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Jacksonville District

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Herbert Hoover Dike a priority in national levee safety program

Jacksonville, Fla. – The Herbert Hoover Dike, a 70-year-old, 140-mile-long earthen dam surrounding Lake Okeechobee in south Florida, has been named by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a “Levee of Maintenance Concern.” “This is an important step in our ongoing process to strengthen Herbert Hoover Dike (HHD),” said Col. Paul L. Grosskruger, commander of the Corps’ Jacksonville District. “We are committed to ensuring the safety and peace of mind of the thousands of residents in lakeside communities. The fact that the HHD is receiving attention through our national levee safety program reinforces the high priority that the Corps of Engineers has placed on providing this protection.”

Jacksonville District representatives reaffirmed during a telephone news conference held today the measures currently under way to address Herbert Hoover Dike stability. Today, the dike’s flood protection capability is strongest when Lake Okeechobee water levels do not exceed 17 feet. Lake levels are closely monitored, and a regulation schedule prescribes releases of water from the lake when necessary, to maintain dike stability as well as ecosystem and estuarine health.

As Everglades restoration projects are built and become operational, thus increasing water storage capacity and the ability to move and treat water when needed, the lake’s regulation schedule will change. An interim regulation schedule is currently under development, providing water managers with the ability to manage the lake at safer and healthier levels year-round and enter the hurricane season with a lake level of 12 feet. The interim schedule is anticipated for implementation this summer.



Because the dike is an earthen structure, made of porous materials like sand, rock, and muck dredged from the lake bottom, it does allow some water to seep through. This is a normal, expected condition called seepage. However, when the seeping water also carries particles of the materials from the structure, referred to as piping or internal erosion, the structure is weakened and becomes vulnerable, particularly when the water levels in the lake are high. At a lake level of 21 feet, we know the dike would likely fail, possibly in multiple locations.

Our ongoing inspection, maintenance and repair program gives us the capability to address piping issues swiftly and effectively. However, in order to ensure a much stronger and more stable Herbert Hoover Dike, Jacksonville District has also implemented a major rehabilitation project, approved in 2000, to strengthen the dike. This rehabilitation project includes filling the toe ditch on the outside slope of the dike and the construction of a non-porous cutoff wall inside the current walls of the dike. Work began on the first of eight sections of the dike in December 2005 but was temporarily halted, to allow time for a reevaluation of the design, to apply lessons learned following Hurricane Katrina's devastation of the hurricane protection levees in New Orleans, and to ensure the highest levels of stability for Herbert Hoover Dike.

Jacksonville District continues to work closely with local officials of lakeside communities, providing them with inundation maps and other information useful in their emergency planning. "While all risk cannot be eliminated totally," said Grosskruger, "knowing the condition of the levee and the risk associated with living or working behind it is a critical factor. Safety, home and security are among the most basic human needs; that's why we have always been – and will continue to be – unrelenting in our efforts to ensure Herbert Hoover Dike's stability for many, many more years and to keep the community informed every step of the way."

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