

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION (WRAC)
LAKE OKEECHOBEE COMMITTEE MEETING
Wednesday, January 24, 2007
Lower West Coast Service Center, SFWMD, 2301 McGregor Boulevard
Ft. Myers, FL
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

MEETING REPORT

INTRODUCTION:

- Committee Chair Malcolm “Bubba” Wade called the meeting to order. Committee Member Roland Ottolini welcomed the committee to Ft. Myers.
- **Agenda Items:**
 - Lake Okeechobee Water Conditions Update
 - Lake Okeechobee Status Update
 - Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Update
 - Herbert Hoover Dike Rehabilitation Update
 - Committee Discussion – Review Draft Recommendations Paper
- Presentations to the committee on 1/24/07 have been posted to <http://my.sfwmd.gov/wrac>, Lake Okeechobee Committee tab.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION BY COMMITTEE:

- **Member Issues:**
 - The Caloosahatchee/St. Lucie Rivers Corridors Council recommended to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, amendments to the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act. The proposed amendments would add a new section to protect the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries and establish a dedicated source of funding for estuary recovery.
 - Several members requested that the WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee support this legislation.
 - Copies of the preliminary bill were provided to committee members.
- **Lake Okeechobee Water Conditions Update – Cal Neidrauer:**
 - Despite earlier forecasts about an El Niño driven “wetter than normal” dry season, the dry season so far (November to January) is below normal. In addition, the 2006 calendar year was the sixth driest year on record.
 - Committee members asked questions about:
 - lake regulation schedule water shortage triggers;
 - triggers for operation of the forward pumps;

- whether permits have been obtained for remediation work and controlled burning;
 - status of El Niño;
 - whether water would be available to the pumps due to shoaling;
 - impacts of releasing minimum flows to the Caloosahatchee estuary
 - several questions and discussion related to the later presentation by Peter Milam, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, on the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Revisions)

- **Lake Okeechobee Status – Susan Gray:**
 - Members discussed recent findings that the lake continues to struggle toward recovery and submerged aquatic vegetation is not recovering quickly but bull rush is doing better. Total suspended solids and total phosphorous remain high.
 - Discussion by members and a comment from the public centered on obtaining permits for controlled burning, doing something about discharges from the lake to the L-8 and Lake Worth Lagoon, and the need to have the SFWMD Water Shortage Management Plan rules match the operating scheme in the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Environmental Impact Statement.
 - **Action Item:** Staff was asked to provide a graph of submerged aquatic vegetation abundance since May 2004 to the present.

- **Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Update – Peter Milam, USACE:**
 - Comments by members included: Current operations pertaining to environmental water deliveries are not reflected in the modeling and there is too much leeway in the Operational Guidelines. Not certain what happens with the schedule when the lake level drops into the water shortage management zone.
 - SFWMD will fill in the gaps between the Base Flow Line and Water Shortage Line.
 - The water supply management plan rule needs to match the revised Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule and the SFWMD will go into rule making probably in May, 2007.
 - The modeling included in the draft schedule revisions is important to the Endangered Species Consultation being conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
 - Questions were asked about cost/benefit of additional water storage. Comments: in wet years, need many, smaller storage sites.
 - Impacts of additional storage in the Holeyland and Rotenberger areas need to be included.

- Need to go forward with the Environmental Impact Statement but make sure the impacts of the Tentatively Selected Plan are assessed and adequately modeled.
 - USACE staff stated the EIS for the revised lake regulation schedule will assess impacts of the lake regulation schedule on environmental and economic resources.
 - Lee County urged the USACE to inform stakeholders of any changes in performance measures because the Project Delivery Team work on Caloosahatchee restoration is saying that it will take a great deal of effort just to bring the estuary back to status quo. Encouraged the SFWMD to look for additional lands for water storage to reduce peak flows during very wet years.
 - **Action Item:** SFWMD staff will provide information about basin rainfall, lake discharges and local basin runoff, including Lake Worth Lagoon area.
 - **Action Item:** The SFWMD, US Fish and Wildlife Service and USACE staff should sort through questions about what should be included in the Lake Regulation Schedule EIS before the 2/8/07 WRAC meeting.
- **Herbert Hoover Dike Rehabilitation Update – Peter Milam, USACE:**
 - Questions were asked about which agency is responsible for land acquisition, estimated costs and source of funds. An estimated \$40 million of the \$500 million budget would be for land acquisition.
 - The Project Delivery Team for the project will assess impacts to homes, the highway and surrounding area, to find ways to reduce impacts on lands and facilities.
 - Questions asked about source of funding and whether the dike rehabilitation costs would come out of CERP funding. Dike rehabilitation funding is expected to come from different sources.
- **Committee Draft Recommendations Paper:**
 - On November 29, 2006, the Committee amended the draft recommendations and members were asked to score the strategies from 1-5 with 5 being of highest importance and 1 being the lowest. The new draft, presented at this meeting, 1/24/07, with “Importance Ranking” results, is attached to this report and it has been included in the Agenda backup for the February 8, 2007 regular monthly meeting of the WRAC.
 - The Committee asked that the staff analyze the draft recommendations and add information on strategies already underway, not underway and estimated costs (if known).
 - Chair Wade asked the Committee to think about the strategies and be prepared to discuss whether we’re recommending the right strategies or whether we need to change course and recommend new approaches.