



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT
701 SAN MARCO BOULEVARD
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32207-8175

Planning and Policy Division
Environmental Branch

1 July 2020

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 revised supplemental Environmental Assessment (EA) and Proposed Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the 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 proposing to initiate a planned deviation from LORS 2008 in anticipation of and following freshwater harmful algae blooms (HABs) to reduce the risk of exacerbating potential health concerns associated with algal blooms in Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie, and Caloosahatchee estuaries while not impacting other project purposes. This revised supplemental EA is being prepared to address concerns received in response to release of the 2019 LORS Planned Deviation Draft EA provided to the public on August 6, 2019. The proposed action occurs in Glades, Hendry, Martin, Okeechobee, and Palm Beach counties, Florida.

The proposed planned deviation would allow the flexibility to make advanced releases east and west, larger than LORS 2008 Part D (recommends Lake Okeechobee releases to tide (estuaries)) calls for and make releases south when LORS Part C (recommends Lake Okeechobee releases to the Water Conservation Areas (WCAs)) does not recommend releases within the Beneficial Use Sub-band, Base Flow Sub-band, Low Sub-band, and the Intermediate Sub-band. These advanced releases when the risk of transporting HABs is low would allow greater flexibility to reduce releases during times when HABs are present in the lake or estuaries. The cumulative volume of water released under the planned deviation would be tracked against the volume held back that would have been released under LORS 2008. The objective would be to reach a net zero balance such that the total volume released across the annual deviation time period (between 1 February and 1 December) is unchanged from the releases that would have taken place under the existing schedule.

Because of the nature of the proposed planned deviation, the Corps may not take water management action immediately upon approval of the deviation. The operational strategy in this revised supplemental EA describes the conditions and the coordination necessary for water management action to be taken. Based on current conditions within Lake Okeechobee (as of June 9, 2020) it is unlikely that action will be taken immediately. Once action is taken, which will be communicated publically at the beginning and throughout that year, the Corps will evaluate the performance of the deviation, identify outcomes, challenges, and conclusions in a memo to the South Atlantic Division Commander, and may request changes to or an extension of the deviation based on that analysis. A subsequent extension may be applied for until LORS 2008 is replaced by a new water control plan (Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM)) anticipated in 2022. The Corps may also terminate the deviation at any time.

The revised supplemental EA and Proposed FONSI are available for your review on the Corps Environmental planning website:

<http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/About/Divisions-Offices/Planning/Environmental-Branch/Environmental-Documents/>

(On that page, click on the "+" next to "Multiple Counties". Scroll down to the project name.)

Due to current circumstances, the Corps is requesting that any comments you may have must be submitted in writing to 2020LORSHABEAComments@usace.army.mil within 30 days of the date of this letter. Correspondence may also be sent to the letterhead address above, however due to limited staff availability at the District office, electronic submittal of comments via email is preferred. Questions concerning the proposed action can also be submitted to Mrs. Melissa Nasuti by telephone at 904-232-1368.

Sincerely,



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Angela E. Dunn
Chief, Environmental Branch