DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P.O. BOX 4970
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32232-0019

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

21 July 2005

Planning Division
Environmental Division

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), Jacksonville District, is beginning preparation of a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) for the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Study (LORSS) of the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Project for Flood Control and other purposes, Lake Okeechobee, Florida. The DSEIS will supplement the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the LORSS prepared in 2000.

Lake Okeechobee is located in south-central Florida, about 60 miles south of Orlando, and 40 miles northwest of Miami, within Okeechobee, Glades, Palm Beach, Martin, and Hendry Counties (Figure 1, location map). The area of interest includes a large watershed north of the lake, the lake itself, and several downstream natural ecosystems (St. Lucie Estuary, Caloosahatchee Estuary, Everglades Protection Area, Lake Worth Lagoon), as well as large agricultural and urban areas that use water from the lake (Figure 2, study area map). The lake receives water from the Kissimmee River and other tributaries located to the north and west, and discharges water primarily to the west, east, and south, via drainage canals that are part of the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Project. The lake has multiple purposes including flood control, navigation, water supply, recreation, and habitat for fish and wildlife.

The current regulation schedule, Water Supply and Environment (WSE), was the preferred alternative in the LORSS FEIS and was approved in July 2000 for the regulation of Lake Okeechobee. The WSE regulation schedule and the Operational Guidelines Decision Trees incorporate tributary hydrologic conditions and climate forecasts into guidelines for managing Lake Okeechobee discharges and water levels. This logic-driven regulation schedule balances the various purposes of flood storage, water supply, fish and wildlife resources, and water delivery to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. The unusual range of weather conditions occurring since implementation of the WSE regulation schedule and the lessons learned as a result, have indicated that modifications to WSE

are needed. The regulation schedule would benefit from greater flexibility in achieving optimal lake levels and optimal discharges to various downstream parts of the C&SF system.

The DSEIS will analyze reasonable alternatives to the WSE regulation schedule, including the WSE, or "no action" alternative, to regulating lake levels and discharges to various parts of the downstream system. This study will consider operational changes to water management structures that discharge water from the lake as well as criteria used to determine those operations. Any operational changes will also consider current and planned water management activities within the Kissimmee River Basin. No new structural features will be considered except those already embedded within the South Florida Water Management Model.

Specific issues anticipated include concern for: municipal, agricultural, and industrial water supply, continued flood protection, protection of the lake's environmental resources and its downstream estuaries, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, endangered and threatened species, and any issues identified through scoping and public involvement.

At this time, we welcome your views, comments and information about environmental and cultural resources, study objectives and important issues within the described study area. Letters of comment or inquiry should be addressed to the letterhead address to the attention of the Planning Division, Environmental Branch, Special Projects Section, and received by this office within sixty (60) days of the date of this letter.

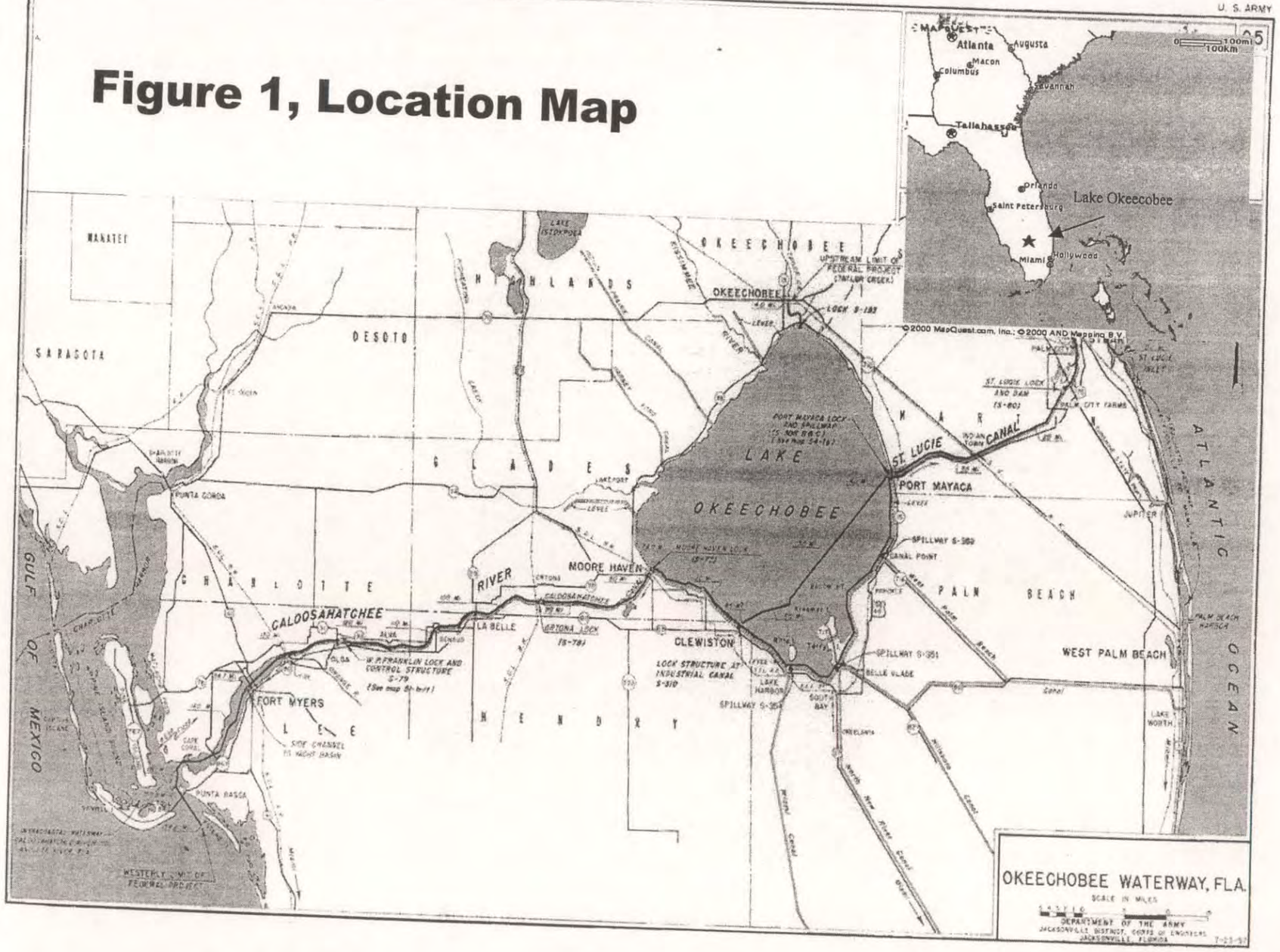
Sincerely,

Marie S. Burns

Stuart J. Appelbaum
Chief, Planning Division

Enclosure

Figure 1, Location Map



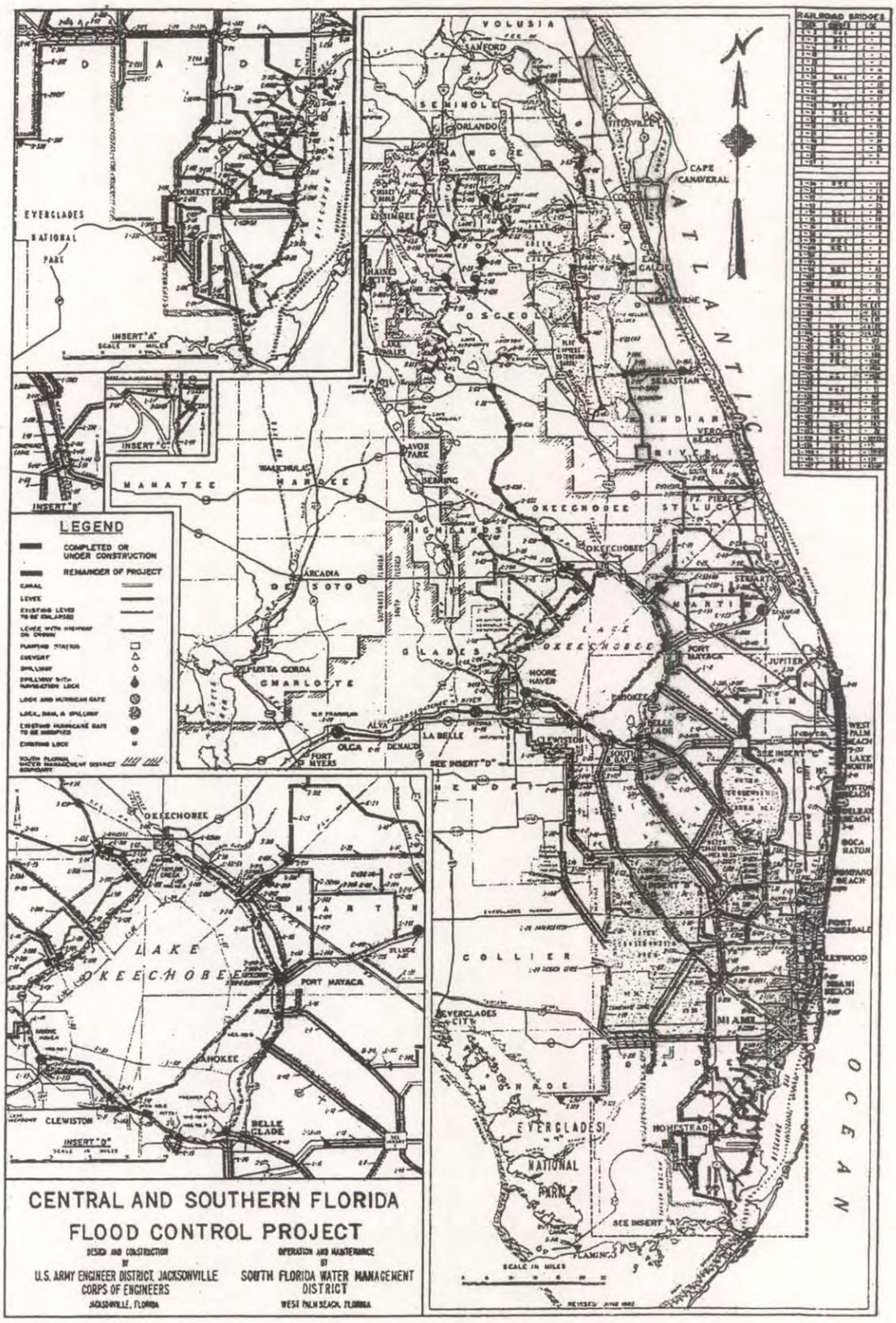


Figure 2, Study Area Map