



July 8, 2014

Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy
Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Re: Request for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to Accelerate the Risk Assessment for the Herbert Hoover Dike to Determine if Additional Water may be Stored as an Interim Strategy to Reduce Damaging Freshwater Releases to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Estuaries

Dear Secretary Darcy:

Over the last year, the Southwest Florida Community Foundation has convened community leaders, experts and concerned citizens in our region around the vital issue of one of our most precious resources—water. We are concerned with its impact on our environment, the economy, the health of future generations of southwest Floridians and our way of life.

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, municipalities, and local governments, it is with these voices behind me that we request the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers accelerate the risk assessment review for the Herbert Hoover Dike. As improvements are made to increase the structural integrity of the dike, the risk associated with a catastrophic failure should decrease. In light of improvements that have been completed since 2007, with more than 21 miles of cutoff wall installed along Reach 1 and work to replace or remove 32 culverts underway, as well as the significant public investment in the repairs, we feel that it is prudent to accelerate the risk assessment component of the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS 2008) to determine if there are any opportunities to provide interim relief to the estuaries.

Last summer the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries were devastated by the freshwater releases from Lake Okeechobee. Regulatory releases from the Lake resulted in extensive ecological impacts to seagrass beds, oysters, fisheries, and critical habitat for the Florida manatee and smalltooth sawfish. Flows to the Caloosahatchee averaged more than 7,400 cubic feet per second (cfs) from June through October. These flows were more than two and one half times the harm threshold for the estuary. The freshwater plume that resulted from these discharges extended more than 14 miles offshore into the Gulf of Mexico, blanketing area beaches with dark nutrient-laden water for more than four months. The St. Lucie estuary experienced similar conditions, with the Florida



Confirmed in compliance with National Standards for U.S. Community Foundations

Department of Health closing area beaches due to elevated bacteria levels and extensive harmful algal blooms. This event not only impacted the ecology of the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries and associated coastal waters, but it also had a significant impact on the coastal economies.

Water is the lifeblood of our coastal communities and supports a robust tourism industry. Tourism in Lee County generates more than \$2.7 billion annually. In Lee and Collier Counties combined, tourism generates more than \$4.3 billion annually and supports more than 85,000 jobs. Real estate assessed values in Lee and Collier counties combined were more than \$147 billion in 2013 and generated more than \$1.9 billion in property tax revenue. Water-related tourism in Martin and St. Lucie counties alone generates more than \$840 million annually and supports more than 6,600 jobs.

We recognize that the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and water storage throughout the Central and South Florida Project area is the ultimate solution to eliminating the harmful discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the estuaries. However, most of the projects in CERP that will address the discharges will take more than ten years to complete. This is an unreasonable amount of time to wait while our estuaries and local economies continue to decline. It is imperative that we move forward with interim strategies that will provide some immediate relief to our coastal communities and the ecology of our estuaries.

It is estimated that six inches of water in Lake Okeechobee is equivalent to 225,000 acre-feet. An additional six inches of water in the Lake would provide the Corps with critical operational flexibility needed to immediately reduce high-flow discharges to the estuaries. If the risk assessment determines that the Herbert Hoover Dike can safely store more water, we respectfully request a deviation from the Lake Okeechobee Release Schedule to allow for temporary storage of a maximum of six inches of additional water within Lake Okeechobee.

We are not requesting that water be held in the Lake for long periods of time for water supply purposes; rather, we are requesting that the additional freeboard be used to improve the timing of releases and reduce the need to discharge high volumes of water to the estuaries. The Lake should still be managed as close to the 12.5 to 15.5 feet operational band. However, in the event that a storm drives the Lake level above 15.5 feet, the time frame in which water would need to be purged from the Lake would be extended over a longer period of time. This would allow water managers more time to identify alternate sites where water could provide a beneficial use, rather than flushing it to our estuaries.

We are not asking the Corps to take on risk that would put the health of our estuaries and local economies above the health, safety and welfare of the communities that surround Lake Okeechobee. However, we are asking that the true risk associated with a catastrophic dike failure be reassessed in light of the improvements that have been completed to date.

We thank you for your leadership and feel confident that you will consider our request to help minimize the impact on our environment and economy.

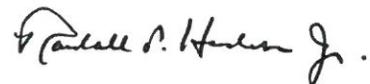
Sincerely,



Sarah Owen
Chief Executive Officer
Southwest Florida Community Foundation



Kevin Ruane
Mayor
City of Sanibel



Randall Henderson, Jr.
Mayor
City of Fort Myers



Larry Kiker
Chairman
Lee County Board of County Commissioners



Noel Address
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Alan Mandel
Council Member
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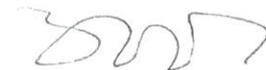
Karson Turner
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Bruce Neill
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Marni Sawicki
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C.C.: General Donald E. Jackson, Jr., Commander, South Atlantic Division

Colonel Alan M. Dodd, Commander, Jacksonville District

Senator Bill Nelson
Senator Marco Rubio

Congressman Jeff Miller, 1st District
Congressman Steve Southerland, 2nd District
Congressman Ted Yoho, 3rd District
Congressman Ander Crenshaw, 4th District
Congresswoman Corrine Brown, 5th District
Congressman Ron DeSantis, 6th District
Congressman John Mica, 7th District
Congressman Bill Posey, 8th District
Congressman Alan Grayson, 9th District
Congressman Daniel Webster, 10th District
Congressman Rich Nugent, 11th District
Congressman Gus Bilirakis, 12th District
Congressman David Jolly, 13th District
Congresswoman Kathy Castor, 14th District
Congressman Dennis Ross, 15th District
Congressman Vern Buchanan, 16th District
Congressman Tom Rooney, 17th District
Congressman Patrick Murphy, 18th District
Congressman Alcee Hastings, 20th District
Congressman Ted Deutch, 21st District
Congresswoman Lois Frankel, 22nd District
Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, 23rd District
Congresswoman Frederica Wilson, 24th District
Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart, 25th District
Congressman Joe Garcia, 26th District
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