

Martin County Projects Update
Rivers Coalition Meeting
October 26, 2017 at 11 a.m., City of Stuart Commission Chambers
(Update provided by Deborah Drum, Manager, Ecosystem Restoration & Management Division)

LAKE OKEECHOBEE CONDITIONS

- This year's wet season (from beginning of June to present) has included 48.35 inches of rain which is 146% of average. For just the month of October so far, there has been 4.16 inches, which coincidentally is also 146% of average.
- Lake Okeechobee level is currently at 16.95 feet. 1 year ago the Lake was at 15.66 feet (1.29 feet lower). The Lake seems to have reached its peak for the wet season at around 17.20 feet, and is now declining with releases.
- There is approximately 6300 cfs entering the Lake from the Kissimmee Basin. This volume has reduced significantly since the weeks after Hurricane Irma. The total outflows from the Lake are 9600 cfs, so the Lake continues to lower.
- Typically, the ACOE likes to have the Lake levels fluctuate between 12.5 feet (at the beginning of the wet season ~June 1st) and 15.5 feet (at the beginning of the dry season ~November 1st).
- The following is subject to change: The ACOE has reported that current release rates will continue until at least next Friday. Then, starting next Friday they are looking to start a ramp down of releases. The ramp down releases will probably continue until the ACOE can get a projection of being below 14' on the Lake by May 1, 2018 (to ready for the wet season).
- The issue of Lake evapotranspiration and regular rainfall patterns all need to be factored in to how this plays out.
- Extremely turbid water from Lake Okeechobee is being released, which can be seen throughout the estuary out through the inlet to the ocean. Based on both ORCA and Harbor Branch real-time data, this morning turbidity in the South Fork were 109-144 NTU; and in the Middle Estuary turbidity was 61 NTU.
- Temperatures at the Roosevelt Bridge dropped in the last day from around 81 degrees Fahrenheit down to 75 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Salinities are zero, and have been since after the hurricane in early September, with some exceptions of increased salinities due to king tides and storm surge, which had a double effect of increasing salinities with a push of water and also created a situation with the ACOE had to reduce or cease discharges to the estuary due to operational constraints.
- Last month, we reported losses by the commercial fisheries due to freshwater releases from Lake Okeechobee. It was reported that inshore fishing collapsed, kingfish season was forced to end early and upcoming Spanish mackerel season impacted by freshwater. We would expect those losses to continue until conditions improve in the estuary.

PROJECT UPDATE

- All American Ditch Stormwater Quality Retrofit Project will reach an important milestone of Substantial Completion, by the end of this month. The Contractor, Felix Associates of Florida, is finalizing the landscape plantings, sod and fencing. This \$5.4 million project will clean water from a 268-acre watershed that previously discharged, untreated, to the St. Lucie Estuary. The All American Ditch watershed was known to be one of the highest pollutant loading tributaries of the St. Lucie Estuary. The project consisted of installing more than a mile of storm pipe and control structures to capture and convey stormwater runoff to a 3.9-acre lake and a 5.6-acre Stormwater Treatment Area for water quality treatment prior to discharging to the South Fork of the St. Lucie River. The project will also provide improved flood protection for the St. Lucie Shores neighborhood that has historically experienced roadway and structural flooding. The project was funded by multiple grants including St. Lucie Issues Team, EPA/FDEP Section 319, FDEP TMDL Water Quality Restoration, State Legislative Appropriates, all totaling \$3.0 million dollars, 55.5% of the total project cost.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

- The BOCC did adopt their state legislative priorities for 2018. They were adopted at the October 10, 2017 meeting. Committee meetings are in full swing in Tallahassee.