DAVE KERNER

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June 15, 2021

The Honorable Jaime A. Pinkham
Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G. Street NW
Washington, DC 20314-000

Dear Mr. Pinkham,

Subject: **Palm Beach County Request for Additional Time to Review and Comment on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual Alternatives**

Lake Okeechobee is an integral component of the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Flood Control Project and is critical to meeting the environmental restoration and water supply needs of South Florida. Lake Okeechobee is the liquid heart of an integrated regional water management system and is essential and interconnected to communities, businesses, public water utilities, and ecosystems throughout Palm Beach County.

Residents, taxpayers and visitors within our County depend on predictable and reliable water supplies to sustain robust and diverse agricultural- and tourism-based economies. Therefore, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) ongoing effort to develop a new Lake Okeechobee operational plan, referred to as the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM), is of particular interest to stakeholders and the public.

Decisions proposed to be made by the USACE in the next several weeks will likely affect our communities for the next decade or more. Specifically, the USACE is planning to tentatively select a new Lake Okeechobee operational plan by the end of July 2021. Detailed modeling results for six operational plans still under consideration were released by the USACE on June 9, 2021. These six plans were conceptualized by the U.S. Army Corps in May 2021 based on the evaluation of more than 120,000 operational concepts.

Palm Beach County strongly believes that additional time is needed to ensure stakeholders have adequate time to review, understand and evaluate the proposed large-scale changes to Lake Okeechobee and the regional water management system and to provide meaningful input on the Lake Okeechobee operational alternatives to the USACE.

Therefore, Palm Beach County respectfully requests that you communicate to the USACE leadership that a minimum of 90 additional days is needed to appropriately review and understand the complexities of the remaining Lake Okeechobee operational alternatives.

Despite what some elected officials and stakeholders have stated publically, Palm Beach County has not publically supported any of the five remaining Lake Okeechobee operational alternatives. Any support or opposition at this time would be premature and unprofessional, as the data and information to evaluate the alternatives is still being reviewed.

While Section 1106 (Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Review) of the Water Resources Development Act of 2018 directs the Secretary of the Army to expedite completion of the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule to coincide with the completion of the Herbert Hoover Dike project, there is no mandate for the USACE to complete LOSOM by 2022, as has been communicated to stakeholders.

Thank you for consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Dave Kerner
County Mayor

cc: Members, Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners
        Verdenia C. Baker, County Administrator, Palm Beach County
        Patrick Rutter, Assistant County Administrator, Palm Beach County
        Jeremy McBryan, County Water Resources Manager, Palm Beach County
        Colonel Andrew Kelly, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
        Lt. Colonel Todd Polk, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
        Rep. Lois Frankel, U.S. House of Representatives
        Gib Owen, U.S. Army, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works