Moving Forward – Reducing the Destructive Lake Discharges to the St. Lucie River and Estuary

> Gary Goforth January 2014

For 90 years, the coastal communities have <u>sacrificed</u> their health, economy, and environment in order to protect the health, safety and welfare of residents around Lake Okeechobee.





Photo courtesy of Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch

Why did this happen in 2013?

- Public health advisories
- Massive algae blooms
 - > Oyster mortality
 - Loss of sea grasses
- Record manatee deaths
 - Recreation impacts
 - Job impacts
 - Education impacts
 - Tourism impacts
 - Real estate impacts
 - ... The Lost Summer

Answers to Why? are complex

Don't know all the reasons, but they include

Continued pollution in areas discharging to Lake Okeechobee

Existing pollution reduction levels are not being achieved A century of development - channelized stormwater into the lake

Lake Okeechobee management – a magnificent endangered ecosystem

A century of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution Operating schedule ("LORS") doesn't adequately balance impacts to estuaries Herbert Hoover Dike – restricts expansion during wet periods; breach risk \rightarrow LORS2008

St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers/estuaries, Lake Worth Lagoon

Draining the Lake to estuaries has been a state policy for over 100 years Estuaries and reefs are "owned" by the state – not protected by private property rights Where's the accountability for impacts of Lake discharges? No permits?

South of Lake Okeechobee

Conveyance and treatment infrastructure to Everglades not yet completed ("3rd outlet") Public lands are not being fully utilized - STAs, WMAs and WCAs Where's the accountability for not sending maximum releases south? Flow restrictions at boundary to Everglades National Park

Can't cover it all in one sitting

So we'll focus on suggestions for moving forward that

... can be initiated in the relative near-term,

... don't require Congressional authorization or funding,

... don't require large construction projects

... do require operational and policy changes

Did I mention ...

The <u>only</u> long-term solution is to complete facilities to treat Lake Okeechobee releases and convey them to the Everglades.

... but you know that.



Brief History: St. Lucie Canal

- Concept of a canal extending from Lake Okeechobee to the Atlantic was formalized in 1913 report commissioned by State of Florida ... before Martin County was established.
 - Drain Lake Okeechobee to allow for development of Everglades
 - Provide cross-state canal for navigation and commerce
- Constructed between 1916 and 1924 by Everglades Drainage District
- Enlarged by Corps of Engineers in 1938 and again in 1949 (C-44)



Port Mayaca Lock and Spillway

- Originally constructed in 1925 by Everglades Drainage District (Lock No. 1).
 - Navigation lock
 - Spillway for releasing Lake water to canal
 - Bulkhead still visible along south bank of canal





From Osborn, 2012, Courtesy Engebretsen family



Replaced in 1978 by Corps of Engineers

- Referred to as S-308
- Maximum discharge 8,150 cfs
- Controls Lake releases to canal and local runoff to Lake

St. Lucie Lock and Spillway

- Originally constructed in 1925 by Everglades Drainage District (Lock No. 2).
 - Navigation lock
 - Spillway for releasing basin runoff and Lake water to River

Replaced in 1941 by Corps of Engineers Referred to as S-80



The first recorded discharge from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie River was on June 13, 1923.



Calendar Year

Notes: 1. Data sources for Lake releases: Lake releases to C-44 Canal flows estimated by USGS for 4/1/1931 to 9/30/1952; Lake releases to C-44 Canal flows estimated by SFWMD for 1/1/1965 to 2013;S-80 flows estimated by SFWMD for 10/1/1952 to 2013.

2. Prior to January 1, 1965 concurrent flow estimates were not available for Lake releases to the C-44 Canal and flow at S-80, so approximations of Lake releases to the St. Lucie River were necessary:

1931-1952: Assumed annual Lake release to River was approximately equal to (S-308 flow x 0.918)

1953-1964: Assumed annual Lake release to River was approximately equal to (S-80 flow x 0.767)

May 8 – October 21, 2013

The Lost Summer

2013 Inflows to Lake Okeechobee

Leading up to, and during, releases to estuaries: 769 billion gallons

Inflows to Lake Okeechobee by Sub-watershed: January 1 - October 21, 2013 Total Inflows = 2.36 million acre feet



Note: South Lake Okeechobee includes EAA and Ch. 298 Districts. East Lake Okeechobee includes C-44 Basin and L-8 Basin. West Lake Okeechobee includes S-4 / Industrial Canal basin and East Caloosahatchee basin.

Lake Okeechobee Water Levels - 2013



LORS guidance when releases to SLRE began

2008 LORS

Part C: Establish Allowable Lake Okeechobee Releases to the Water Conservation Areas



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LORS guidance when releases to SLRE began

2008 LORS

Part D: Establish Allowable Lake Okeechobee Releases to Tide (Estuaries)



The Lost Summer – Where did the water go?



To estuaries (incl. Lake Worth Lagoon): 474 billion gallons (92%)

To STAs/WCAs: 21 billion gallons (4%)

Other, e.g., water supply: 21 billion gallons (4%)

Note: 17 billion gallons of southern stormwater went back to Lake!



Approximately 22 times more water sent to the estuaries than to the STAs/WCAs

The Lost Summer – St. Lucie Estuary Inflows

More than 417,700 acre feet (136 billion gallons) of Lake water sent to the St. Lucie River and Estuary – ~40 percent of total surface flows to estuary. S-308 max flow of 4,680 cfs on 8/15/13; S-80 max flow of 5,869 cfs on 8/6/13



Does not include flows from tidal tributaries and groundwater. Data are from SFWMD and are subject to revision.

TP Loads to St. Lucie River & Estuary: May 8 - Oct 21, 2013



Not "freshwater" - Lake contributed almost 6 times the Total Maximum Daily Load established for nitrogen and phosphorus



DRAFT - SUBJECT TO REVISIONS. Notes: 1. All loads in pounds. 2. Other tributary inflows were estimated based on District's SLRWPP model allocation for flow and 2013 concentrations.



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Moving forward – What to do the next time releases threaten

Send more water south – slow and steady

Stormwater Treatment Areas (57,000 acres) Wildlife Management Areas (62,000 acres) Water Conservation Areas (849,000 acres)

Sense of scale - if the entire 2013 Lake releases to St. Lucie Estuary were uniformly spread out over these areas the result would be less than a 1 inch per month increase in depth (hypothetical - can't physically spread water uniformly)



Sufficient publicly-owned conveyance and treatment capacity exists today to send more lake water to the WCAs

Lake releases to the WCAs have <u>decreased</u> <u>dramatically</u> despite more than \$1 billion of public investment to, in part, send more Lake water south.



Lake releases south include regulatory releases and water supply that pass through the EAA and L-8 basins via the West Palm Beach, Hillsboro, North New River, Miami and L-8 canals.

Available Capacity Exists in WCAs

Despite significant available storage capacity in the WCAs <u>and</u> the direction to send "up to maximum practicable releases to the WCAs", regulatory releases to the WCAs were not maximized; appears to be no accountability for not sending regulatory releases to the WCAs.

Suggestions:

- 1. Send a minimum of 250,000 acre feet to WCAs before any regulatory releases to the estuaries
- 2. Establish nondiscretionary minimum release targets to the WCAs (subject to levee heights)
- 3. Remove all policy restrictions to sending regulatory releases to the WCAs



Estimates are preliminary and subject to revision. Inflow capacity is limited by factors other than total available storage capacity.

Stormwater Treatment Areas

5 large water treatment areas utilizing wetland plants and natural processes to remove nutrients from water entering the Everglades; constructed within the EAA and adjacent basins.



More Fully Utilize the STAs

1994 State legislation authorized public funding of STAs to treat a 28% increase in flows to the Everglades. The original 40,000 acres were designed to treat an <u>average</u> of 250,000 acre feet per year (81.5 billion) – more during wet years. Now there are more than 56,000 acres of STAs, so even more capacity exists.

Lake releases to STAs have averaged about 65,000 acre feet per year.

Fear of sending Lake water to STAs stems from a 2002-03 event – overloaded STA-1W with 6 ft per month; water quality performance dropped, but recovered in 18 months.

2013 flows to STAs were restricted in approx. 20,000 acres due to ground nesting birds, construction, and "resting" treatment vegetation.

2013 STA Inflows: only 41,200 acre feet before May 8 (22%) only 65,800 AF during releases to estuary (6%)



More Fully Utilize the STAs

Suggestions:

- 1. <u>Slow and steady flow of Lake water south River of Grass</u>
- Send 0.5 3 cm per day to STAs (0.5 3 ft per month)
 Target of 87,000 acre feet/month
 Under ideal conditions 435,000 AF over a 5-month period
 Actual capacity will vary depending on various factors (rainfall, STA and
 WCA water levels, etc.) and while short-term impacts to STAs/WCAs may
 - occur, public health safety and welfare justify these.
- 3. Maintain minimum of 0.5 ft water depth and obtain Special Purpose Permits to avoid restrictions due to ground nesting birds
- 4. Return all STA cells to full operation during regulatory releases to estuaries

More fully utilize Wildlife Management Areas Publicly-funded infrastructure exists to re-establish slow continuous flow-through conditions

Suggestion:

<u>Slow and steady</u> flow of Lake water south

Send 0.5 cm per day to Holey Land and Rotenberger WMAs

Target 31,000 AF/month

Under ideal conditions, 155,000 acre feet over a 5-month period



Calendar Year

When Regulatory Releases to Estuaries are <u>Unavoidable</u> Until the long-term solution is in place, estuaries will get destructive releases.

Suggestions:

- 1. Declare emergency notify permit holders and regulatory agencies of need for emergency operations
- 2. Alert county health departments when algae is observed in Lake releases
- 3. Implement additional measures to reduce inflows to the Lake

2013: more than 17 billion gallons of southern stormwater added to Lake during releases to estuary

- 4. Terminate releases when Lake level is at or below 16 ft
- 5. Prepare environmental and economic impact analysis

Other suggestions

- 1. Conduct an updated risk assessment of Herbert Hoover Dike
- Revise Lake's regulation schedule balance impacts to estuaries at the same priority as impacts to other regions
- 3. Add projects to State's BMAP and District's Protection Plan to treat Lake regulatory releases
- 4. Expedite actions to achieve Lake Okeechobee TMDL
 - **Document effectiveness of source controls**
 - 2. Ensure Dispersed Water Management Projects are cost effective at reducing pollution loading, or re-direct funding to regional water quality projects
- 5. <u>Begin conceptual design of long-term solution "3rd outlet" to</u> <u>Everglades</u>

Summary of near-term suggestions

- 1. When LORS directs "up to maximum releases to WCAs", fully utilize public lands south of Lake Okeechobee
 - a. Slow continuous releases to the STAs, WMAs and WCAs
 - **b.** Before regulatory releases to estuaries: minimum of 250,000 AF
 - Non-discretionary levels until releases terminated
- 2. When regulatory releases to estuary are unavoidable:
 - a. Declare emergency
 - **b.** Alert county health departments when algae is observed in Lake releases
 - . Implement additional measures to reduce inflows to the Lake
 - a. Terminate releases when Lake level is at or below 16 ft
 - Conduct environmental and economic impact analysis
- 3. Revise Lake's regulation schedule with updated risk assessment and impacts to estuary evaluated at same priority as other regions
- 4. Take cost effective actions to achieve Lake and estuaries' TMDLs
- 5. <u>Begin conceptual design of long-term solution "3rd outlet" to Everglades</u>

Thanks to all who have contributed to raising and sustaining public awareness during the Lost Summer

The future for South Florida, as for all once-beautiful and despoiled areas of our country, <u>lies in aroused and informed public</u> <u>opinion and citizen action</u>. If more and more of us continue forcefully and untiringly to demand a <u>balanced</u> development of land, of salt and fresh water, of people and wilderness, farms, cities, appropriate industries, wildlife and recreation such as the region can intelligently be expected to support, <u>we can still bring</u> <u>back much usefulness and beauty to a changed and recreated earth</u>.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas, The Everglades: River of Grass, 1947

Questions or comments?

Photo courtesy of Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch

Continued Pollution of Lake Okeechobee



5-yr Moving Average TP Unit Area Loads (UALs) fom Lake Okeechobee Sub-watersheds to the Lake for the WY2008-2012 period



Note: Unit area load for South Lake Okeechobee was 0.01 #/ac and includes discharges from areas outside the Sub-watershed boundary.

Phosphorus Loads to Lake Okeechobee Average for period WY2008-2012: 346 metric tons per year

Flows and Phosphorus Loads to Lake Okeechobee



Flows to Lake Okeechobee: Average for period WY1995-2013 Average annual flow of 2.3 million acre feet (760 billion gallons)





Historical Flows to St. Lucie Estuary

Inflows to St. Lucie River & Estuary: 1995-2013 Average annual inflow in acre feet



DRAFT - SUBJECT TO REVISIONS. Notes: 1. Missing flows for C-23 Basin are estimated from C-24 flows prior to 1996. 2. Missing flows for Ten Mile Creek are estimated from C-24 flows prior to 2000.

3. Flows for other tributary inflows estimated based on SLRWPP model allocation.

Historical Loads to St. Lucie Estuary

Nitrogen Loads to St. Lucie River & Estuary: 1995-2013 Average annual loads in pounds



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Phosphorus Loads to St. Lucie River & Estuary: 1995-2013 Average annual loads in pounds



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3. Flows for other tributary inflows estimated based on SLRWPP model allocation.



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3. Flows for other tributary inflows estimated based on SLRWPP model allocation.

2013 - The Lost Summer

More than 417,000 acre feet (136 billion gallons) of Lake water sent to the estuary – 37 percent of total surface flows.



1 acre foot = enough water to cover an acre of land with one foot of water. 1 acre foot is equal to 325,872 gallons. Data source: South Florida Water Management District database : http://www.sfwrmd.gov/dbhydropksql/show_dbkey_info.main_menu Data are preliminary and subject to revision. Inflows to St. Lucie River & Estuary: May 8 - Oct 21, 2013



DRAFT - SUBJECT TO REVISIONS. Notes: 1. All flows in acre feet (1 acre foot = 325,872 gallons). 2. Other tributary inflows were estimated based on District's SLRWPP model allocation.



Summary of 2013 Lake Releases to Estuaries and WCAs (excludes Lake releases for water supply to adjacent basins) (acre feet)

Source	Jan 1- May 7	May 8-Oct 21	Oct 22-Dec 31	Total 2013
Lake Release to STA/WCAs	41,323	65,800	51,101	158,225
Basin Runoff to STA/WCAs	148,371	1,002,116	648	1,151,135
Total to STAs/WCAs	189,695	1,067,916 51,749		1,309,360
Lake as % of Total	22%	6%	99%	12%
Lake Release to St. Lucie R/E	1,450	417,733	768	419,951
Basin Runoff to St. Lucie R/E	41,283	719,281	30,438	791,002
Total to St. Lucie R/E	42,733	1,137,015	31,206	1,210,953
Lake as % of Total	3%	37%	2%	35%
Lake Release to Caloos. R/E	65,957	966,463	23,808	1,056,228
Basin Runoff to Caloos. R/E	66,301	1,762,350	45,587	1,874,237
Total to Caloos. R/E	132,257	2,728,813	69,395	2,930,465
Lake as % of Total	50%	35%	34%	36%
Lake Release to LW Lagoon	5,058	70,744	24,855	100,658
Basin Runoff to LW Lagoon	19,502	304,386	7,465	331,353
Total to LW Lagoon	24,560	375,130	32,320	432,010
Lake as % of Total	21%	19%	77%	23%
Total Lake Releases	113,788	1,520,741	100,532	1,735,061

Notes:

1. Estimates are preliminary and subject to revision; all flows in acre feet.

2. Basin Runoff to STAs/WCAs include only those basins that discharge to the STAs.

3. Basin Runoff to St. Lucie River/Estuary includes runoff from C-23, C-24, C-25 and C-44

4. Basin Runoff to Caloosahatchee River/Estuary includes runoff from S-78 and S-79 basins only.

5. Basin Runoff to Lake Worth Lagoon includes only runoff from C-51 Basin.

Summary of 2013 Lake Releases to Estuaries and WCAs (excludes Lake releases for water supply to adjacent basins) (billion gallons)

Source	Jan 1- May 7	May 8-Oct 21	Oct 22-Dec 31	Total 2013
Lake Release to STA/WCAs	13.5	21.4	16.7	51.6
Basin Runoff to STA/WCAs	48.4	326.6	0.2	375.1
Total to STAs/WCAs	61.8	348.0	16.9	426.7
Lake as % of Total	22%	6%	99%	12%
Lake Release to St. Lucie R/E	0.5	136.1	0.3	136.9
Basin Runoff to St. Lucie R/E	13.5	234.4	9.9	257.8
Total to St. Lucie R/E	13.9	370.5	10.2	394.6
Lake as % of Total	3%	37%	2%	35%
Lake Release to Caloos. R/E	21.5	314.9	7.8	344.2
Basin Runoff to Caloos. R/E	21.6	574.3	14.9	610.8
Total to Caloos. R/E	43.1	889.2	22.6	955.0
Lake as % of Total	50%	35%	34%	36%
Lake Release to LW Lagoon	1.6	23.1	8.1	32.8
Basin Runoff to LW Lagoon	6.4	99.2	2.4	108.0
Total to LW Lagoon	8.0	122.2	10.5	140.8
Lake as % of Total	21%	19%	77%	23%
Total Lake Releases	37.1	495.6	32.8	565.4

Notes:

1. Estimates are preliminary and subject to revision; all flows in billion gallons.

2. Basin Runoff to STAs/WCAs include only those basins that discharge to the STAs.

3. Basin Runoff to St. Lucie River/Estuary includes runoff from C-23, C-24, C-25 and C-44

4. Basin Runoff to Caloosahatchee River/Estuary includes runoff from S-78 and S-79 basins only.

5. Basin Runoff to Lake Worth Lagoon includes only runoff from C-51 Basin.

Estimated Lake Releases to the Estuaries

Lake Releases St. Lucie River and Estuary
Lake Releases to Caloosahtchee Estuary



Note: Lake releases include regulatory releases, water supply releases and releases for salinity adjustment.

Historical (WY1995-2013) structure maximum discharges from the Lake

South/southeast

- S-351: 2,050 cfs (1,406 in 2013)
- S-352: 1,300 cfs (1,104 in 2013)
- S-354: 1,860 cfs (1,448 cfs in 2013)
- LC10-A: 622 cfs (562 cfs in 2013)
- Combined: 5,832 cfs (3,703 cfs in 2013)
- East/West
 - Caloosahatchee River once a natural meandering river
 - S-77 8,967 cfs (7,151 cfs in 2013) 8,967 cfs POR max (1965 present)
 - S-79 21,338 cfs in 2103
 - In general receives about twice the Lake releases than St. Lucie Canal
 - St. Lucie Canal man-made
 - S-308 7,695 cfs (4,680 cfs in 2013) 8,150 cfs POR max (1978-present)
 - S-80 5,869 cfs in 2013
 - Combined: 16,662
 - Ratio of E/W to S = 2.9 to 1

		Lake	Stormwater	Total	STA	Hydraulic
STA	Period	Releases	Flows	to WCAs	Area	Load from Lake
		AF	AF	AF	acres	cm per day
STA-1E	Jan 1- May 7	6,344	4,718	11,062	5 000	0.30
	May 8-Oct 21	21,476	83,315	104,791		0.78
	Oct 22-Dec 31	4,828	102	4,931	5,000	0.41
	Total 2013	32,649	88,135	120,783		0.55
	Jan 1- May 7	1,179	25,791	26,971	6 500	0.04
CTA 414	May 8-Oct 21	38,217	154,563	192,780		1.07
STA-IW	Oct 22-Dec 31	8,466	3,572	12,038	0,500	0.56
	Total 2013	47,862	183,926	231,789		0.61
	Jan 1- May 7	9,352	51,809	61,160		0.14
STA 2	May 8-Oct 21	395	288,434	288,829	15 500	0.00
51A-2	Oct 22-Dec 31	20,147	2,214	22,361	15,500	0.56
	Total 2013	29,893	342,457	372,350		0.16
	Jan 1- May 7	24,358	60,229	84,587		0.36
STA 2/4	May 8-Oct 21	5,712	362,266	367,978	16,300	0.06
51A-5/4	Oct 22-Dec 31	17,657	-5,903	11,755		0.47
	Total 2013	47,728	416,592	464,320		0.24
	Jan 1- May 7	0	5,805	5,805	12 700	0.00
STA 5/6	May 8-Oct 21	0	96,144	96,144		0.00
31A-5/0	Oct 22-Dec 31	0	662	662	15,700	0.00
	Total 2013	0	102,612	102,612		0.00
	Jan 1- May 7	41,233	148,352	189,585		0.17
Total	May 8-Oct 21	65,800	984,723	1,050,523	E7 000	0.21
Totai	Oct 22-Dec 31	51,098	648	51,746	57,000	0.38
	Total 2013	158,132	1,133,722	1,291,854		0.23
Portion of STA Inflows	Jan 1- May 7	22%	78%			
	May 8-Oct 21	6%	94%			
	Oct 22-Dec 31	99%	1%			
	Total 2013	12%	88%			
Diverted directly to WCAs	Jan 1- May 7	90	20	110		
	May 8-Oct 21	0	17,394	17,394		
	Oct 22-Dec 31	3	0	3		
	Total 2013	93	17,413	17,506		
Total Lake to STAs and WCAs	Jan 1- May 7	41,323	148,371	189,695		
	May 8-Oct 21	65,800	1,002,116	1,067,916		
	Oct 22-Dec 31	51,101	648	51,749		
	Total 2013	158,225	1,151,135	1,309,360		

Notes:

1. "Stormwater Flows" is total STA outflow to WCAs minus Lake inflows to STAs; assumed all Lake flows pass through STAs

2. Negative value appears for STA-3/4 during Oct. 22-Dec. 31 because not all Lake flows left the STA during this period

3. Some STA-3/4 and STA-5/6 outflow was sent to Rotenberger WMA instead of the WCAs.