

THIS IS A DRAFT LETTER. IT IS INTENDED TO BE CIRCULATED BY AND AMONG VARIOUS COUNTY STAFF FOR EDITING. IT IS NOT INTENDED TO BE AND SHOULD NOT BE USED AS FINAL ACTION BY ANY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSION

Dear____,

On Tuesday, May 7, 2019, commissioners from Martin, Palm Beach, Glades, Hendry and Okeechobee Counties (the Counties) held a public meeting to discuss local government interests as stakeholders in the management of Lake Okeechobee (the Lake). Although our Counties may not agree on every concern or every solution to water resource matters in South Florida, the Counties agree on the following foundational principles for future management of Lake Okeechobee.

Among the Counties' highest collective interest is the completion of all projects identified in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). All of the Counties are vested in completing CERP as its projects will bring about significant improvements in water quality, quantity and timing that will result in substantial progress towards resolving the current challenges in water management.

It is further commonly agreed that the Lake is the heart of the Central and South Florida system; and therefore, its ecology is of significant importance. Improving water quality through reduction of pollutants and restoration of natural systems is a priority. More specifically, management that occasionally allows for aquatic vegetation growth which contributes the highest value water quality treatment in the Lake at frequencies supported by science must be a high consideration. This year, for example, the climate, Lake levels and forecast conditions provided a unique opportunity for recovery of critical aquatic vegetation that is expected to benefit water quality and habitat. Improved water quality in the Lake is a high priority to all stakeholders.

It is agreed that a continued focus on increasing water storage in the Okeechobee watershed is critical. We also agree that restrictions and impediments to southern flow should be removed to allow flow to mimic natural systems, such as removing flow restrictions along the Tamiami Trail. Other actions include storing and treating stormwater in the watershed of origin and minimizing operational restrictions at Stormwater Treatment Areas due to protected species, while protecting the sensitive ecology within Everglades National Park and other critical ecosystems. The Counties are supportive of the development of the new Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM). The Counties agree that LOSOM should take into account the concerns from both coastal communities as well as the concerns from the communities surrounding Lake Okeechobee.

Furthermore, the Counties stress the importance of the economic dependency of the surrounding communities on Lake operations which include, but are not limited to, agriculture, tourism, water supply, fisheries and other direct and indirect water dependent businesses. Similarly, the Counties recognize the importance of the quality of life we all strive to enhance in our communities, which includes sustainability of clean water for drinking, agriculture, recreation, and propagation of healthy fish and wildlife in the natural systems.

It is a landmark occasion that the Counties embraced the opportunity to identify issues of solidarity concerning Lake management. While the Counties maintain their autonomy to prioritize individual interests, these are points of agreement that the Counties share in common. It is the

intent of this letter to emphatically convey these collective interests as the Counties work to resolve water management challenges for a better future for all the residents of this distinct and special region of Florida.

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