DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P.O. BOX 4970
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32232-0019

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

FEB 21 2014

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CITY OF SANIBEL
ADMIN./LEGIS.

Executive Office

The Honorable Kevin Ruane
Mayor of Sanibel
800 Dunlop Road
Sanibel, Florida 33957-4096

Dear Mayor Ruane:

This is in response to your letter dated January 23, 2014 regarding Supplemental Freshwater flows to the Caloosahatchee Estuary.

I completely understand your frustration with the freshwater releases from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee estuary during the past rainy season. We manage water in Lake Okeechobee in accordance with the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS). As you know, our water management decisions are guided by three primary considerations: the current lake level, the amount of water coming into the lake, and the amount of precipitation forecast for the short-term and long-term. LORS was developed to balance all purposes to include flood risk reduction, navigation, water supply, and ecological benefits, however it sometimes requires tradeoffs when all needs cannot be met as we saw this last year. The decision to initiate water release was based on lake levels, large inflows to the lake, and a forecast that called for very wet conditions in the upcoming weeks and months as well as predictions of a very active hurricane season, resulting in undesirable consequences as you experienced.

I also note your concern regarding increasing salinity levels within the upper estuaries that are beginning to rise above the Minimum Flow Level (MFL) "harm" threshold that could adversely impact estuarine resources such as tapegrass, oysters, and nursery areas for economically important fish species. Establishing MFLs is a requirement under Section 373.042(2), Florida Statutes (F.S.). The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board is required to develop recovery or prevention strategies in those cases where a water body currently does not or will not meet an established MFL. The Corps recommends contacting the SFWMD regarding MFL issues to seek resolution strategies.

Since October 21, 2013, we have been making maximum freshwater releases as allowed by LORS to the Caloosahatchee Estuary. The allocation of impounded flood waters from Lake Okeechobee for the use of individual landowners, municipalities, and

others were contemplated by the Central and South Florida Project authorized plan as a state function. Based on LORS, the Corps defers to the SFWMD to recommend additional releases from the lake to the Caloosahatchee River for water quality enhancement purposes and will consider their recommendations in making all water management decisions. With regard to the make-up releases mentioned in your letter, the concept of make-up releases, as discussed in LORS, is to compensate for Lake Okeechobee regulatory release targets that were not achieved due to consideration of potential excessive harm to estuarine resources. While they may provide environmental benefits to the Caloosahatchee Estuary for a brief period of time, make-up releases are not a provision to provide environmental water to the Caloosahatchee Estuary. They were intended to temporarily hold back on the quantity of maximum discharges recommended by LORS and are to be released as soon as the estuaries could accommodate additional flows.

As you are aware, recent high volumes of freshwater due to rainfall, increased freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee, and overland basin runoff has resulted in decreased salinities throughout the Caloosahatchee estuary. This influx of freshwater has returned the salinity values back to favorable estuarine levels. The Corps recognizes conditions are subject to change at any time and all decisions will be predicated on the best information available.

If you have any questions or need additional information regarding Lake Okeechobee water management operations, please contact Mr. Jorge Tous, Chief, Water Management Section, at 904-232-1661.

Sincerely,

Alan M. Dodd
Colonel, U.S. Army
District Commander