



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
CIVIL WORKS
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WASHINGTON DC 20310-0108



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Honorable Jeb Bush
Governor of Florida
The Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Dear Governor Bush:

Thank you for your letter of April 28, 2006 concerning the importance of the Herbert Hoover Dike in providing flood protection during major weather events. I share your concern for the health and safety of the residents surrounding Lake Okeechobee during the upcoming hurricane season. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers holds public safety as its highest priority. We will continue to take actions that put protection of the public above all other considerations. Lake Okeechobee water levels are managed to minimize risks for each hurricane season. The Herbert Hoover Dike safety enhancement activities provide for a wide array of preventive and protective measures, including increased on-site inspections as the prospect of damaging storms increases.

As you know, the Herbert Hoover Dike is an earthen dam that was built with natural materials in the 1930s, according to the construction standards of the time. The dike does permit some natural seepage from Lake Okeechobee; however, in some instances, this seepage creates internal erosion of the dike, creating small, subterranean tunnels that, if undetected and unchecked, may undermine the integrity of the dike. The Corps regularly monitors for this condition and takes immediate corrective actions to prevent erosion from leading to a failure of the dike. A rehabilitation project was approved in 2000, and construction on a 4.6-mile section of the dike near Port Mayaca is currently under way. This is the first of eight sections scheduled for rehabilitation.

Further, because the Corps recognizes that the dike is more stable when the water in Lake Okeechobee is maintained between 12 and 18.5 feet, we are currently studying the possibility of revising the approved lake regulation schedule to balance estuary health, a viable lake ecosystem, water supply, and public safety. The Corps lowered the water levels to a 14-foot elevation in mid-April, well ahead of our goal to reach that level by May 1st. Achieving lower lake levels during the dry season helps to prevent larger and potentially more environmentally damaging releases from the lake during the rainy season and as tropical storms and hurricanes become a threat.

The Corps has been engaged in discussions with the South Florida Water Management District and its independent consultants regarding the Report of Expert Review Panel, Technical Evaluation of Herbert Hoover Dike. The report confirms and validates concerns that the Corps has expressed for some time now, and which we

have already begun to address. The Corps is evaluating the consultant's report and will give every consideration to its recommendations.

I will address the nine specific concerns you identified in your letter:

1. Lower lake level in hurricane season: Lake Okeechobee has been lowered to an acceptable lake elevation for the beginning of the 2006 hurricane season. The Corps will continue to use its current authority to maintain the lake elevation at safe levels throughout the 2007 hurricane season. Further, we are in the process of studying the possibility of revising the approved lake regulation schedule to allow the lake to be managed at a lower average level year-round.
2. Removal of power poles: The Corps has and continues to coordinate with Florida Power and Light and with the South Florida Water Management District to remove and relocate power poles constructed on the dike and within the Herbert Hoover Dike right of way. We share your goal to have all power poles relocated off Herbert Hoover Dike project limits.
3. Daily inspections: The Corps has a rigorous inspection program, the frequency of which (from once every ninety days to daily) corresponds to lake pool elevations. Potentially vulnerable areas are identified through these inspections and additional monitoring takes place, even at lower lake elevations, as necessary.
4. Materials, equipment and personnel for emergency repairs: Just as the Corps prepared for Hurricane Wilma and previous storms, it will continue to provide all necessary materials, equipment and personnel to ensure that any identified vulnerabilities in Herbert Hoover Dike are quickly and efficiently repaired. Supplies are stocked at various locations around the Herbert Hoover Dike, and equipment is prepositioned prior to predicted storms to allow immediate access and ready availability in the event a repair is necessary. The Corps is presently positioning an additional 53,000 tons of rock and stone to augment its existing supplies.
5. Acceleration of repairs and rehabilitation: We are pleased to report that the erosion containment repairs and debris removal that were required as a result of the 2005 hurricanes have been completed. The first phase of the planned Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation project is currently under way. The President's budget for fiscal year 2007 includes \$39.884 million, which the Corps identified as its spending capability for the Dike, to continue this rehabilitation work.
6. Repair design: Repair designs will be reevaluated to ensure optimal protection is provided under congressionally-authorized levels of protection and project requirements.
7. Engineering solutions to strengthen the dike: All engineering solutions are, and will continue to be, developed to optimize dike strengthening allowed under current congressional authorizations.

8. Congressional authorization: I will review the need for new authorization and consult with other members of the Administration to develop new recommendations for authorizations as needed.
9. Data and tools to Florida Department of Emergency Management: Through our proactive dam safety program, the Corps consistently coordinates with state agencies responsible for emergency management preparedness and response. This includes, but is not limited to, regularly scheduled coordination meetings, training and providing data and information to assist in the development and/or updating of emergency evacuation plans and overall preparedness. Finally, inundation maps have been provided to the county emergency management offices, with copies to the Florida State Dam Safety Officer and South Florida Water Management District.

The Corps welcomes independent analysis and constructive feedback, and we take the panel's recommendations and the Governor's requests very seriously. We will review and consider all of these recommendations very carefully, while the Corps continues to implement all of the measures currently under way as part of Herbert Hoover Dike safety enhancement activities. The Corps has identified dam safety, seepage, and stability correction projects as its number one funding priority and will do everything possible to prevent a breach in the Herbert Hoover Dike.

We will continue to work with all parties to protect life, property and the environment in south Florida as we contribute as partners to the management of the state's vital water resources. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Very truly yours,



John Paul Woodley, Jr.
Assistant Secretary of the Army
Civil Works