

Resolution No. 21-01

Resolution of the Palm Beach County League of Cities on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Development of a New Lake Okeechobee Operational Schedule, Lake Okeechobee System Operation Manual (LOSOM)

WHEREAS, Lake Okeechobee is the liquid heart of an integrated regional water management system and is essential and interconnected to communities, businesses, public water supply utilities and ecosystems throughout Palm Beach County; and,

WHEREAS, Lake Okeechobee is an integral component of the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Project and is critical to meeting the water supply needs of Palm Beach County and all South Florida; and,

WHEREAS, Lake Okeechobee is essential to protecting the region's water supply infrastructure from saltwater intrusion by providing a source of freshwater to prevent the migration of saltwater into coastal wellfields; and,

WHEREAS, Lake Okeechobee's authorized project purposes include flood control, water supply, water storage, navigation, and salinity control; and,

WHEREAS, rehabilitation activities on Lake Okeechobee's Herbert Hoover Dike by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) began in the early 2000s and became a comprehensive rehabilitation after its dam safety action classification rating of "1" occurred in 2006; the repairs are expected to be completed by 2022; and,

WHEREAS, the current Lake Okeechobee Rehabilitation Schedule, "LORS 2008," was implemented as an interim schedule, which lowered the Lake and reduced its storage to reduce the risk of the dike's failure while repairs were ongoing; and,

WHEREAS, the communities in Palm Beach County rely on Lake Okeechobee for their water supply, which is a critical part of the communities' socioeconomic success and necessary to sustain our communities' current and future growth; and,

WHEREAS, Palm Beach County residents have waited years for Herbert Hoover Dike restoration and will need adequate time to review the Corps' proposed Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) alternatives to provide input toward reaching a well-supported schedule that serves the lake's purposes and has broad-based support; and,

WHEREAS, the Palm Beach County League of Cities League) is composed of 39 cities and our communities include diverse residents from all economic backgrounds, needs and resources; and,

WHEREAS, the League is focused on the equitable treatment of all persons and promoting environmental justice throughout our communities; and,

WHEREAS, the League wishes to provide its input in the critical decision-making process being undertaken by the Corps in the development of LOSOM, because the Lake impacts the quality of life and livelihood of the residents of our communities.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PALM BEACH COUNTY LEAGUE OF CITIES that the League supports the following as it relates to the new Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) being developed by the Corps in partnership with the State of Florida:

1. A science-based evaluation that is transparent, provides for fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people and meets all congressionally authorized purposes of Lake Okeechobee operations; and
2. The use of modeling that accurately and appropriately allows the Corps and stakeholders to evaluate the impact of Lake operations on water supply availability, particularly in Palm Beach County; and
3. Performance measures that appropriately and accurately characterize impacts to our communities as it related to our water supply and our economy, including ensuring there are not disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations; and
4. The selection of a Lake schedule that ensures navigation, water storage and water supplies for our communities are resilient and return our supply to the performance that existed pre-LORS 2008; and
5. The implementation of water storage and water quality treatment projects in Lake Okeechobee tributary basins north of the Lake, the Lake, and other areas; and
6. Lake Okeechobee operations that reduce water use restrictions and cutbacks on public water utilities, agricultural uses, and other existing water uses as compared to those which occur under LORS 2008; and
7. Lake Okeechobee operations that incrementally improve ecologic performance as made possible by restoration infrastructure and appropriately related to Lake Okeechobee operations; and
8. A partnership with the League and its members that allows for involvement in the planning and implantation of the plan; and
9. Ensuring compliance with President Biden's Executive Order 14008 dated January 27, 2021, which provides: "Agencies shall make achieving environmental justice part of their missions by developing programs, policies, and activities to address the disproportionately high and adverse human health, environmental, climate-related and other cumulative impacts on disadvantaged communities, as well as the accompanying economic challenges of such impacts."

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the League opposes the following as related to the Lake Okeechobee LOSOM, schedule:

1. Lowering Lake Okeechobee to levels not supported by sound science which would induce drought conditions, impact the ability to deliver water to communities, and result in economic harm to our communities; and
2. Using flexibility to operate the Lake outside of an adopted, defined Lake schedule and creating uncertainty in water storage and future water supplies; and
3. Prioritizing goals and objectives that are not part of the Lake's congressionally authorized purposes; and
4. Failing to provide stakeholders the adequate time needed to analyze the alternatives; and
5. Releasing excessive water to the Lake Worth Lagoon and failing to assure water for aquifer recharge and natural resources such as Grassy Waters and the Wild and Scenic Loxahatchee River; and
6. Conversely, Lake Okeechobee operations that result in exposure of the region's water supply infrastructure to saltwater intrusion from restricting the appropriate amounts of freshwater to prevent the migration of saltwater into coastal wellfields; and
7. Lake Okeechobee operations that result in restrictions on recreational and commercial fishing and navigation, which would impact small businesses, such as marinas, fishing guide services, and the hospitality industry.

THIS RESOLUTION SHALL BECOME EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY UPON ITS ADOPTION.

PASSED AND ADOPTED this 27th day of October 2021.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
THE PALM BEACH COUNTY
LEAGUE OF CITIES, INC.



Kimberly Glas-Castro, President

(SEAL)

ATTEST:



Leondrae Camel, Secretary/Treasurer