



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT CORPS OF ENGINEERS
701 San Marco Boulevard
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32207-8175

Planning and Policy Division
Environmental Branch

AUG 06 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Regulation (33 CFR 230.11), this letter constitutes the Notice of Availability of the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Proposed Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for a planned deviation from the water control plan for Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades Agricultural Area (also known as the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS 2008)). The Corps is initiating a planned deviation from LORS 2008 in anticipation of and following freshwater harmful algae blooms (HABs) with the goal of reducing the risk to public health and safety associated with HABs. The water management operational criteria described in the water control plan establishes the allowable quantity, timing, and duration of releases from Lake Okeechobee to the Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) and to tide (estuaries). Water management decisions utilize LORS 2008 Parts A through D for guidance on releases from Lake Okeechobee. Information from Part A and Part B is utilized to compare the Lake elevation and the corresponding band and sub-band, respectively. Information from Part C and Part D is utilized to establish the recommended releases to the WCAs and the recommended releases to tide (estuaries). The planned deviation will allow the Corps to alter the timing and volume of Lake Okeechobee releases to the WCAs, east, and/or west to allow for greater flexibility with water management decisions when HABs are present or forecasted in Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie or Caloosahatchee estuaries or the system of canals that connect them.

The planned deviation will allow the flexibility to make slightly larger releases east and west than LORS 2008 Part D (establishes allowable Lake Okeechobee releases to tide (estuaries)) calls for and make releases south when LORS Part C (establishes allowable Lake Okeechobee releases to the WCAs) does not recommend releases within the Beneficial Use Sub-Band, Base Flow Sub-Band, Low Sub-Band, and the Intermediate Sub-Band. The cumulative volume of water released under the planned deviation will be tracked against the volume held back that would have been released under LORS 2008. The objective will be to reach a net zero balance such that the total volume released between 1 February and 31 January each year is unchanged from the releases that would have taken place under the existing schedule.

The planned deviation would be implemented as soon as possible, but action may not be taken immediately and would depend upon the conditions set forth in the operational strategy. This deviation will be in effect for a minimum duration of one year. The Corps Water Management Section's assessment of hydrometeorological conditions and stakeholder or agency input may suspend or discontinue the planned deviation due to impacts greater than expected/discussed within this EA.

This deviation may be terminated at any time. Reevaluation of and possible extension of the planned deviation will occur after year one of implementation via memorandum to the South Atlantic Division Commander. Water bank summary information as well as any unexpected effects or challenges encountered during implementation will be evaluated in the memorandum. The planned deviation may extend until LORS 2008 is replaced by a new water control plan (Lake Okeechobee System Operation Manual (LOSOM)) anticipated in 2022. Implementation of the proposed action would be consistent with conditions outlined in the operational strategy.

The EA and Proposed FONSI for the 2019 planned deviation from LORS 2008 is available for your review on the Corps Environmental planning website under multiple counties:

<http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/About/DivisionsOffices/Planning/EnvironmentalBranch/EnvironmentalDocuments.aspx>

Any comments you may have must be submitted in writing to the letterhead address within 15 days of the date of this letter. Questions concerning the planned deviation can be submitted to Melissa Nasuti at Melissa.A.Nasuti@usace.army.mil or by telephone at 904-232-1368.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angela E. Dunn", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Angela E. Dunn
Chief, Environmental Branch