

August 4, 2021

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor of Florida
The Capitol of the State of Florida
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

RE: Protecting the State of Florida's Water Rights from the Federal Government's Usurpation in Lake Okeechobee

Dear Governor DeSantis:

We represent a broad cross section of business, landowners, and stakeholders who rely on Lake Okeechobee's water supply for our livelihood, our economies, and the continued prosperity of our communities. Lake Okeechobee ("the Lake") provides recreation and supplies the water we need to grow food, irrigate our lands, and for our drinking water. We have been engaged in the management of Lake Okeechobee for decades, including the ongoing Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual ("LOSOM").

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ("Corps") is considering a plan that would drive the Lake down to the water shortage line by eliminating the water-conserving band, also referred to as Zone F. The water in the Lake within this band is significant because the water has already been allocated to hundreds of established water users who have been in place for decades. If the Corps is allowed to drive the Lake down to the water shortage line in LOSOM (wasting water instead of conserving it), a dangerous precedent will be set in Florida - that the Federal Government can override the State of Florida's right to allocate its water to its residents and environment.

The right to allocate water is a fundamental State right that should not be interfered with by the Federal Government. Otherwise, we will permanently reduce the available water for our current and future needs. Florida has enjoyed a long and successful history in developing its science-based water supply program, issuing water use permits to users like us. The State also established rigorous rules to protect the Lake's ecology from damaging low lake levels. If the Corps eliminates the water conservation band in the Lake, this will result in repeated violations of this rule, compromising the Lake's health. As in all past Lake Okeechobee schedules, the schedule must be predictable and the zone above the water shortage line must remain within the purview of the State to protect our water supply program and the Lake's health. If we fail to protect this fundamental State right, Florida's longstanding water allocation program would be eroded, the Lake's minimum level violated, and the reliability of our water will be permanently diminished.

We ask that you send a clear message to the Corps and the South Florida Water Management District that protecting Florida's water supply is a critical State function, and it must be acknowledged in LOSOM. We look forward to your assistance in this critical matter and your continued support and protection of Florida's water supply and our Lake for Florida's future.

Sincerely,

City of Clewiston
City of Okeechobee
City of Moore Haven
City of South Bay
City of Pahokee
City of Belle Glade
City of West Palm Beach
Okeechobee County
Glades County
Hendry County
Okeechobee Utilities Authority
Lake Worth Drainage District
Southeast Florida Utility Council
South Florida Water Coalition
Anglers for Lake Okeechobee
Muck City Angler
Consumer Energy Alliance
Associated Industries of Florida
Florida Chamber of Commerce
Chamber of Commerce of the Greater Palm
Beaches
Central Palm Beach County Chamber of
Commerce
Hispanic Policy Group
Florida State Hispanic Chamber of
Commerce
Palm Beach County Economic Council

Okeechobee Economic Council
Florida Fertilizer and Agrichemical
Association
Florida Golf Course Superintendents
Association
Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape
Association
Florida Forestry Association
Florida Cattlemen's Association
Florida Citrus Mutual
Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association
Florida Farm Bureau Federation
Florida H2O Coalition
Florida Ag Coalition
Florida Land Council
Florida Agribusiness Council, Inc.
Turfgrass Producers of Florida
United Dairy Farmers of Florida
U.S. Sugar
Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida
Florida Crystals Corporation
A. Duda & Sons, Inc.
Garcia Family Farms
King Ranch
Lykes Bros, Inc.
Rayonier, Inc.