

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
FOREIGN RELATIONS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

July 8, 2018

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As you know, earlier this week the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released its “Long Term Disaster Recovery Investment Plan” to fund critical flood protection projects in states impacted by the 2017 hurricanes and other disasters as mandated by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. Of significant interest to Florida was more than \$514 million in funding to expedite the completion of the Herbert Hoover Dike Rehabilitation that I have long championed. These funds will be instrumental to provide Floridians living along the edge of Lake Okeechobee the security and peace of mind to know that their loved ones, homes, and businesses are no longer threatened by the high potential for the dike’s catastrophic failure. However, even as the small cities and towns in the Herbert Hoover Dike’s shadow now have reason for hope, coastal communities on the St. Lucie River, Indian River Lagoon, and the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary face another nightmarish summer of poor water quality and algae stoked by the Lake Okeechobee discharges.

For the third time in five years, harmful algal blooms in Lake Okeechobee, coupled with the water management practices of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, serve as a major cause for concern for downstream residents. While the completed rehabilitation of the dike could potentially allow the Corps to adjust the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS) that determines when and how discharges are conducted, these communities are desperate for immediate relief. Along with “pulsing” submaximal discharge flows, loosening the Corps’ rigid implementation of the current LORS is one possible measure that could improve downstream conditions and quickly signal to residents that their federal government is responsive to their needs and concerns. The Corps should work closely with the State of Florida to balance the risks of destructive discharges on downstream communities with the Corps’ other responsibilities and authorities in managing Lake Okeechobee water levels.

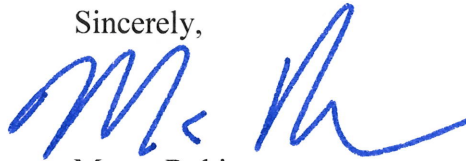
I respectfully urge you to use your authority to order the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to immediately include the impacts of harmful algal blooms and poor water quality on downstream communities and ecosystems as a major factor for consideration when planning and conducting Lake Okeechobee discharges. This should include an emergency re-evaluation of the flows currently entering the Caloosahatchee River and the reconsideration of the decision to once again begin discharging flows to the St. Lucie River tomorrow.

I also request that you increase the federal investment for Everglades restoration infrastructure through your fiscal year (FY) 2020 budget request by at least twice the amount

provided in FY19. These overdue federal funds can accelerate design and construction of the Central Everglades Planning Project and the Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoir to clean and divert discharges through the Everglades and Florida Bay instead. Increased funding could also advance important water storage and treatment features of the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) West Basin Storage Reservoir, Indian River Lagoon-South, and Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration projects that can further enhance coastal water quality for the benefit of coastal communities by reducing the combined impacts of Lake Okeechobee discharges, stormwater and nutrient runoff, and septic tank leaks.

Perhaps more than any of your predecessors in the Oval Office, you personally understand the economic importance of maintaining Florida's alluring coastal resources. Together, these suggested actions would immediately demonstrate a renewed commitment by the federal government to its responsibilities and to its citizenry in Florida. I stand ready to assist you in addressing this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator