March 03, 2014

Daniel O'Keefe, Chairman
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33406

Re: Request from Lee County Mayors to Reassess the Adaptive Protocols for Lake Okeechobee Operations

Dear Chairman O'Keefe:

The five Mayors of Lee County are requesting the South Florida Water Management District to reassess the Adaptive Protocols for Lake Okeechobee to identify additional operational flexibility that can be exercised to provide supplemental freshwater flows to the Caloosahatchee when a violation of the Caloosahatchee Minimum Flow and Level (MFL) rule is occurring or is imminent and no other water users are being cutback.

The Caloosahatchee estuary remains in a state of recovery following four months of high-flow discharges from Lake Okeechobee and stormwater runoff from the Caloosahatchee watershed. Wet-season flows averaged more than 7,400 cubic feet per second (cfs), more than two and half times the high flow target for the estuary, from June–October. These flows not only impacted the ecology of the Caloosahatchee estuary and our coastal waters, but they also had a significant impact our local economies.

Just three months after the high flow discharges were discontinued, the Caloosahatchee exceeded its Minimum Flow and Level (MFL) "harm" threshold. This year now marks the seventh consecutive year of MFL violations, resulting in "serious harm" to the resource as defined in 40E-8, F.A.C. This occurred despite of the District's January Position Analysis indicating that there was less than a 10% chance that the Lake level would fall into the Water Shortage Management Band of the Lake Okeechobee Release Schedule prior to June 1st.

The primary Prevention and Recovery strategy for the Caloosahatchee MFL is the C-43 West Basin Reservoir and Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) projects. These projects have been significantly delayed and there is no assurance that these projects will be completed anytime in the near future. In addition, when storage estimates were calculated for the Caloosahatchee MFL it was based on a minimum flow of 300 cfs. Today, we have more accurate data that suggests that the minimum flow needed to achieve the Caloosahatchee's salinity target is closer to 650–800 cfs. This means that the total

volume of storage needed within the Caloosahatchee basin is estimated to be closer to 450,000 acre-feet. The projects outlined in the Prevention and Recovery strategy will fall short of this goal.

We are very appreciative of the 650 cfs flows that the U.S. Army Corps and the District have provided to the Caloosahatchee this year to help moderate salinities. However, the volume appears to be slightly insufficient to keep salinity below the MFL harm threshold. In the interim, while we wait for the C-43 Reservoir to be authorized and funds to be appropriated, we request that the District and U.S. Army Corps identify short-term strategies in the Adaptive Protocols for Lake Okeechobee to meet the Caloosahatchee's low-flow needs. Let us be clear, we are not asking for supplemental flows to be provided to the Caloosahatchee during times when it will result in harm to existing legal users or other ecosystems within the SFWMD service area. However, when no other water users are experiencing water shortage cutbacks and no other ecosystems are being harmed, the Caloosahatchee should continue to receive flows that meet the minimum ecological needs of the estuary.

We want to thank you for your leadership and hope that you will consider supporting our request.

Sincerely,

Ben Nelson Jr., Mayor
Bonita Springs

Marni L. Sawicki, Mayor
Cape Coral

Randall P. Henderson Jr., Mayor
Fort Myers

Alan Mandel, Mayor
Fort Myers Beach

Kevin Ruane, Mayor
Sanibel

C.c.: Kevin Powers, Vice Chairman
Rick Barber
Sandy Bachelor
Mitch Hutchcraft
James Moran
Juan Portuondo
Timothy Sargent
Glenn Waldman
Blake Guillory, Executive Director