

July 7, 2016

Re: Update to the Citizens of Sanibel on the Coastal Water Quality Issues from Mayor Ruane

Dear Sanibel Residents,

I want to take this time to update you on the current water quality situation affecting Sanibel and our coastal waters. Since the last week in January, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in consultation with the South Florida Water Management District, has been conducting regulatory freshwater releases from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries to reduce water levels to protect the integrity of the Herbert Hoover Dike. These damaging high-volume freshwater discharges are not only impacting the ecology of our coastal waters, reducing salinity for important organisms like oysters, seagrasses, finfish and shellfish, they are also impacting our quality of life, our property values, our local businesses, and the experience of visitors to our island.

On June 29th, Governor Scott issued Executive Orders 16-155 and 16-156, declaring a State of Emergency in Martin, St. Lucie, Lee, and Palm Beach Counties as a result of the discharges from Lake Okeechobee. We are not currently experiencing the blue-green algae blooms along Sanibel's coastline that have been reported by the national news along Martin County's beaches. However, the discharges are resulting in a dark freshwater plume along some of our beaches and we remain concerned about the excessive nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, associated with high-volume releases that can fuel algae blooms. At this time we are not seeing any significant algae blooms along our beaches. City staff, working with our island partners, continues to monitor beaches conditions and water quality and will provide updates on the City's website at www.mysanibel.com.

The problem we are faced with persists because of inadequate water storage within the Kissimmee, Lake Okeechobee, and Caloosahatchee watersheds and our inability to treat and convey more water south into Everglades National Park and Florida Bay where it is desperately needed. I want to assure you that Sanibel City Council is doing everything in our power to address the situation and to get the state and federal governments that are responsible for managing our waters to expedite projects that will provide relief to the estuaries. This year, the City of Sanibel completed its third revision of the Caloosahatchee Watershed Regional Water Management Issues White Paper. This document provides an overview of our regional water management issues and provides a list of short and long-term strategies



City of Sanibel

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to improve water storage and treatment throughout the central southern Florida water management system. This document is available through the following web link: <http://www.mysanibel.com/content/download/22491/137383> While there is no single project that will solve our water problems immediately; there are a number of projects that when completed will significantly reduce the harmful discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries.

The South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are the agencies responsible for managing the water releases to the coastal estuaries. Together with other state, federal and local agencies they have developed a schedule for implementing projects to restore the Everglades and Northern Estuaries. This schedule is referred to as the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS). The IDS contains a number of projects that are underway or are in the planning process and when constructed will provide relief to the estuaries. There is one project in particular on the IDS that would provide meaningful relief to the estuaries, but it is not scheduled to begin the planning process until 2020. That project is referred to as "EAA Storage & ASR/Decomp Ph2" on the IDS. This project would result in additional water storage and treatment south of Lake Okeechobee within the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA). This project combined with the other projects currently underway would provide additional storage, treatment and conveyance south of Lake Okeechobee. In light of the Governor's Emergency Declaration and the current impacts to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries and the local economies of south Florida, it is critical that the planning process for this project be accelerated to begin in 2016/17. We cannot wait until 2020 for planning to begin on this project!

Sanibel City Council is continuing to push for immediate changes in how Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee are managed, but we need your help. We encourage you to contact our legislators in Washington and Tallahassee to make sure they hear your concerns about how water quality is impacting your quality of life and our local economy. Demand that they accelerate the planning process for EAA Storage included on the current Integrated Delivery Schedule from 2020 to 2016/17.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kevin Ruane", is written over a faint blue circular stamp or seal.

Mayor Kevin Ruane

Below is contact information that may be helpful if you are interested in contacting any of the state or federal agencies responsible for managing discharges from Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee.

Army Corps of Engineers:

Jo-Ellen Darcy

Colonel Jason Kirk
Army Corps of Engineers
joellen.darcy@us.army.mil

Army Corps of Engineers
Email: Jason.A.Kirk@usace.mil

State of Florida:

Governor Rick Scott
Office of the Governor
Email: rick.scott@eog.myflorida.com

South Florida Water Management District Governing Board:

Daniel O'Keefe, Chairman
SFWMD
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South Florida Water Management District Executive Director:

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Florida Department of Environmental Protection:

Jon Steverson, Secretary
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Email: Jon.Steverson@dep.state.fl.us