

RESOLUTION R-5-19

RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF PALM BEACH SHORES ON THE RE-EVALUATION OF LAKE OKEECHOBEE OPERATIONS BY THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS PURSUANT TO THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT ASSESSMENT FOR THE LAKE OKEECHOBEE SYSTEM OPERATING MANUAL

WHEREAS, Lake Okeechobee is the liquid heart of an integrated regional water management system and is essential and interconnected to communities, businesses, public water supply utilities and ecosystems throughout Palm Beach County; and

WHEREAS, Lake Okeechobee is an integral component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and is critical to meeting the environmental restoration and water supply needs of South Florida; and

WHEREAS, Lake Okeechobee is essential to protecting the region's water supply infrastructure from saltwater intrusion by providing a source of freshwater to prevent the migration of saltwater into coastal wellfields; and

WHEREAS, Lake Okeechobee's authorized project purposes include flood control, water supply, recreation, navigation, environmental effects to fish and wildlife, and cultural and recreational resources; and

WHEREAS, Section 1106 of the 2018 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) directs the Secretary of the Army to expedite completion of the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule to coincide with completion of the Herbert Hoover Dike project, and may include all relevant aspects of the CERP; and

WHEREAS, in January 2019, the County received notice from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) that, in accordance with Section 1106 of the 2018 WRDA, the Corps is beginning preparation of a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) assessment for the Lake Okeechobee System Operations Manual (LOSOM), which is to re-evaluate and define operations for the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule that takes into account nearly complete additional infrastructure which will soon be operational components of the water management system; and

WHEREAS, rehabilitation activities on Lake Okeechobee's Herbert Hoover Dike by the Corps began in 2001 and are expected to be complete by 2022; and

WHEREAS, the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule of 2008 (LORS08) was implemented as an interim measure to protect the public from the risk of catastrophic failure of the Herbert Hoover Dike; and

WHEREAS, Palm Beach County, in partnership with state and local partners, has invested over \$500 million in the acquisition, restoration and management of approximately 32,000 acres of natural areas and invested approximately \$88 million to restore the Lake Worth Lagoon; and

WHEREAS, The Town of Palm Beach Shores wishes to provide direction as to which measures that Palm Beach County supports and opposes in the Lake Okeechobee operations re evaluation process and the resultant LOSOM.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE TOWN OF PALM BEACH SHORES, that the Commission hereby *supports* the following as it relates to the re-evaluation of Lake Okeechobee operations by the Corps:

1. A science-based evaluation that is transparent and acknowledges and balances all congressionally-authorized purposes of Lake Okeechobee operations; and
2. Performance measures that appropriately and accurately characterize impacts to all communities as it relates to water supply, the environment, and the economy; and
3. The incorporation of data and methods to ensure proposed operations improve lake ecology, protect water supplies and are robust and resilient to expected climatic variability; and
4. The implementation of water storage and water quality treatment projects in Lake Okeechobee tributary basins north of the Lake; and
5. Lake Okeechobee operations that reduce flood risk and flood insurance premiums for residents and businesses in the Glades communities located southeast of Lake Okeechobee; and
6. Lake Okeechobee operations that assist in achieving restoration flows and other key ecosystem goals, including performance measures developed by CERP's Restoration Coordination & Verification (RECOVER) program; and
7. The avoidance and/or minimization of Lake Okeechobee discharges to the Lake Worth Lagoon and the Loxahatchee River; and
8. Reductions in water use restrictions and cutbacks on public water utilities and existing permitted users, as compared to those which occur under LORS08.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission *opposes* the following as it relates to the re-evaluation of Lake Okeechobee operations by the Corps:

1. Drastically lowering Lake Okeechobee to levels not supported by sound science (e.g. 10.5 feet) which would induce drought conditions, impact the ability to deliver water to critical ecosystems, and result in significant environmental damage; and
2. Lake Okeechobee operations that result in increased risk of saltwater intrusion into coastal wellfields which would cause irreversible damage to freshwater supplies, affect the health and safety of residents, and result in the need for massive alternative water supply infrastructure investments; and

