US Army Corps of Engineers®
Jacksonville District

Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Study

January 2007

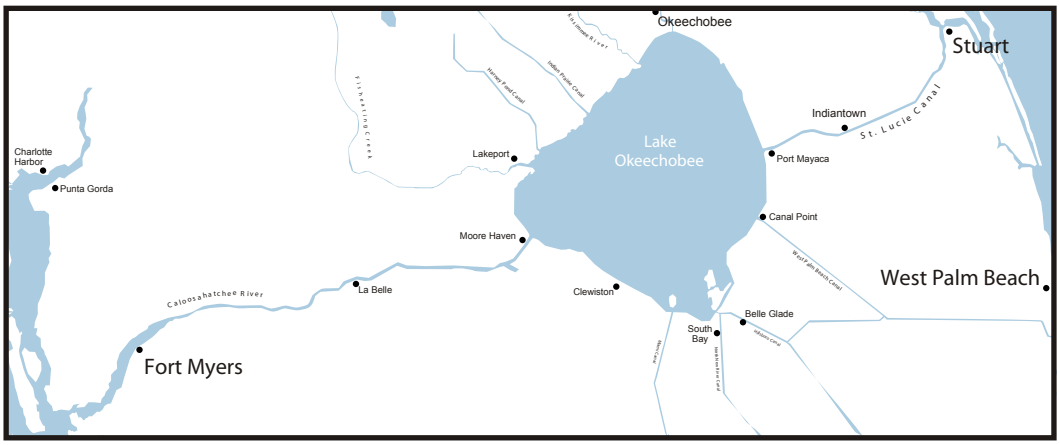
Overview & Update

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District manages Lake Okeechobee in close coordination with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The Corps manages lake levels through water management structures and canals that lead to the Caloosahatchee estuary to the west and the St. Lucie estuary to the east. A series of major canals and structures also release water south from the lake to water conservation areas, Everglades National Park and for water supply. Current Stormwater Treatment Area constraints prevent increased releases south. The overriding concern that leads to periodic releases of freshwater to the estuaries is public safety and the stability of the Herbert Hoover Dike at high lake elevations.

Lake Okeechobee water management actions are guided by a regulation schedule referred to as the Water Supply and Environment (WSE) schedule. Because the WSE is based on actions that would be taken in relatively drier years, and as we have entered a period of higher rainfall, water managers agreed that the regulation schedule can be improved. The resulting Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Study (LORSS) includes a two-part approach for developing improved water management guidelines for Lake Okeechobee:

Short-term: The Jacksonville District initiated a fast-track study for revising the current WSE, based on operational changes only, without the benefit of any new construction. The document to revise the regulation schedule, a draft Water Control Plan (WCP), will be supported by a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). Work on the draft WCP and SEIS began in fall 2005. The revised regulation schedule is planned for implementation for a three-year period beginning July 2007.

Long-term: In mid-2007, when an interim Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule is implemented, water managers will immediately begin to develop a new regulation schedule that will take into account construction of early Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects, including Acceler8 project components. The components will provide many additional options for water storage and management. Acceler8 is a state initiative being implemented by the SFWMD for the purpose of expediting construction of eight CERP project components. A new regulation schedule is currently planned for 2010 implementation. As CERP features come on line, the system operation manual will be modified.



Lake Okeechobee Waterways

In the Final Analysis

The Army Corps of Engineers considers public safety our highest priority. When water levels are high, Lake Okeechobee poses a serious threat to the Herbert Hoover Dike and to its surrounding communities. The Corps must maintain a regulation schedule that does not compromise health and safety.

We want to adopt a plan based on the best engineering, science and water management analysis available, and the best plan for the entire greater Everglades region, including the Kissimmee River Basin, Lake Okeechobee, coastal estuaries, water conservation areas, Everglades National Park and Florida Bay. The study process itself provided us with a significant improvement in our understanding of the total system.

Since the LORSS public meetings in Stuart, Clewiston, Okeechobee and Fort Myers in September 2006, we heard and incorporated public comments to further improve the tentatively selected plan (TSP) and arrive at the best balanced plan for the entire system. The frequency and duration of high discharges to the coastal estuaries was revised to minimize impacts as much as possible. We're also working closely with the SFWMD to analyze additional benefits that their offsite storage sites would eventually provide to the coastal estuaries.

The LORSS interagency team, including engineers and scientists from the SFWMD, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, City of Sanibel and Martin and Lee counties recommended this plan to the Corps as their preferred alternative. In addition to reducing the frequency of high discharges, the plan improves the environmental health of the lake and estuaries, and minimizes impacts to water supply and commercial navigation.

For Further Information

In support of the interim Lake Okeechobee water control plan, the Corps is revising its draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), which outlines in detail the proposed actions, alternative actions and their probable affect on the environment. A second 45-day public review and comment period will begin in April 2007.

For further information:

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