, we have Jarrod Lowe and J.D. McClintock.

MS. DAVIS: Good evening. My name is Lisa Wilson-Davis. I'm here representing the Southeast Florida Utility Council. The council represents utilities located in Martin, Palm Beach, Broward, Miami-Dade, and Martin Counties to provide critical water and wastewater services to over six and a half million Floridians.

I'm here today because Lake Okeechobee is the liquid part [Ed.: "Heart"?] of a completely integrated, regional water management system that our members rely on to meet the essential needs of their customers.

Our members have invested billions of great payor dollars to develop infrastructure needed to meet the needs of our customers for both environmental protection, meet minimum flows and levels and prevent saltwater intrusion.

They have also implemented aggressive conservation programs and developed alternative water supply projects to meet the demands of present and future customers.

The development of CERP in the WSE during the late 1990s resulted in the adoption of programs and regulations that guaranteed portable water suppliers in one in 10 level drought protection.

CERP was additionally intended to provide for additional water use source development to meet the resulting demand from future growth, a commitment that even today has yet to be --remains largely unfulfilled.

The operation of Lake Okeechobee must remain with --to the implementation of CERP in the operation of the central and South Florida project.

Our members' consumptive use permits for South Florida Water Management Districts' restrictive allocation rule and minimum flows and levels established by the district to protect the environmental system from significant harm are based on the WSE regulations schedule, adopted and parallel with CERP.

In 2008, product safety concerns resulted in the implementation of LOROS '08 as an interim measure to protect the public from the risk of catastrophic failure of the dike.

The Army Corps has assured our six million and a half customers the prior regulations schedule would be restored once the dike's repairs were complete.

Our members are dismayed to learn that the Corps is now being asked to consider an even more erroneous regulatory schedule after dike repairs are completed.

Consequently, in order to avoid diverse impacts, the Council requests the Corps establish a base condition for reevaluation of the regulation schedule that recognizes the reliance of the state.

In summary, our council requests this effort address the technical requirements that provide a one-in-ten-year rule of protection; protect against saltwater intrusion; adequately incorporate climate impacts; and be based on sound science and comprehensive modeling.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Jarrod Lowe, J.D. McClintock and then Jonathan Dolphus.

MR. LOWE: Good evening. My name is Jarrod Lowe and I'm the president-elect of the Realtors Association of the Palm Beaches and Greater Fort Lauderdale.

Our Association spans from Broward County all the way to St. Lucie County. We represent 30,000 Realtor members, the third largest Realtor association in the nation.

I've been a long-time resident of both the Treasure Coast and Palm Beach County for many years. I've seen firsthand the devastating impact of toxic algae blooms and their negative effects on our little piece of paradise.

National news coverage of beaches, boats and waterways to homes surrounded by guacamole-thick algae, alarming do-not-swim warning signs and people becoming ill after coming in contact with the algae are not what people want to see as they are considering a move to South Florida.

When toxic algae blooms are present in our estuaries, our local economies and the real estate markets that support them suffer greatly.

As president-elect of the Realtors of the Palm Beaches and Greater Fort Lauderdale, as well as a member of Florida Realtors, we support less discharges from Lake Okeechobee.

My question to the Army Corps of Engineers is this. The Army Corps of Engineers has spent large amounts of money to recreate the traditional meandering of the Kissimmee River. Has the Army Corps conducted any hydraulic modeling that would show additional water storage features that could potentially help to slow the large amounts of water flowing into Lake O during large rain events?

If the answer is yes, can the Army Corps provide or direct the public to these scientific answers?

We thank you for your time and commitment to solving this crisis because water quality affects every aspect of our lives to include our economy, jobs, resources, and most importantly, our quality of life.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. After J.D. McClintock, we have Jonathan Dolphus and then Dale Erickson.

MR. McCLINTOCK: Good evening. My name is J.D. McClintock, and I'm the chairman of the Palm Beach County Government Affairs Committee for the Realtors Association of the Palm Beaches and Greater Fort Lauderdale.

As Jarrod said, we have 30,000 members and residents through Palm Beach County, Broward, St. Lucie, and Martin.

When toxic algae blooms over Lake Okeechobee --blooms over Lake Okeechobee and then gets discharged in our estuaries, our local economies suffer, our real estate markets dry up, and our communities pay the price.

As a member of the Realtor --of the Florida Realtors, we support less discharges from Lake Okeechobee.

Lake Okeechobee is often referred to as the liquid heart of Florida. It provides Floridians with water for boating, fishing, agriculture, and drinking water. There is no doubt that Lake Okeechobee plays a pivotal role in the daily lives of Floridians. However, what Floridians may not be aware of is the saltwater intrusion is a clear and present danger to their lives.

Consistent access to fresh drink water as well as a secondary source of drinking water is essential to sustain life in South Florida.

My question to the Army Corps is, has the Army Corps of Engineers conducted hydraulic modeling that would help give guidance to the water management --to water managers on the potential negative impacts a low lake level would have on saltwater intrusion in the drinking water wells of South Florida secondary source of drinking water, Lake Okeechobee, is aimed to be at lower levels? We thank you for your time and commitment to this crisis.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. After Jonathan Dolphus, Dale Erickson and Kiley Harper-Larsen.

MR. DOLPHUS: Hi. My name is Jonathan Dolphus and I'm the vice chair of the Palm Beach County Government Affairs Committee of the Realtors of the Palm Beaches and Greater Fort Lauderdale.

If you turn on the national news during the recent toxic algae blooms, you might think that the issue is strictly contained to the St. Lucie River and the Treasure Coast.

However, news coverage does not always reflect reality. The truth is, is that boat ramps and parks along the Intracoastal from West Palm Beach to Lake Worth were plastered with do-not-swim signs. Even Peanut Island, arguably the busiest and most famous county park, was forced to close due to high levels of cyanobacteria.

I realize that in order to preserve the integrity of the dike, water from Lake Okeechobee must be discharged somewhere. Given that, my question is, if the Army Corps ceases to discharge east to the St. Lucie River, will there be an increase of discharges to the L-8 and C-51 canals?

Thank you for your time.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next is Dale Erickson and Kiley Harper-Larsen and then Jackie Lipish (phonetic).

MR. ERICKSON: Dale Erickson, Erickson Farm. I'm a 60-acre farm that's located on the eastern shore of Lake Okeechobee. We've been there since 1911. And I'm here to say that without 12 and a half feet of water in the lake, we would have devastating results.

Our crops depend on Lake Okeechobee to provide freeze protection, to stop saltwater intrusion, and to keep our soil saturated so we don't have oxidation and would lose our soil.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Kiley Harper-Larsen, Jackie Lipish (phonetic) and Steve Myott.

MS. HARPER-LARSEN: Good evening. My name is Kiley Harper-Larsen. I'm a proud Okeechobee, Florida, resident of 13 years, with my husband. And we have had the amazing opportunity to see the realization of our farming dreams because of the opportunities that are afforded along the shores of Lake Okeechobee.

I understand that we have a diverse crowd in the room tonight. And the Glades farmers are incredibly sympathetic to the perils that all of us have faced through the management that has occurred, but we all have to work together in this process.

I'm vehemently opposed to lowering the lake level to 10 and a half feet. We must step away from anything that is political strategy and look towards absolute, concrete, and also well-researched and sound science.

Environmentalists and farmers, we're all stewards. Stewards of sound decision making. And we have to encourage the Army Corps and the South Florida Water Management District to use those practices that all of us employ for our livelihoods.

We encourage you to follow the 1999 WSE regulation schedule, which we have seen positive results for.

Any regulation schedule must balance all project purposes. Please make sure that you prioritize the Herbert Hoover Dike restoration, which literally sits in my backyard and behind both of my farms and my nursery.

My second-generation Florida farmer who's four years old and the livelihoods of all of your children depend upon these sound decisions.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Jackie Lipish (phonetic). Steve Myott.

MR. MYOTT: Hello. I'm Steve Myott from Boynton Beach. I've learned a lot tonight. And I think I just want to focus on what I've got to say about the input for stakeholders.

The issues that are important to me --I'm a coastal resident, so I like to use the water and go fishing. And I can tell you the water is really dirty and it's just not the estuary life that we've had in the past. It's not looking good.

The outcomes from --the outcomes that I would be interested in would be that we really understand how dirty the water is and that we're doing --that we've got a plan to do something about it, because --the levels are important and the farming is important; food's important; people's lives are important, for sure.

But unless we are looking at, really, what's in the water and where it's coming from, we're not gonna really change anything. You know, it's just gonna get worse, so I'd really like to see it be included in the study that the quality of the water and how to improve the quality of the water when it does get to the coast is addressed in the long-term plan.

Thanks very much.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Scott Lewis, then Tommy Strowd, and Roy Synder.

MR. LEWIS: My name is Scott Lewis and I'm a native. I was born here 62 years ago. I protested out front of this building during one of the last bad droughts, because what they're proposing to do with the 10.5 foot is playing Russian roulette.

They will be costing jobs. They will be affecting everybody in South Florida. And they'll be doing dangerous things with what affects everyone in this room and everybody in South Florida. And what I don't hear enough talk about is who's dumping all the pollution into Lake Okeechobee that's coming out to all of us.

And to me, the flow is coming from up north, and the water wars are starting. But playing to one particular element --and last year was horrific up in the north end of our county and in Port St. Lucie. But they need to look at what's going to happen down here because of uncontrolled restrictions up north. And that needs to stop. Dumping thousands of tons of phosphorus into the bottom of the lake and not doing anything about it with three foot of dead morass in the bottom of it doesn't help any of us.

We need to take care of what's being discharged because we've gotta have high water quality. That's something all of us depend on. And I'm relying on our governor and our senator, who represent the entire state, not to listen to Brian Mast, who's listening to his constituents in the north area alone. And we need to support something that blankets all of us and don't play Russian roulette, because I will be back out in front of the building with the nurserymen and the growers and landscapers. And I know that there'll be other people that were here, because there were hundreds of us protesting. And that will happen again. I promise.

And I heard Commissioner Mack Bernard say he'd fight it. I will be there to fight. We will fight for our jobs and we'll fight for water quality and we'll fight for South Florida.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Next is Tommy Strowd, then Roy Synder and then Paul Orsenigo. Sorry about the last name there.

MR. STROWD: Good evening. I want to thank the Corps for having the opportunity to speak tonight.

My name is Tommy Strowd. I'm the district engineer of the Lake Worth Drainage District. You heard from a couple of our governing board members earlier.

The Lake Worth Drainage District was created by the legislature in 1915. Pretty much exists from this canal right out back here south to the Hillsborough Canal around Boca, from the area around 95 west to the Loxahatchee refuge.

The use of regional water from Water Conservation Area 1 Lake Okeechobee is critical to our ability to maintain regional groundwater levels and ward off the dreaded saltwater intrusion into coastal utilities. Within our boundaries, about half the population of Palm Beach resides. So it's a sizable urban area and it requires this maintenance of groundwater to protect those urban well fields.

Before I worked at the Lake Worth Drainage District, I worked for the South Florida Water Management District for about 22 years, worked with the Corps of Engineers on a couple of these lake regulation schedule efforts, and had the good fortune to work on the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.

LORS 2008 was developed as a temporary schedule to address legitimate dam safety concerns until a permanent structural fix could be implemented. However, it did impact the regional water supply to the lower east coast of Florida. Recognizing that risk, a lot of people shared in order to give the Corps an opportunity to do that work on the dike.

And with the significant progress made by the Corps were both the refurbishment of the Herbert Hoover Dike and the implementation of the Everglades Comprehensive Restoration Plan. We also had the unique opportunity to consider both improved conditions in the dike and the upcoming completion of several new reservoirs.

The opportunity of this additional storage provides benefits to virtually every part of the Kissimmee, Okeechobee and Everglades System. But it's always a balance of a wide range of benefits that must be carefully considered and evaluated.

The federal authorization of CERP plan not only provided a blueprint for the distribution of benefits, but afforded protection to existing legal users known as the savings clause of the program.

And it's our hope that in developing LOSOM, that the Corps upholds its promise to existing water users and provides adequate water storage to meet the permitted water allocations under CERP.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next we have Roy Synder, Paul Orsenigo, and Lisa Inerleming (phonetic). Roy?

MR. SYNDER: I decline.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Paul?

MR. ORSENIGO: Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. My name is Paul Orsenigo. I was born and raised in Belle Glade. And in our farming operation in the Glades and Loxahatchee, we grow sugarcane for Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida.

Our operation produces about 10 million pounds of lettuce and leafy vegetable items a year, 800,000 pounds of spring mix, and 10 million ears of sweet corn. So we help feed a lot of people from here all the way to New York.

Our companies are regular contributors to the food bank in Palm Beach County as well as a host -- we're a host farm for cleaning operations as well, giving back to our community fresh vegetables for giving to those in need.

There has been very little consideration setting this lake stage at a lower level to the population in Florida since 2011. We're up somewhere around 21 million people in this state now. In 2001 we were around 14 million. So there's got to be some consideration given to the demands on the system based on pure population growth.

To lower the lake level would be a very, very dangerous, uncalculated risk. The bottom line is we would wait for something of the magnitude of Tropical Storm Isaac north of the lake to bring the lake level back to a level that serves everyone's needs.

In closing, there needs to be a lot of science and research done about the lake --Lake Okeechobee, which is a finite resource with infinite demands.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next, Keith Wedgworth, Gianni Bertuzzelli and Dennis Wedgworth.

MR. WEDGWORTH: Good evening, everyone. My name is Keith Wedgworth. I'm a fourth-generation farmer in the Everglades agriculture area.

My family came to South Florida in the late 1920s and they've seen a lot of changes over the last 90 years, from population growth, hurricanes, the construction of the dike, wet seasons, but also droughts.

Our family came to the area because my great-grandfather was a plant pathologist for the University of Florida. So our family has always followed science and facts instead of emotions.

Sometimes people lose focus on history and facts. If you look back in history, we have had as many dry seasons as we do with wet periods. By keeping the lake artificially low, it will take much of the dry season to send us into a real drought. It would really hurt the cities and farms around the lake, but also the cities on the coast, since a lot of them use the lake as their primary or secondary water supply.

I ask the U.S. Corps of Engineers, when developing the lake schedule, to please not manage the lake in a way that will ensure artificial drought for years to come.

Thank you very much for your time.

MR. BERTTUZZELLI: Good evening. My name is Gianni Bertuzzelli. I am a resident of Jupiter, Florida, and I'm also a business owner in Jupiter, Florida. But I'm also a homeowner in Buckhead Ridge.

I have the distinct pleasure of being able to recreate in both Jupiter as well as Lake Okeechobee.

I attended the last meeting at Treasure Coast, and what's evident to me tonight --I forget what I wrote --but what's evident to me tonight is we all have our needs here and we all have our point of view in Palm Beach County.

And contrasting to what I saw at the Treasure Coast meeting was a lot of people that felt a lot of hurt and suffered a lot of pain for the discharges that they suffered.

And what seems to me --maybe I'm wrong, but what seems to me to be happening tonight is that there's a division occurring. There's a division of the coast and the inland interests. Well, those interests intermarry, they're together. And I think what's happening is that there are some political forces at play. And what's happening is --how can you get your mission accomplished --and it's the old divide and conquer.

My question to the Army Corps of Engineers is, what steps are going to be taken to really ensure that --or bring about some sort of study to ensure that the causes for the reasons that we're here are addressed? Because we know that the Army Corps of Engineers cannot alone take care and cure the problems that the discharges are occurring. We know they're deep --and reasons why they're there. What is the Corps gonna do to bring together other agencies from --doing the top-down water flow studies with the whole state of Florida, looking at population growth, all the factors that impact why we're here tonight?

I would be very happy if we could get some sort of positive resolution to look at things well beyond just a lake level number.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next is Dennis Wedgworth, Mary Lou Bedford and Nyla Pipes.

MR. WEDGWORTH: Hello. My name is Dennis Wedgworth. I'm currently president of Wedgworth Farms, which was started by my grandparents in Belle Glade in 1932.

Currently we grow sugarcane and rice. Farmers, by nature, love the land and have a keen desire to pass it down from generation to generation. They know to do so they must practice sustainable farming techniques and continually improve best management practice to co-exist with the environment around us.

Farmers in the AAA have invested more than \$500 million in restoration efforts over the last two decades, achieving remarkable results. Ninety percent of the Everglades is below 10 parts per billion phosphorus and is continuing to improve.

We take dirty water from the north and clean it before sending it south, removing more than 50 percent of the phosphorous. We're doing our part.

Farmers love to hunt and fish. We want nothing more than to have a vibrant lake along with pristine coastal estuaries. We recognize that the Indian River Lagoon and the Everglades are world-class assets that need to be protected.

We also recognize that the Everglades agriculture area is a world-class asset that also needs to be preserved. It is the largest continuous area in the world of highly productive organic soils, making Palm Beach County the largest agricultural county east of the Mississippi. The citizens of Florida ought to be proud of this.

We've had three significant water shortages since 2000 that not only caused tremendous crop losses, but also significant environmental damages throughout South Florida.

Lowering the lake to 10.5 will not only increase the frequency but the severity of water shortages.

It was contemplated that the current lake regulation schedule was temporary until the rehabilitation of the lake levee was complete and that the new schedule would give you more flexibility in holding water during heavy rain events. It was never contemplated that we would lower the schedule further.

The modeling shows that a lower lake schedule would make all of us, including the coastal estuaries, worse off. Please manage the system for all the stakeholders. Please follow the science.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next, Mary Lou Bedford, Nyla Pipes and John Koons.

MS. BEDFORD: Good evening. First of all, thank you to the Corps of Engineers for listening to us. We appreciate that. And I'd like to thank South Florida Water Management for hosting.

I am Mary Lou Bedford. I am the CEO of the Central Palm Beach County Chamber of Commerce. We are a regional chamber of commerce and our footprint sits from the lake to the ocean. So we go from cane to coral. We encompass 21 of the 39 municipalities in the region.

I'm here on behalf of our board of directors. We did submit a resolution that will go on public record. The resolution is to oppose the lowering of the lake, and so I want to be cognizant of the time and others, I'm just gonna read you the bottom portion of what our resolution says.

The Central Palm Beach County Chamber Board of Directors encourages the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to consistently maintain Lake Okeechobee water levels within the ecologically preferred operating band of 12.5 to 15.5 feet.

The Central Palm Beach County Chamber Board of Directors also encourages the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to adopt the scientifically driven approach with regards to Lake Okeechobee water levels.

The Chamber would support a discussion with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding how to sustain the overall quality of Lake Okeechobee and possibly do a study that not only controls the levels of the water, but protects fish and wildlife communities; provides water supply for municipal, industrial and agricultural uses. This will ensure a healthy economic future for all.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. After Nyla Pipes, John Koons and Bishop Wright.

MS. PIPES: Good evening, everybody. Gee, I can't even wait to hear what I'm gonna say. For those of you who know me, that's sort of a joke to lighten the mood.

So we have a problem. And we have a problem collectively, because we are all drawn together by this incredible flood control system that we built that no longer serves all of our needs, because there's just too many of us living here.

Now nobody's gonna put up fences at the line. I know that's been suggested. But I will say this. I am a coastal resident. I live in Port St. Lucie. My husband works in Martin County. I also happen to work in Martin County quite a bit of the time. I go back and forth across those county lines on the Treasure Coast. I know a lot of people and I listened to not one, but two meetings last week like this, back-to-back, and we had hundreds of speakers.

I'm going to tell you something about the coastal area of Martin County and the St. Lucie side. We frequently have closed sandbars and no-contact orders for our water due to enterobacteria. But dare I talk about septic tanks, and immediately I'm hated by somebody who lives in the heartland who has a bunch of upland.

There are definitely forces that are trying to push us apart. And I like what the man said about divide and conquer. That has been something going on because of special interests in this state for the last 30 years.

The problem lies north of the lake and we're not doing enough to stop the inflow to Lake Okeechobee.

In our local basin, we are not doing enough to get off the septic tanks, and we are not doing enough to stop local basin runoff. And some of that is IRL south and surcharges that we need to do. But because we've got this excuse on the St. Lucie side --it's all Lake O --nobody wants to work on any of those issues on our own side.

So until we do that, it's very difficult to take health concerns seriously, because nobody seems to care when our sand bar is closed due to enterobacteria.

We all need to come together and we all need to get real. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next is John Koons, Bishop Wright and Lee Simons.

MR. KOONS: My name is Jeff Koons. I was the city commissioner of West Palm Beach for 12 years, and county commissioner for eight. I've been working on water for 30 years. I was a commissioner of West Palm Beach. They showed up and said they want to shut our water down. And I go, What are you talking about?

It's Flagler's original water system. We can't take anything in there. It's the water supply for the coastal area here. And it's the recharge for the Loxahatchee River, which happens to be Congressman Mast's —power third of his district, which is the Everglades Restoration Project and the Wild and Scenic River.

I want to thank the Colonel. We've been going through our project selection team process for that. The third time. We all came together in Palm Beach County and put together the L-8 reservoir, which was a

recharge for the river. Got sued by the environmentalists. Now that water goes back. Now we've been in the discussion for five years of where's our deep storage that we could use to restore our own ecosystem?

What I'm telling you is we can manage the hell out of this basin. The C-51 basin, the L-8 basin, we can use all the water the farmers want to send to us on the L-8. We can use lake water, and we can use it and reuse it and we could send it to the Lake Worth Drainage District down to the cities in Broward and Miami-Dade that need the recharge.

We are recharge for Palm Beach County and going to the south. We can keep the water table up. We have demonstrated how this works.

I sent the Colonel a list today. We've spent on 230 projects, \$1.5 billion on our basins, okay? This is the L-8 basin, the C-51 basin, recharge the Loxahatchee River, half a billion dollars' worth of county land.

We have Corbett, DuPuis, the county national --we have 100,000 acres of historic wetlands that are ready to receive all the water. We can take a flood of that and load it in there, and a week later it's all gone. We can manage this basin together.

What I want to ask the Colonel is, please look at this basin unique. And nobody's measured the water quality in the basin.

The water is showing up in the catchment area now as we speak. It was there this summer. So we're having man-made droughts affect our natural areas that we have worked together to recharge.

This basin is completely different than where you are and we need to manage it differently. Water knows no political boundary.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. After Bishop Wright, we have Lee Simons, Simon Smithy (phonetic) and Todd Townsend.

MR. WRIGHT: I'd like to thank the Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District, but most of all I'd like to thank everybody who come to this meeting tonight to set the channel changer down to give some public comment, because that's really what it's all about. It's nice to see this great crowd.

I've lived here for 53 years, all my life. I'm a sportsman. I'm one of these guys who go out in Lake Okeechobee to fish, hunt, eat and enjoy every bit of this toxic water, okay?

What's amazing me tonight is people pass out this propaganda. You know, we're all concerned about water quality, but we're all part of the water quality problem.

As you heard, different speakers speak here tonight about water quality. There's sportsmen who are probably the most concerned about water quality, because everything that we eat comes from that water.

So with that said, we're all concerned about water quality. But the fact is, we're all concerned about water. In my area, the Realtors worry about that. Well, maybe they ought to look out in California and see what a drought's like, see how many properties they sell when the lawn's brown in the yard. So we're all interested in the water.

Someone said tonight, shared adversity. That's my favorite line. I believe that I picked that up a long time ago. And a lot of people talk about estuaries and everything else. Well the Everglades suffers when high water comes too. The animals, the (inaudible)-bearing animals, all of the wildlife suffers in high water.

We all talk about sending water south, and we all know it don't go south. Same reason why we all squabble. But if we all work together for shared adversity, we all work together to try and get better water quality, we wouldn't be complaining about this water because it's something we all know we've gotta live with --we gotta live --to have water.

So with that said, really gotta think about --harder about water quality and not so much about getting rid of it, because I think we all need it.

But again, I'm also proponent that doesn't want to see Lake Okeechobee be a reservoir for everybody. But I do agree I don't want to see Lake Okeechobee be bone dry either.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. After Lee is Todd Townsend and Glenn Bair.

MR. SIMONS: Hey, everybody. I'm Lee. It's so nice to see everyone here tonight. I want to offer up a hydrologist's perspective.

I just want to know by a show of hands, anybody else swam in Lake Okeechobee? I'm the only one? Anybody before age 10? So my story is age nine, jumping off a boat, diving down where I could see bream beds at nine years old. We dove down and then we grabbed the eggs to bring them up --of course, we're kids --and that was my fascination. Which actually, that's probably what drew me here today, drew my interest into this issue.

So I'm gonna offer one little slide of my presentation that I, kind of, drummed up for this and I'm gonna talk about the conveyance channels.

So the conveyance comes from south of Lake Okeechobee and it spills off into the coastal areas. And I have a concern with them because I know what happens. As a fisherman, there's only a few types of fish that can survive in this environment and one of them is the snook. They come in when the gates are open and they swim. And they only use about this much of water. They stay on the top.

And that's actually the only water that interacts with the surface and that's the only water that has the oxygen in it, is the upper one or two foot of water.

So if you can imagine, the conveyance channels are, what, 60 feet wide --we drove across them coming here --and maybe 10 to 20, 24 feet deep at max. So most of that water --what I'm gonna call --is dead water, because there's no surface air interaction.

And in Florida we have what's called laminar flow. And laminar flow is kind of like a glacier. There's no mixing. It just stays like this the whole way.

So anyhow, given that, by the time the water leaves the lake --there's a fact about the Mississippi River I'm gonna throw in here real quick --because I don't know the actual sediment load of these conveyance channels --but the Mississippi River is about 70 percent sediment. And that's a lot, a lot -- that's a lot of sediment. So if you can imagine how much sediment is in these channels.

So what happens, when C-51 or 43 or the 44 canal hits the ocean or the gulf, depending on the energy of that environment, that's actually the start of what's called a dead zone in the ocean.

And right now I want to draw your attention to --because I'm out of time --but I want to draw your attention to --there's an article, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration called the Gulf of Mexico. It's called the dead zone. And it's the largest dead zone ever measured. It's from August 2, 2017. So if you want to know the science, read that article. And I hope that helps you out.

Thanks.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. I just wanted to note that we're at 8:00 and we have 40 more speakers. People are doing a good job of keeping to their two minutes, but we're still gonna be here for a while.

MR. TOWNSEND: Hi. My name is Todd Townsend. I'm a Lake Worth resident. I'm here representing the water. I just want to say that if you need to store the water, you could possibly look at the idea of making huge cofferdams within the lake. You could store it, you could use that to let water out, you could let some of that water go out and store water within the cofferdams. That might work.

Secondly, we're looking at the water in the wrong way. The water is not a simple resource at our whim. The water is a sacred connection to and of life. And if you really think about it, the water is the body of our ancestors. The water is the body of us and our contemporaries. And the water is the bodies of the future people that we will have later. So we need to look at the water almost as a person.

If companies can have a personality or have personhood, then so should the water.

So in the end, this is a really good case to show that --well, I'll just leave it right there.

Thank you. Bye-bye.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next, Glenn Bair, John Whidden, Dennis Grady.

MR. BAIR: I'm the short number. Hi. I am Glen Bair. I represent Bair Electronics. We are the Motorola sales and service facility up in the Glades. All the agricultural customers you heard talk tonight are people from that area. They're my customers. I'm the little guy. I'm the small business that is affected by whatever happens if the lake gets too low.

So, currently, as you guys move forward, 12 and a half looks pretty good. I've spent all my life playing in that lake. I don't have any horns sticking out of my head. And hopefully God won't give me any cancer down the road, which I don't think he will, but there are serious concerns about --it's all about the science of what's going on here, the science and the issues and the estuaries in the Treasure Coast area. Somebody has already spoken to that.

Harbor Branch (phonetic) has mentioned how we can fix that problem. It's not your privy to solve, but it's some discussions you need to get back to Congressman Mast, because he's going to be in your face about, Well, I want this. How come we need this? Because as the Corps you speak to him, and you listen to us. Also, he'll listen to his people.

But they've already said. Let's get rid of sewer systems --I mean septic systems, let's go to sewer. Anywhere humans live and there's lakes --if you look all over the country, all over the world --this problem exists.

Now, they're discussing --the reason why they're trying to get us to lower the lake and have you alter the flow --and these programs you have --LORS you had since 2008 and before --the truth, I'm learning more about it every day --but we need to extend the course for CERP, get it all finished.

I was at the C-44 today. One of my customers is working up there. I was there seeing them. I need them to work. I need to make some money. I'm not going to lie to you. It's all about being in business. It's also about clean, fresh water; about our livelihoods, our kids; everything about it.

And I very much would not see anything below 12 and a half. I've been on the lake all my life. I'm generation three of my family's business. We're 66 years old. I can't see why we can't come together and solve this problems scientifically.

With that, thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Thank you. Next, John Whidden, then Dennis Grady and Donia Roberts.

MR. WHIDDEN: Good afternoon. My name is Tony Whidden. I'm a fourth generation Glades County resident. I've been employed by a farm in Glades Country. I've been there for 27-28 years. I'm also a sportsman on Lake Okeechobee.

I want to address a question that's kind of spouted out rudely at a Port St. Lucie meeting. It was, What has US Big Sugar done for water quality? That's a pretty good question. That's what we all need to ask ourselves.

Some of you clean-water advocates, you should ask this yourselves. What are you doing for clean water? Where is your money going? Where is it coming from? That gives you the true identity of the politics behind it.

I'm not affiliated with U.S. Sugar, but just a simple look on their website, they spend over \$400 million on Everglades restoration. That's pretty big.

What some of us other farmers have done, we've developed settling cells on our farms. When the water comes off our crops, it goes into these settling cells. When it leaves the farm, it actually leaves cleaner in many, many instances than when we get it.

We've also developed high-tech fertilizer rigs. We go out on our land, we take many, many soil samples over GPS locations. We load that information into our computer, the results from the samples over a topical map, load that information into our rigs. It goes out and it reads the ground from the samples. It's a variable rate. It's allowing us to use less fertilizer. That's better for our bottom line, better for the environment. Just a few of the things.

These things were driven by scientific research, facts, truth about our facts, past experience and technology. That's the drivers behind our industry. We can't use growth crops, half-truths, full-blown lies and human emotion. It doesn't work. That only works in media and politics.

When managing this lake, we want you to hold the lake at an acceptable level. It helps all of us. That's important.

Low water doesn't equal clean water. The drought effects of 2007 in July, that proved that. When water comes in Florida --the lake was at 8.8 feet then. And when the water came, it come hard and it come fast. And what do they do? They released water.

In Captains, that was not clean water. It couldn't have been. Our grasslands --our flooded grasslands were on dry ground, dead or died. Think about what you're advocating for.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Next Dennis Grady, Donia Roberts and Scott Kelly.

MR. GRADY: Hi. I'm Dennis Grady, CEO of the Chamber of Commerce of the Palm Beaches. Our organization was founded in 1913. We're located at 401 North Flagler Drive, downtown West Palm Beach.

Lieutenant Colonel, thank you for making this evening possible.

We understand that you're currently developing the Lake Okeechobee Operating Manual commonly referred to as LOSOM, which will replace the current regulation schedule and set the parameters of how the Corps will manage Lake Okeechobee water levels once the Herbert Hoover Dike rehab project is complete in 2022.

Lake Okeechobee is the lifeblood of South Florida, providing a critical water supply to Florida's citizens and the environment.

The Corps has stated its responsibility is to balance the project's purposes for flood control, water supply, recreation, navigation, environmental effects to fish and wildlife, and cultural and recreational resources.

For stakeholders like us in West Palm Beach, Lake Okeechobee provides the most fundamental need to the lives of more than 100,000 residents and businesses: our drinking water, which the United Nations has recognized as a fundamental human right.

During the Corps' public input process, some elected officials and coastal activists have advocated for Lake Okeechobee to be drained to historically low levels that would be disastrous for the more than six and a half million citizens of South Florida who rely on the lake for this basic human right.

The board of directors for the Chamber of Commerce of the Palm Beaches, on behalf of its more than 1,100 members, urge the Corps to protect our drinking water supply while balancing the needs of other stakeholders.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: After Donia Roberts, Jack Kelly, it's Tom Schwartz.

MS. ROBERTS: Good evening. My name is Donia Roberts. I'm a multi-generational farmer in the EAA as well as a business owner in the Glades whose livelihood depends on Lake Okeechobee.

We farmers and Glades business owners have a direct economic stake in the health of the lake and how it is managed, and we depend on a robust agricultural economy.

My family grows sugarcane, green beans, and sweet corn. Our fresh market coincides with the dry season. And without our sole source of supplemental irrigation, we are at severe risk.

Lowering the lake level below 12 and a half feet is effectively cutting off our water supply and is contradictory to our consumptive use permits and the congressionally mandated purpose of the lake.

Protection of our water supply and the ecology of the lake is critical to the economy of Palm Beach County and the state.

Thank you for considering the public input on the issues surrounding the lake levels. We understand the balancing act the Corps of Engineers must address in managing the lake, and we are hopeful that you will follow the science related to these issues.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: After Scott and Tom, it's is Paul Gray.

MR. KELLY: Hi. My name is Scott Kelly. I'm the assistant city administrator representing the City of West Palm Beach.

The City of West Palm Beach services a population of more than 120,000, the water needs including the City of West Palm Beach, the Town of Palm Beach, as well as the town of South Palm Beach.

We also end up providing our principal supplier of water for the Loxahatchee River during the dry season in order to meet minimum flows and levels and preserve the ecological balance of the river.

What I would like to talk to today is about the fact that we studied this system extensively and we've hired a number of professionals, both scientists and engineers, to do extensive modeling. And half of that modeling, based on the results of the last drought we had, which was in 2011, we invested tens of millions of dollars to build a robust system that would address the historic record in regard to water supply needs during droughts.

This is unprecedented though, because we never would have contemplated artificially lowering the water level to 10.5. And it puts us at risk and also puts the --I'm talking about the people that are on our water system --but it also puts the environment at risk.

A little lesson here. On April 25th, 2000, the Corps released water from the Lake Okeechobee from 14.7 feet down to 13 feet. There were massive releases into the estuaries. It ended up at 13 feet on May 21st of year 2000. We had a dry summer, so it was a multi-year drought condition, and then we ended up having a severe drought during the dry season in 2001. The lake dropped to 8.97.

Can you imagine if they had dropped the lake down to 10.5 what kind of damage that would have caused?

We need to look back at the historic record. It's very easy to look at this. We have done extensive modeling and we need to rely on the science.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: After Tom Schwartz, it will be Len Lindahl and James Bonfiglio.

MR. SCHWARTZ: My name is Tom Schwartz. I was an attorney for the South Florida Water Management District for 31 years. And I think by now we know the full extent of the problem with the St. Lucie, and it's been explained to us.

I want you to consider this, that we had droughts during my tenure at the Water Management District in 1971, '81, '91, and, as just explained, in 2001.

The difference in our reaction and our response to those was the number of people in 1971 as opposed to 2001. And now here we are in 2019, many, many more people and our response will be even more different.

In 1981, the drought was quite severe. What happened was, we went through a dry season with very little rain. Here comes the rainy season, nothing. We went through a rainy season with very little rain, and here comes the dry season. We went through that with very little rain and it was very, very dangerous.

We were able to --we formed a committee to meet weekly and keep track of everything that we could as to the drought. And it was in 1981 where we formed our rules as far as watering is concerned during droughts.

And the drought went over the second dry season and here comes the rainy season and no rain in June and July. Businesses went under. We had golf courses that were quite brown, and, of course, you couldn't do your lawns except once a week for a limited period of time.

And we were very much afraid at that time that the lake level would go below 10 feet, because most of the structures around Lake Okeechobee are at 10 feet. And when the lake is below that, there is no gravity water flowing into the canals.

We tried our best to pump --but we didn't keep track of --yes, we did keep track of --our employees did --of the saltwater intrusion, and indeed it was pretty dangerous westward. We know that a couple of our smaller wells went under.

So I'm here to tell you that at 10 and a half you can lose six inches of water in a week in a drought.

Our paradise here was not formed on the average-mean water levels. It was formed by a series of floods and droughts and it will continue to be that way.

We are going to have droughts. And I'm here to say that if --not if, but when we have a drought that lasts more than two years, this South Florida is in serious trouble. We will --with the people we have now, we are going to have disaster. We may even be considering evacuation.

The definition of disaster will be a whole new thing. So 10 feet is just out of the question. You cannot have --would we like to solve the problem? Yes, we do. And it seems like the answer is pointing towards water quality of the lake. So I hope that that's where we go and I hope we never, ever change the schedule down to that 10 feet.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: After Len Lindahl, James Bonfiglio and Wesley Ledesma.

MR. LINDAHL: Hi. Good evening. My name is Len Lindahl. I'm a Palm Beach County native. I'm a professional here and I work for MacVicar Consulting. We represent agricultural communities throughout the Everglades agricultural area. I would like to thank the Corps and the district for hosting this meeting tonight.

The current schedule lowers the way it was developed so that you could lower the lake to fix the dike. The result of that is that there were increased estuaries discharges and it took away water supply from the urban lower east coast as well as agriculture.

When the dike is fixed in 2022, I would hope that a schedule more similar to WSE, Water Supplying Environment, which was one that was prior to the LORS '08 --that schedule was adopted in 1999 -- would be evaluated to something similar to that. That provides benefits for all interested parties, including the estuaries.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: After James and Wesley is Jeremy McBryan.

MR. BONFIGLIO: Hi, everyone. My name is James Bonfiglio.

I would like to thank the Army Corps and South Florida Water Management District for giving us this opportunity to speak publicly about this issue.

I am a two-term commissioner in Ocean Ridge. I'm a former vice-mayor and mayor. I served four terms as the --on the Ocean Ridge Planning and Zoning Commission, most of that time either as vice-chair or chairman. We had to deal --Ocean Ridge is a coastal community, so we had to deal with water issues. I've had that opportunity for probably 20-25 years, and I've lived in Palm Beach County for 40 years.

It's hard to find something new to say after being number 46 on the list.

You know, I go through my list here, the health of the people, triple check. The health of the children, check. People already said that. The drought issues, check. Someone has already said that. The negative effect on agriculture, negative affect on tourism, check, check. Solve water retrusion, well intrusion, check, check. Everybody has said that.

So what I would like to say is that I agree with everybody that has gone before me and what they say. I think the only thing I can say that somebody else has not said before me is that lowering the level to 10.5 feet is a good thing. But it's not.

There's nothing I have read or heard that says lowering the lake level to 10.5 feet is a good thing.

What I would like to ask, though, is --and this is one of the things I've learned as a commissioner -- you've got to ask yourself, what is the policy goal of reducing the lake level to 10.5 feet? What policy are you trying to accomplish?

Well, we've heard all these negative things about lowering the lake level. What is the goal, though, of doing it? What is the good thing the community will get? And I can't see nothing good about lowering the level to 10.5 feet.

For example, if the goal is to protect the dike, that's being fixed. If the goal is to protect the water quality, that's not something that reducing the lake level to 10.5 feet will accomplish.

What you have to accomplish is cleaning up the nutrients and the fertilizer from the agricultural --the animal --the human pee and poo that's getting drained into the lake from the Kissimmee drainage system going into Lake Okeechobee.

And even if you stop that drainage from occurring and clean it all up tomorrow, nothing bad would end there. There's still about 50 years of discharge of all this bad stuff in the lake that would take that to clear it out.

So the only good thing that could come of this --and I hate to say this, though, because of the political ramifications of this --I don't think Brian Mast wants to run for re-election in two years facing another blue-green algae bloom in his district. So that's the only thing that I can say --see as a result of reducing the lake level to 10.5 feet. I see my time is up here, so thank you very much for this opportunity to address you all.

MR. ENGLE: After Wesley and Jeremy, Ray Galdney (phonetic).

MR. LEDESMA: Good evening. My name is Wesley Ledesma. And I'd like to thank, first of all, the Army Corps of Engineers for their hospitality tonight and letting us use this forum to speak.

I work for the Bank of the Belle Glade located in the Belle Glade, Florida. And our bank is the last remaining community bank here in Palm Beach County. It was originally chartered in the county and still operating and headquartered in the county, which is an interesting fact.

We were founded in 1963 and have had a wonderful longstanding relationship with many residents in the Glades. And in recent times we have reached out and extended into other parts of the county even beyond Palm Beach County.

Our community knows more than ever --perhaps any other community for that. Community banking is a huge pillar for local business and really grows small business owners and individuals here in the local economy.

Every day firsthand at our bank we see how our agriculture industry --one of the best agriculture industries in the country --influences local businesses and small business owners and individuals like you and me every day.

That positive influence from the agriculture industry is far-reaching and should continue on forever.

We would like to speak up on behalf of so many individuals whose livelihoods are dependent on our county's strong agriculture industry and voice our concern at lowering Lake O's water level to the proposed depth.

We ask the Army Corps of Engineers to consider a regulation schedule that maintains higher water levels rather than diminish them.

The planned projects and work on estuaries and dikes should be cultivated and seen through. So many individuals whose livelihoods depend on this and their jobs, careers, families, and future are dependent on this decision.

With this in mind, our bank and the rest of the community hopes that we can continue servicing this great community and Palm Beach County for another 55 years and we continue to enjoy living in the best county in the state of Florida.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: After Jeremy McBryan is Kathy Baylor.

MR. McBRYAN: Good evening. For the record, Jeremy McBryan of Palm Beach County Water Resources Manager here speaking on behalf of Palm Beach County. We appreciate the opportunity for my comments here tonight. We look forward to continuing dialogue with the Army Corps of Engineers for the duration of this effort. But we will be following up with great comments. I think some of my commissioners talked about that this evening.

I wanted to start by reminding you that Palm Beach County, in partnership with state and local partners, has invested over \$500 million in the acquisition and restoration and management of over 32,000 acres of natural areas. We've invested almost \$90 million to restore the Lake Worth Lagoon.

Just like many areas of South Florida, we are anxious for the completion of Everglades restoration projects and their benefits to the county, and also to address the region's critical water resources challenges.

I think as many people talked up, the operation of Lake Okeechobee is very complex. I think that it's definitely a resource that's essential and interconnected to many communities in South Florida. It can't be expected to solve the region's water resources challenges by itself, though.

There have been a lot of comments. I want to reiterate many of them, specifically, proposals to address lowering of the lake have the potential to make a impact on public water utilities, businesses, and communities throughout the county.

Potential impacts include undesirable discharges to Lake Worth Lagoon that are actually happening right now; impacts to Grassy Water Preserve; as Mr. Kelly already talked about, some of the damage to

the ecology of the Everglade's potential because of the lake not being there as a backup water supply during dry times.

We also anticipate potential ecological damage to the lake itself with the little zone and the potential release of nutrients within the second once that area is re-flooded.

We're concerned about the saltwater intrusion that many of other speakers have talked about. We're concerned about potentially more frequent water shortages that require increased water use restrictions on public utilities, agriculture, and nurseries --some of the people that have been here tonight.

We're also concerned about well fields, saltwater intrusion --again, already mentioned --particularly, as it affects human element safety.

Palm Beach County has the following suggestion on how Lake Okeechobee operates and how the changes will be implemented and evaluated. We should avoid or minimize discharges to Lake Worth Lagoon. Our operation should result in reductions to water use restrictions and cutbacks on existing users.

We'd like evaluations to be transparent and also acknowledge all congressionally authorized purposes of the lake. Any proposed changes need to be fairly evaluated. I'll make sure that that happens.

The following measures should be appropriately and actively characterized --impacts the water supplies and the environment and the economy where possible.

Evaluations should incorporate data and methods to ensure operations are robust and resilient to expect a climate viability.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: All right. Last call for Ray Galdney, Kathy Bangler (phonetic). Then next is David Bambace, then Maria Antuna and Darryl Miele.

MR. BAMBACE: Good evening. My name is David Bambace. I am a West Palm Beach resident and I'm the local person.

Lowering the water level is just outrageously insane. Everybody before me already spoke about it. I don't need to talk about the facts again. I'll tell you how it affects me personally.

My brother hauls produce from here all the way to New York City. I did not grow up here, but I am a resident here for a long time.

My brother would be out of work, my godchildren would not have a place to live. When my brother cannot get produce, he does not run his truck.

Lowering the water level to where you guys are talking about, it's just insane and outrageous. I'm saying from a low-level. I don't have a PhD, I don't know anything about engineers. And I appreciate all of your service. I do.

But to see my brother not work and not support his family, which he's doing as we speak, would be a crisis. So I implore you not to lower that water level.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: Maria Antuna, Darryl Miele, Katie Marshall.

MS. ANTUNA: Good evening, everyone. First and foremost, thank you to all the parties that were involved in allowing the public to voice our demands.

I am Maria Antuna. I'm the CEO of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Palm Beach County, and I'm here to voice the opinion of the Hispanics. Now, you're probably wondering what does that have to do with this. Let me explain to you what this has got to do with this.

I was raised in Hendry County, which is Clewiston, and my husband was raised on Okeechobee. We are 100 percent Glades people by heart.

The Glades and the surrounding areas of Lake Okeechobee employs hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of Hispanics. If the level of the water for Lake Okeechobee is lowered and we do go into a drought that has now created many, many, many jobs that these Hispanics, and along with everyone else that is in the areas, have --no longer have these jobs.

Now, these folks are the ones keeping the Glades alive --most important, the farmers, of course --and all the other businesses that are in the Glades and surrounding areas.

That means that if all these people are left without jobs there will be no longer what Belle Glade is, what Pahokee is, Lake Okeechobee, Okeechobee County, Hendry County and all the surrounding areas.

These are people that buy and sell homes, they work, they provide for the Glades, and it's imperative, it is absolutely imperative that we maintain the integrity of Lake Okeechobee because it is the livelihood of not just us today, the future.

And every one of us has a responsibility to make sure that the surrounding areas around Lake Okeechobee and all the ones that I have just now mentioned keeps going. Not just for us, but everyone in the future.

Thank you on behalf of the board of directors of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Thank you for allowing us to express our concerns.

MR. ENGLE: After Darryl, it's Katie Marshall and Elizabeth Romfh.

MR. MIELE: Good evening. My name is Darryl Miele and I represent a Glades company called Glades Parts d/b/a Original Equipment. This company was established in 1974.

Why am I here today? The reason why I'm here today is because the impact of our business is impacted by the level of the lake in ways of farmers, people who have boats, people who have a livelihood that is on the lake as far as recreational. We supply parts that keep these machines going. The boaters, the fishermen. We come to the community, they come to us. And if you lower the lake to a level of what you're discussing, it would completely destroy the place.

People come from around the world to enjoy the lake. If it is taken to that level, it will have a huge impact on the families, the businesses and everybody surrounding the lake.

We come here to just plead with you to listen to the scientists, to listen to the people that know, and to most importantly listen to the citizens that live in the area that are greatly impacted.

If a mistake is made today because a decision was made based on a guess, how long is it gonna take to fix that? What is the impact that's going to be presented if a mistake is made because the right decisions were not made. It will affect everybody. Let's make the right decision, let's listen to the right people.

Political strategy is not a way to make things happen. The way to make things happen is listen to the people who know the best. Those are the people that live in the area, those are the people that work in the area, and those are the people that will be greatly impacted.

Thank you, Colonel. Thank you to the engineers who are working on the project. But please, please, listen to the people that know best.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: All right. Last call for Katie Marshall, Elizabeth Romfh, then Jeff Sumner and Martha Musgrove.

MS. ROMFH: Hi. My name is Elizabeth Romfh. I'm here as a grandmother. I'm not affiliated with anybody, and I'm not going to take up a whole bunch of your time, because everybody has said pretty much everything has been covered on this.

I have grandchildren. I live in Jupiter, Florida. We love the water. So, obviously, last summer was very, very difficult. It's hard to not be able to take them out there to do that. But, you know, all of that being said, my husband's family has been in South Florida since prior to 1900.

I think that the Army Corps needs to take into consideration everybody. I may live on the coast, but, you know, there's families in the Glades, there's families in Martin County, there's families everywhere that are being affected by this. And it's not just one of us, it's all of us.

So, I think that they need to, you know, follow what the science says. It's hard for me to imagine in this day and age that between computer modeling and between, you know, all the different seismic theories out there that there's not some way to figure this out where --through compromise, we're not, no one group is totally adversely affected. It just seems like there should be a way to do that.

The only other thing I'd like to say for tonight is I'm a little --I, sort of, feel like one of the first things that was said was that they realized in 2008 that they were going to have to revisit this. I --but now we are told that this is going to take four and a half years. I, sort of, wonder why they didn't start this process sooner.

I think that we're, sort of, at a crisis level now and that's why people are so upset on all sides. I would like to just, sort of, propose that maybe somewhere when they figure this out that they set it on a schedule where they revisit these things a little bit more quickly, just because it takes a long time to do this. I understand that.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Jeff Sumner, Martha Musgrove and Kim Murfuri (phonetic).

MR. SUMNER: Hey. Good evening. Jeff Sumner. I'm a professional engineer. I'm also currently serving as the chairman of the Economic Council of Okeechobee.

I'm not going to repeat everything that was said tonight. There's been a lot of great comments. This is a much friendlier room than what we had in Stuart last week, I will say.

Our community does depend on a healthy-environment lake, not only for our recreational fishing -- which constitutes the bulk, really, of our tourism industry --but we also depend on the lake as our source of potable water for all of the City of Okeechobee. And we have done so since the 1920's.

So there's been some talk about this being a replacement for LORS. It's been stated already tonight LORS was an interim schedule that was put in place in order to address concerns with the dike. This analysis was going to look at the system with the dike repaired, so I would suggest to you that LORS is an inappropriate starting place for that analysis and we should really be going back to that WSE.

There has been a lot of talk tonight about 10.5. I can tell you that there's a rumor out there that seems to be growing by the day that 10.5 is the foregone conclusion.

I had two fishermen approach me in a tackle shop in Okeechobee today. You know, they know that I used to work here at the district and I get asked all the water questions in Okeechobee.

They said, Why --well for one thing, they blame the district for the pulse releases now.

John, I tried to tell them that it was not the district.

But I said the district is already lowering the lake to try to get it to 10.5 by the start of the wet season because that's what Brian Mast wants to do.

I did my level best to convince them that that's not the case. I think that --I know that you'll look at 10.5. I think your analysis will show that it will --almost hard to believe --but it's going to increase discharges, it's going to increase water-supply cutbacks, and it's going to increase MFL violations. So it's a trifecta of bad policy. And we look forward to working with you over the next couple of years to make sure we don't get there.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: After Martha and Kim is Joanna Reisman.

MS. MUSGROVE: I'm Martha Musgrove, retired journalist. And since retiring, I guess you'd just call me a constant critic.

I would like to talk about the revisions in the Lake Okeechobee Operating Manual and would urge the Corps of Engineers to broaden the scope of those revisions to include water quality issues and to prioritize implementation of changes and adjustments to the operating schedule that do or may improve the quality of water that is held in Lake Okeechobee and is released from Lake Okeechobee.

I would like to see a clearer statement of intent in that manual dealing with the following, stating that it is the intent to protect the quality of water in Lake Okeechobee, which provides a supplemental source of public drinking water; to preserve Lake Okeechobee's recreational and commercial fisheries; to maintain the region's agricultural economy, which uses lake water to irrigate winter vegetables and other food crops; to prohibit direct discharges into Lake Okeechobee, its tributaries and associated canals of poisonous chemicals, including herbicides, pesticides, gasoline, oil, industrial and home solvents; and finally, to encourage conservation of fresh water.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Kim Murfuri and Joann Reisman and Ty Briggs and Emily Morrie (phonetic).

MS. REISMAN: Good evening. My name is Joann Reisman. I'm a resident of Palm Beach County. I am requesting to send the water --I speak as an environmentalist. I'm requesting to send the water south and compress the timeline for review.

I ask that this not be dropped, that this process be not drawn out more than it has to be.

Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: Ty Briggs, Emily Morrie, Brett Hauquitz. After Brett, Chad Alvarez.

MR. HAUQUITZ: Hi. I'm Brett Hauquitz. And I think the one thing we haven't talked about is what's best for the lake. Everybody's talking about what's best for everything else, the farmers, people and everything. Why don't we talk about the lake.

The lake isn't just a reservoir. It's a living, breathing ecosystem. Why don't we talk to the experts like Paul Gray and all and find out what's best for them? What's the best level for the bass, for the crabbies and everything else that's there? This is what we're supposed to be protecting, is the lake itself, not everybody else. It's supposed to be used for the lake.

Also, I would say that 10.5 is way too low, that we've had a lot of rain in the last few years now, which only means that we're closer to a year of drought. And once we're in a drought, we're going to have big problems. So we can't just go by the last couple of years. We have to go by the whole system of it.

Also, I think that most of this problem is not the Army Corps of Engineers or anything. It's water quality, not water quantity that everybody's talking about.

So if politicians want to do something, why don't they start by cleaning up the lake? The highest concentrations are in the northeast part by Taylor Creek. Why don't they start cleaning that up? Why don't they take the 18,000 acres that they were supposed to buy from US Sugar by Lake Hicpochee and turn that in --they could clean up the flows from Caloosahatchee River going out and maybe we won't have so much algae then. And they could probably put more water down.

But I don't think that this is a big problem for the lake --of water quantity. It's a water quality. And that's what we've gotta fix.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Douglas Cain, Susan Ludwin and John Hein (phonetic). Rachel Lubotnik (phonetic), Don Gossick and Alice Nagle (phonetic).

MS. LUDWIN: Good evening. First time I've been in a situation like this, so I'm going to make it probably short and sweet, to the point.

Susan Ludwin. I live in Boca Raton. And I'm also here as a grandparent. I heard someone say that before. I thought I'd be the first one.

But at an alarming rate, there are special interests that want to lower the Lake Okeechobee, which is our back-up water supply.

So as a grandparent, I find this topic of very strong interest to me. Actually, I'm even more --I've been here tonight, learned quite a bit. But I can't --I can only protect her with kindness and love, so, unfortunately, I can't protect her personally. But I am here tonight to at least voice my opinion and at least support those that really do understand. So that's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLE: All right, so we're down to about the last 12 cards. If you haven't spoken yet and you turned in a card, I want you to go ahead and come on up here so we can try to get through these. We have a bunch of people around here.

Just go ahead and yell out. They are Rachel Lubotnik, Don Gossick, Alice Nagel, Drew Martin, Ryan Rossi, Suzette Green, would be up next. Stephen Basore.

MR. ROSSI: Good evening and thank you for your time. My name is Ryan Rossi of the South Florida Water Coalition.

Last year in my campaign for the Florida State Housing Coastal District 89, I promised that if I lost I'd go out and continue to advocate for the issues that are of concern for our community. Well, I'm here, so obviously that tells you what happened with the election results.

Nonetheless, you know, this is an issue that is impacting our community a great deal. And part of what the coalition's objectives are is to, number one, educate the public on what's happening with the health and management of our water. Number two, support policies that we think are right for our citizens. And number three, Oppose policies that we think are wrong for our citizens.

And to keep it brief, I think that what's happening with what Brian Mast is doing --the congressman north of us --I think that is exactly wrong for our citizens here in the county, here in South Florida.

You know, there is no doubt that the toxic algae problem is a disaster, but I am of the belief that you don't create a disaster by fighting that disaster.

So, I think that we need to do everything that we can to make sure that we're on the right side of this issue. And I think that opposing that policy is what's right for the citizens here in this county.

Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to working with all of you at some point in the future. Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Kim Murfuri, then Krista Basore, Ryan Abrams, Lucky Politis.

MR. BASORE: Hello. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. My name is Stephen Basore. I am a principal owner of TKM Bengard Farms, a fourth generation family farm that operates in the Everglades agricultural area, often appropriately referred to as the country's winter south pole.

My family's business is the largest lettuce grower east of the Mississippi. Our produce goes into grocery stores and to restaurants, cruise ships, hospitals and schools. If you've ever had a salad, there's a good chance that you've eaten my lettuce.

Earlier today my five-year-old son asked what time I was gonna be getting home from work tonight, and he was told that it was going to be late, that I needed to speak tonight on an important issue. And he responded, Yeah, Daddy, I know you're going to save your farming job again. No farm, no food. So he gets it and that means a lot.

To grow vegetables you need three primary things: sunshine --which we have plenty of --land and water.

Lowering the Lake Okeechobee level to 10 and a half feet has the potential to seriously hurt the families of the many people that are employed by EAA Farmers and small businesses in the Glades communities that depend on agricultural businesses.

Most importantly, it could negatively affect the ability to not only feed Floridians, but also the eastern half of the United States with healthy vegetables.

Lowering the lake level to such a low rate creates an opportunity to increase discharges during rainy periods, which seems counterintuitive if the goal is really to decrease discharges.

The common theme that we all agree on is the need for clean water. I greatly support the work that the Army Corps of Engineers is doing to repair the Herbert Hoover Dike and I encourage the Corps to pursue projects north of the lake that will improve the quality of the water that flows into Lake Okeechobee.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: After Krista, Ryan and Lucky and then Ranier and Miriam.

MS. BASORE: Good evening. My name is Krista Basore. I am here on behalf of my husband, the lettuce grower from the Glades you just heard from, and our family. I thank the Army Corps of Engineers for allowing me and my fellow residents to speak tonight.

My husband and his five brothers are part of the family farm in Belle Glade, as you've heard, produces lots of lettuce to feed a lot of the country. This is the farm where a lot of the nieces and nephews are employed and our three young children are very keen to be part of it. In fact, our daughter has been lobbying my husband for what she calls a membership to the farm. So, they want to be part of what my husband does and the rest of the farmers in the glades do, which is helping to feed our country.

So, a lot of compelling arguments have been made here tonight. I am here on behalf of the next generation of farmers that's thinking about these issues in a different way than a lot of us are.

My daughter is a much more articulate advocate for her future, but it's way past her bedtime, so you got me.

I urge the Army Corps of Engineers to take the long view when you're thinking about solutions for this. Please keep the water at a level that's gonna protect the future of farming, the Glades and our county. I ask you to rely on science to make these decisions so that our children, the next generation of farmers --not just ours but the rest of the families out there --are gonna have land and water on which to farm, and, ideally, to be able to share farming and its values with their children.

Thank you.

MR. ABAMS: Good evening. My name is Ryan Abrams. I am the vice president of the Lake Worth Waterkeeper. We advocate for increased water quality standards in the Lake Worth watershed for Palm Beach County.

I'm also an attorney and resident of Boca Raton. A lot has been said here tonight, so I won't try to repeat a lot of it. I think there's two main issues that everybody's in agreement about. One is we need to increase southerly flow and thereby decrease discharges. And, two, we need to promote our water quality standards. And I think both of those goals require a state and federal partnership.

And I think to a large extent, the federal government has tried to hold up its end of the bargain when it comes to managing the flow of water and trying to increase southerly flow. But they can't do it without the state government.

And there's been failed attempts to purchase swaths of land and failed attempts to increase water quality standards. Both of those are failures of the state government. And I think we all need to keep in mind that our state government is responsible for water quality standards. We do have a flow daily -- total maximum daily load for phosphorous and various other nutrients, and those are not enforced, and we need to make sure that our elected officials are held accountable for that.

I thank the Corps for holding this public meeting and for taking public input. And I hope that in redoing the 2008 water plan and in putting out the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual you'll resolve the priorities and make it a priority never to discharge into the estuaries under any circumstances, because that really should be the case --other than full discharges to assist with salinity levels and whatnot.

Thank you. Have a great night.

MR. POLITIS: Good evening. My name is Lucky Politis. I'm a resident of the Acreage, in Loxahatchee.

I'd like to thank the Army Corps for this opportunity to speak in front of people, to be given a pulpit. Obviously, my media budget is a lot smaller than some of the other special interest groups that do an excellent job of disenfranchising residents like me. And they do an excellent job of miseducating the public and miseducating the people of the state of Florida.

I'm a sportsman, I'm a fisherman. I love the state of Florida. I plan on raising children here. But I can also say that I will not have a Florida that the people before me had. And my only goal in this meeting is to make sure that I have a Florida that's at least as good as it is for me today for my children when they come about.

Today we have special interests, and the same people that scream, Send it south and buy the land. They're the same people that sue over sparrows and the same people that sue over water flow. And they're the same people that are funded by developer hedge funds. And the same people that Mickey Mouse cozies up to, and the same people that put all the septic in Port St. Lucie and on the western coast. And they're the same people that push the laws that allow them to build septic on half-acre properties, and the same people that allow them to put septic within fifty feet of a canal. And those people want us to stay silent as residents of the state of Florida.

There's 2.5 million new people coming into the state of Florida in the last eight years. There's nothing left to carve. And those in the special interest groups know that there's nothing left to carve when you look on a map from North Florida, from north of --almost Morton all the [Ed.: Corrected misspelling.] way down to the Keys. They know what's left is what's west. And what's west is where I spend my time, where I do my hunting, where I do my fishing. It's also where the state of Florida gets its water recharge from. It's also the reason why we don't have ten parts per billion in the Everglades. We don't have ten parts per billion because there's new shopping communities.

Ninety-five to 99 percent of the water coming into Lake O comes from north of the lake. We can measure where the phosphorous comes from. It comes from north of the lake. We can see that the septic problems in Port St. Lucie and on the Caloosahatchee River and the Miami River don't coincide with the discharges from Lake Okeechobee. They coincide with heavy rains in those basins.

So the problem isn't coming from Lake Okeechobee. What does modifying Lake Okeechobee have anything to do with the conversation? It's a disenfranchisement of Florida state residents and we should stand up and we should not accept it, and we should not let people come from other states and cram their policies and their hedge funds down our throats.

Thank you.

MR. REGNEIRO: Hello. I am Ranier Regueiro and I'm a resident of Miami-Dade County, specifically Miami Gardens.

I want to thank the Army Corps of Engineers for allowing this public comment. You know, I feel that this meeting --and I know you're having a meeting tomorrow, but unfortunately I can't go tomorrow -- but I think it's been the last sort of approach. And I understand where everything comes from, but I am one of the residents that likes to go to the Everglades down south, that like to see it, and I feel that southern movement needs to happen when it comes to the discharge.

Now, at the end of the day, I mean, we sit here in the tomb of what was Charlie Christ's plan, so I find that pretty hilarious but, at the same time (inaudible).

But when it comes to Lake Okeechobee, I want to just go ahead and say some facts that I feel are pertinent.

When it comes to germination of the specific plant life there is in Lake Okeechobee, 12 feet is about the limit where the light will hit the bottom and germinate the specific seeds.

So, at the end of the day when it comes to water levels, yes, we need to raise them, but we can't go past 12. And that's just a straight fact.

And at the end of the day, we need to do something about the flow. We need to try to withstand and hold back the flow going through the sides, going to the left, going to the right, and try to open up those areas in the Everglades reservoir to be able to go down south, because, at the end of the day, the Everglades down south that I saw when I was a kid are not the ones I see now. And that ultimately --we need to get that water back, so we can get the animals back and we can get everything back.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: Last one.

MR. MARTIN: I'm the last one.

MR. ENGLE: Drew, you didn't do a card.

MR. MARTIN: Well, I just want to thank the Colonel. Drew Martin. I'm here --I'm not here on behalf of the Sierra Club, but I do --I am volunteer in the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club has not established a position on this yet, so I'm going to speak on my own behalf.

Everybody starts --they're saying --everybody's saying they want to listen to science and then they say what the answer is. And I think that contradicts what they're saying. I don't know if 10 and a half feet is the ideal solution. But I would let science make that decision and not prejudice your decision by telling you that 10 and a half is too low.

I think that we need to treat this like a lake. And I agree with Brett Hauquitz and the statements he said. And Brett and I worked on a plan to restore the Everglades when Governor Crist had interest in purchasing the land, which I think we were disappointed that he didn't follow through and we were unable to follow through with that plan.

I think that coming into the wet season we want to try to get the lake as low as possible, which I think the Corps would agree. That means the lake might be a little lower than people like.

The lake is a lake, and it needs to be treated as a lake. And the health of the lake is what we need to focus on, because I don't think people who live out on the water in Palm Beach County realize the damage that these microsystem of blue HABs are causing. And that damage is going to be far more damaging than anything else.

Further, we need to focus on water conservation and not just rely on the lake.

Last night I rode a bicycle home at midnight. It was pouring rain and sprinklers were going off all over the place. Those sprinklers were coming out of West Palm Beach's water.

So when the people today come from West Palm Beach and say, Oh, man, we got to do something 'cause we can't run out of water, turn your sprinklers off when it's raining, okay?

You have to realize that this is an environmental problem. We cannot continue killing the environment.

I agree we need agriculture, but we can't have agriculture at the expense of the health of the lake. Agriculture needs to adjust.

If we treat the lake properly, we'll have enough water. But we may need at some point to purchase some of that land south of the lake and restore the original pond apple forest and the water flowing south.

Thank you.

MR. ENGLE: All right. Is there anybody else out there who would like to speak tonight? And if not, you can all be released to go home.

Thank you all for coming out. We really appreciate it.

(The above proceedings were concluded at 9:00 p.m.)

COURT CERTIFICATE

STATE OF FLORIDA                    )  
  : SS  
COUNTY OF PALM BEACH            )

I, SONJA D. HALL, certify that I was authorized to and did stenographically report the foregoing proceedings and that the transcript is a true record of my stenographic notes.

Dated this 8th day of April 2019.

SONJA D. HALL

(This transcript was reformatted for readability, which changed the page count. A word list/index was deleted at the project manager's direction.)