

Letter to the Editor

From the Stuart News October 17, 2005

Editor:

These comments are on the behalf of the newly formed Rivers Coalition Defense Fund: Governor Bush's Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery plan takes good but small steps in the right direction, though it will do virtually nothing to stop the ruinous lake discharges to the St. Lucie Estuary for at least several years at best.

The projects announced by the governor have basically been planned and known about for years and pushed by the Rivers Coalition and others. Even so, we commend Gov. Bush, Senator Ken Pruitt and our state delegation for accelerating construction and funding. Now, we all have to see that the projects are completed as quickly as possible.

By far the most important shorter-run goal is to manage Lake Okeechobee at a much lower average level. The state and Army Corps of Engineers should complete a new water-level schedule soon. We're told, however, that an actual implementation of a new schedule would be years and months away. That's not good enough.

Additionally, the timeframes for the completion of these projects are unacceptably too long, and the funding will be a fight every year.

Everyone should realize that Lake Okeechobee is in the worst condition of its entire history. Plant and wildlife systems are destroyed and a complete collapse like what happened at Lake Apopka is imminent.

It's the same with the St. Lucie River Estuary. Now, for the first time ever, our children and grand-children are advised not to make contact with the water. Who could have imagined this for one of North America's most diverse and beautiful rivers.

Plainly, it is shameful.

The fundamental flaw in all the water mismanagement is the protection of the Everglades Agricultural Area, which is drained annually at public expense for private sugar farming while Lake Okeechobee is dying and the estuaries suffer massive discharges of polluted water. More of the lake's watershed must be stored inland, in parts of the EAA if possible, and in other areas that include planned reservoirs. Sadly, all the remedies on the table are just not enough to save the St. Lucie.

The days of pandering to special interest groups, a tiny minority, at the expense of the citizens of this region, the majority, must come to an end!

The degradation of the lake and estuaries leaves us no option but to seek relief by court order as we explore possibilities for one or more lawsuits.

If not us, who? And if not now, when?

Leon Abood, President

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