

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0918

July 13, 2021

Colonel Andrew Kelly
Jacksonville District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Boulevard
Jacksonville, FL 32201

Dear Colonel Kelly,

As the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) Project Delivery Team (PDT) nears completion of its years of work crafting a new operating manual for the lake, this moment is a legacy-defining opportunity for the Army Corps of Engineers to address the decades of inequity that has plagued the east and west coasts and the Everglades.

Although none of the preferred alternatives achieve truly optimal performance for my community on Florida's East Coast, Balanced Alternative AA is a compromise that performs best for our community while also sending the largest quantity of water south into the Everglades. Alternative AA would be a large improvement for our community's economy, environment and public health.

Likewise, Alternative CC—although it does not perform as well for the St. Lucie or Everglades—is a balanced selection that with continued optimization could be a truly desirable choice. Specifically, Alternative CC benefits the most people across the State of Florida. The plan increases optimal performance to the Caloosahatchee by the most, and the alternative also performs best for both recreation and the Lake Worth Lagoon. Alternative CC also ranks second best for the St. Lucie, Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades, navigation and water supply. No other alternative is even close to this level of balanced performance.

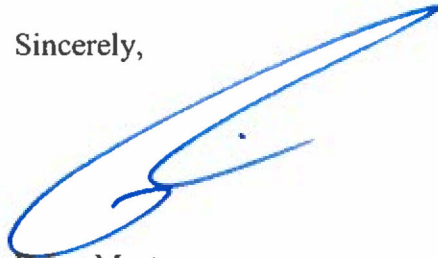
There is room for improvement in Alternative CC. If this alternative is selected, during the optimization process I urge you to merge in beneficial aspects of Alternative AA to send more water south during the dry season and further reduce discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie. Specifically, I request that you remove Zone F and lower the bottom of Zone D. Doing so would ensure more water reaches the Everglades during the dry season and would also ensure that the Caloosahatchee can receive ecologically beneficial dry season flows throughout the winter and spring. In turn, this change would free up additional capacity in Lake Okeechobee that could be used to reduce damaging high lake stages, reduce high-volume discharges to the Caloosahatchee and eliminate discharges to the St. Lucie in Zones B and C.

With these changes, Alternative CC would have my support; however, this support is contingent upon a commitment that the total annual average of discharges to the St. Lucie in the final plan

will not exceed the Iteration 2 modeled performance of 72,000 acre-feet per year. This level of discharge is already a substantial compromise off of both our goal of zero discharges and Alternative AA. The bottom line is that the St. Lucie cannot continue to be forced into substantial *harm* in order to supply *benefit* to other project purposes.

In short, LOSOM represents a monumental opportunity to fix a massive imbalance in Florida's water management that has existed for decades. This new schedule is a once-in-a-decade or more chance to improve the health, economy and environment for the millions of people who call South Florida home. Thank you for your continued leadership in the process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Mast", is written over the word "Sincerely,". The signature is stylized and somewhat abstract, with a large loop at the end.

Brian Mast
Member of Congress