

MEMORANDUM

TO: Laureen Borocharner, Chief, Engineering Division (USACE)
FROM: John Mitnik, Chief District Engineer (SFWMD)
DATE: March 20, 2025
SUBJECT: System Operational Position Statement March 18, 2025 to March 24, 2025

This Position Statement is to provide operational input for the one-week period from March 18, 25, 2025 to March 24, 2025 based on system conditions and data observed during the previous Monday to Sunday 7-day period.

Current climate conditions: District March rainfall to date is much below normal (29% of normal). The rainfall forecast (issued March 19) calls for below to much below normal rainfall for the coming 7-day period and below normal for the following period.

Climate and weather forecasts: The most recent CPC precipitation outlook for Mar 2025 is equal chances of below, normal and above normal rainfall (EC) for south Florida. La Nina conditions (drier) are present, ENSO-neutral is favored to develop in April and persist through Northern Hemisphere summer. The 3-month window of Mar 2025 – May 2025 shows slightly increased chances (33-40%) of below normal rainfall for the entire District. The 3-month window of Apr 2025 – Jun 2025 shows outlooks for equal chances of below, normal and above normal rainfall (EC) for south Florida. All the 3-month windows from May 2025 – Jul 2025 to Dec 2025 – Feb 2026 indicate slightly increased chances (33-40%) of above normal rainfall for south Florida. The 3-month windows of Jan 2026 – Mar 2026 to Mar 2026 – May 2026 signal equal chances of below, normal and above normal rainfall (EC) for south Florida.

Hydrologic and tropical outlooks: Current climatological conditions are Normal. Current hydrological conditions are Normal. Based on the conditions at the start of the month the stage is projected to stay in Zone D for the next 2 months.

Water-supply conditions: The Lake Okeechobee seasonal net inflow outlook is Dry at Moderate risk for water supply. The multi-seasonal net inflow outlook is Normal at Moderate risk for water supply.

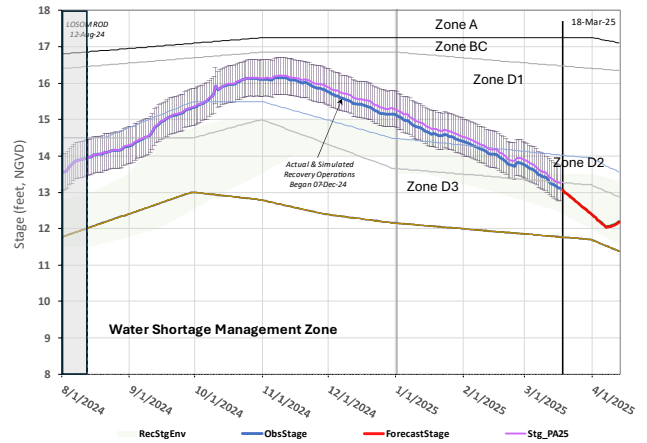
Estuary conditions: For the 7-day period, March 10 to March 16, 2025, total inflow to the Caloosahatchee Estuary averaged approximately 2,100 cfs with about 1,550 cfs coming from Lake Okeechobee through S-77. Salinities in the upper estuary were within the optimal range (0-10) for tape grass. Salinities were in the optimal range (10-25) for adult eastern oysters at Cape Coral, and in the upper stressed range (>25) at Sanibel and Shell Point. Total discharge to the St. Lucie Estuary was about 1,400 cfs with about 700 cfs coming from Lake Okeechobee, about 550 cfs coming from C-44 Basin, no flow coming from C-23 and C-24 Basin, and about 150 cfs coming from Tidal Basin. The average salinity in the middle estuary was within the optimum (10-25) for adult eastern oysters.

Lake Okeechobee stage and ecological conditions:

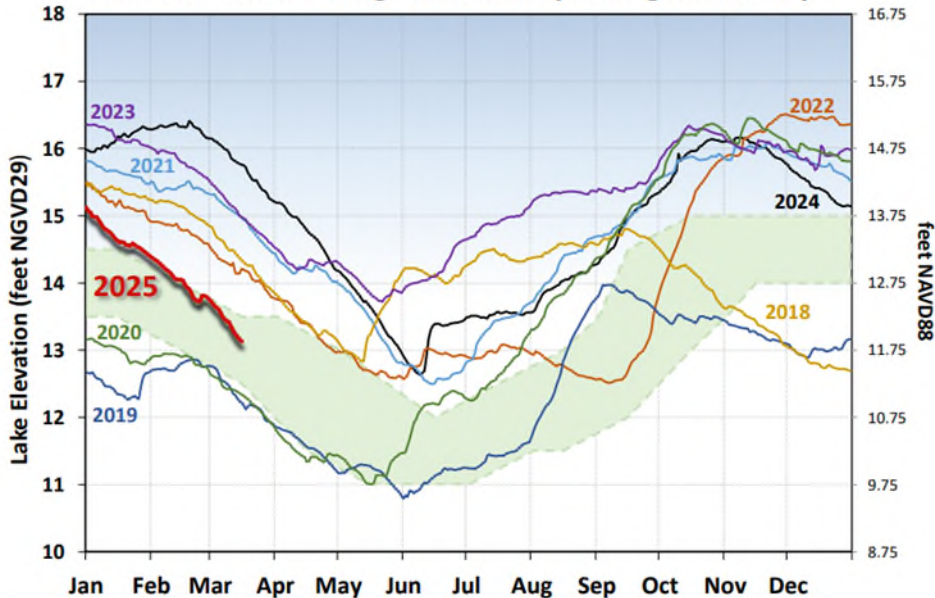
On March 9 the daily average Lake Okeechobee stage was 11.82 feet NAVD88 (13.13 feet NGVD29), which placed it within the lower third of Zone D (Zone D3 of the PA25 simulation) of the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM). Lake stage decreased by 0.30 feet over the preceding 7-day period. The current climate outlook is for La Niña and ENSO-neutral is favored to develop in April. The LOSOM criteria to implement Recovery Operations to lower the lake level into Lake Okeechobee’s Recovery Envelope has been triggered. The District has been monitoring conditions in the estuaries in anticipation of the onset of spawning season. As such, the District recommends that USACE should continue non-harmful Recovery Operations for Lake Okeechobee as described in LOSOM and implement a reduction in flows to the estuaries. It is recommended that flow targets for the Caloosahatchee Estuary should be 1,400 cfs, flow targets for the St. Lucie Estuary should be stepped down to 0 cfs over the next 1-2 operational periods, and a flow target for the Lake Worth Lagoon should be 0 cfs. The USACE should continue to track Red Tide and Blue Green Algae conditions, and should conditions change during this operational period, the USACE should look to reassess releases as needed. The USACE typically implements the releases to the estuaries over a 7-day period starting on Saturday and ending on Friday.

Forecast Modeling Based on PA25 Simulation

Lake Okeechobee Hindcast & Forecasts* [S79/S80: 2100/1200]



Lake Okeechobee Stage vs Recovery Ecological Envelope



The current and seven prior years’ annual stage hydrographs for Lake Okeechobee in comparison to the recovery envelope (light green). A shift from the normal ecological envelope to the recovery envelope occurred because the 30-day minimum lake stage (elevations exposed for at least 30 days, nonconsecutively) in the June 1 – July 31, 2023, window was >11.75 feet NAVD88 (13 feet NGVD29).

Navigation and recreation conditions: Currently, there are no planned deviation or declared water shortage impacting navigation or lockages.

STOF water supply conditions: Current Lake Okeechobee stage is sufficiently high that water supply deliveries to the Seminole Tribe of Florida (STOF) Brighton Reservation, if needed, will not be impacted. When Lake Okeechobee stage recedes below 8.75 feet NAVD88 (10 feet NGVD29) and 6.75 feet NAVD88 (8 feet NGVD29), water supply delivery is not achievable via Pump Station G-207 on the Harney Pond Canal and Pump Station G-208 on the Indian Prairie Canal, respectively, as the respective canals become disconnected from Lake Okeechobee.

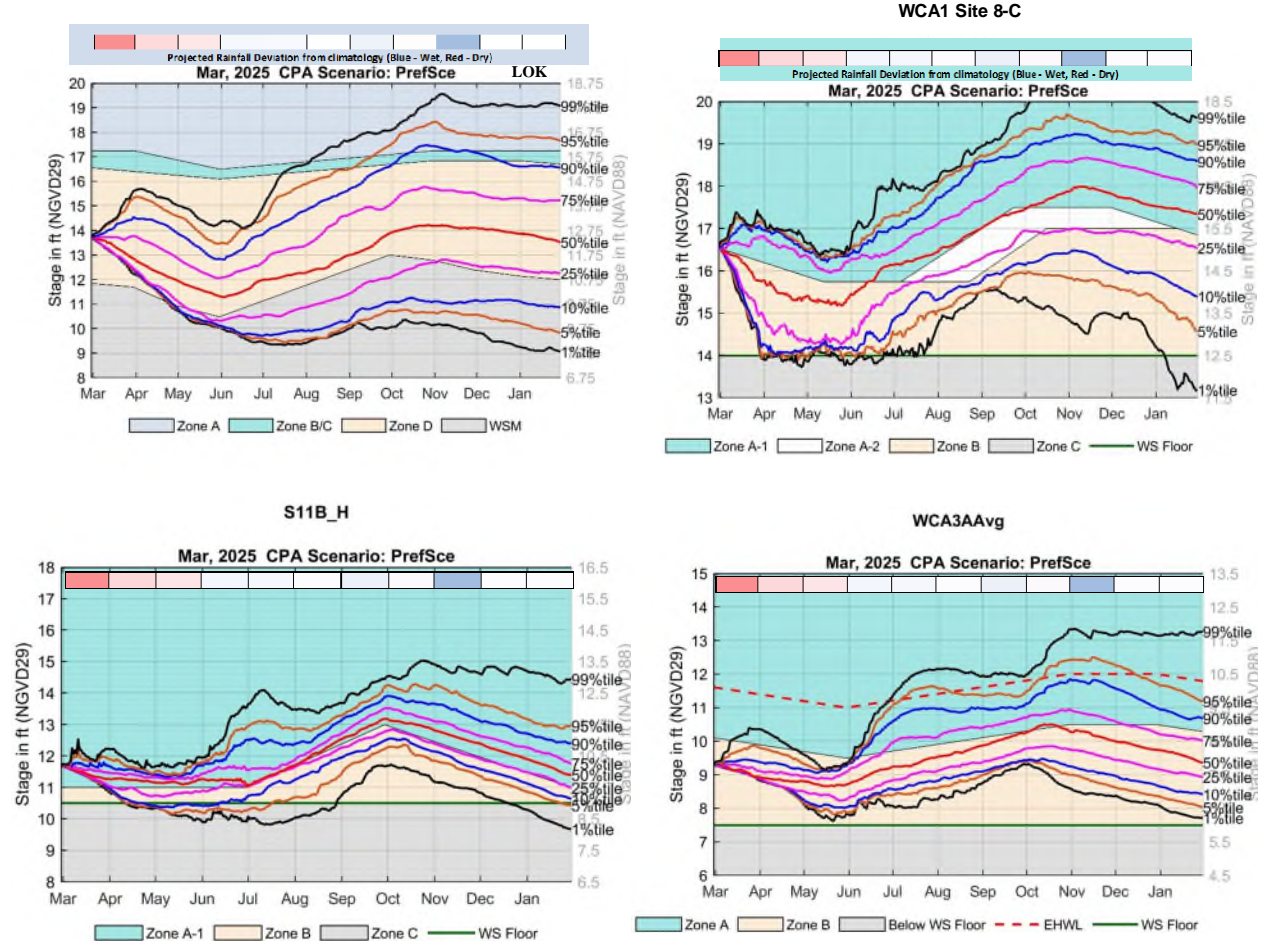
Algal Bloom conditions: The FWRI reported on March 14, 2025, that *Karenia brevis*, the Florida red tide dinoflagellate, was not observed at bloom concentrations in any samples collected within the District region over the past week. In the most recent non-obscured satellite image from March 15, 2025, NOAA's Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring System suggests low bloom activity along the western nearshore region of Lake Okeechobee.

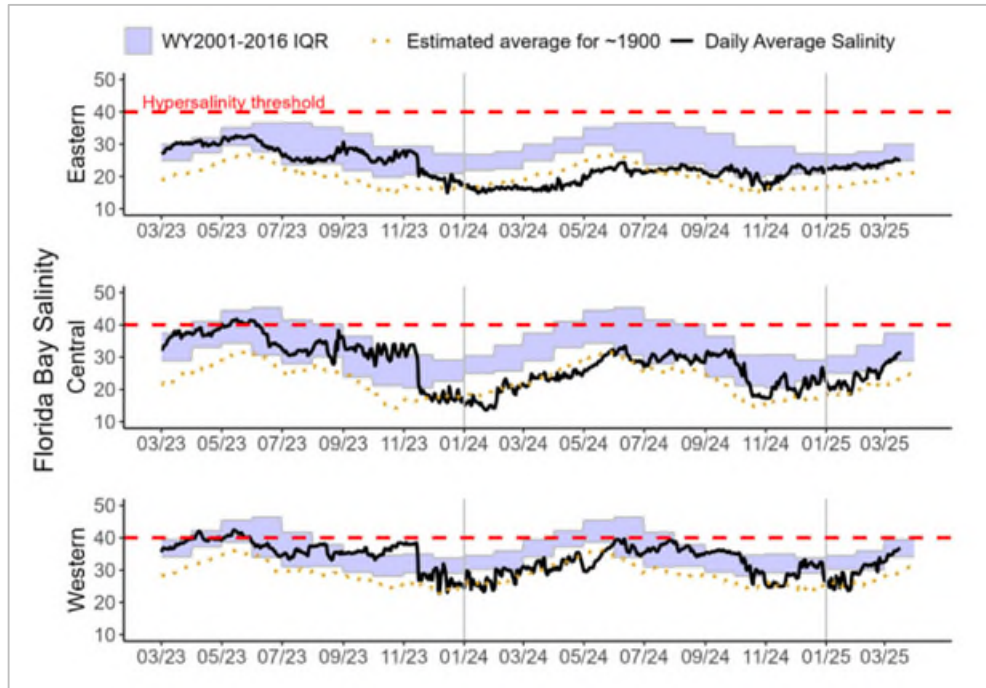
STA conditions: In STA-1E, Central Flow-way is offline for construction activities. An operational restriction is in place in the Western Flow-way for post-construction vegetation grow-in. Online treatment cells are near target stage. In STA-1W, an operational restriction is in place in the Northern Flow-way for vegetation management activities. Treatment cells are near target stage. Vegetation in the Western and Eastern flow-ways is highly stressed. The 365-day PLRs for the Eastern, Western, and Northern Flow-ways are high (≥ 1.0 g/m²/yr). STA-2 Flow-way 3 is offline for a SAV recovery drawdown. Operational restrictions are in place in Flow-ways 2 and 4 for vegetation management activities. Online treatment cells are near target stage. Vegetation in Flow-ways 2 is stressed, and in 5 is highly stressed. The 365-day PLRs for flow-ways 2 are high (≥ 1.0 g/m²/yr). In STA-3/4, Eastern Flow-way is under limitations for post-drawdown vegetation grow-in. Treatment cells are near or above target stage, vegetation in the Central flow-ways is highly stressed, and the 365-day PLRs for the Central and Western Flow-ways are high (≥ 1.0 g/m²/yr). For the current operational period, USACE is requesting maximum practicable regulatory releases be sent south from Lake Okeechobee towards the WCAs. The District will continue to work with the USACE to manage Lake Okeechobee levels in an effort to curtail harmful discharges over this year. To help with this objective the District will move as much water south through the Stormwater Treatment Areas as possible under the current permits, recognizing the existing conditions in the STAs at the conclusion of the wet season, and as regional conditions allow.

WCA conditions: On March 16 the daily average stage in WCA-1 was at 14.72 feet NAVD88 (16.31 feet NGVD29), in Zone B and 0.05 feet below regulation schedule. The daily average stage in WCA-2A was at 9.74 feet NAVD88 (11.34 feet NGVD29), in Zone A and 0.34 feet above regulation schedule. The daily average stage in WCA-3A was at 7.57 feet NAVD88 (9.09 feet NGVD29), in Zone B and 0.92 feet below regulation schedule. Over the 7-day period, March 10 to March 16, 2025, a total of 8,800 acre-feet were sent from Lake Okeechobee south to STA3/4. About 4,100 acre-feet of Lake regulatory releases reached the Lake Worth Lagoon through the C-51 canal and passed to the Intracoastal Canal through S-155 and S-41 during this period.

ENP conditions: Releases from WCA-3A to the ENP continue through the S-12C/D and S333 structures. Hydrologic connectivity within the western sloughs of ENP is now absent in the west, very diminished in the east, and remains favorable to flows south in Shark River Slough. WCA-3A North continues to dry out and water level is now at the soil surface across most of that sub-basin except in the southeast corner near the Alley North colony. The ponded conditions in southern WCA3A remain absent and that region is now well below average stage. Water level in most of the Big Cypress Basin is now below soil surface. Stages decreased in Taylor Slough last week and remain above the recent average. Salinity increased on average in Florida Bay compared to last week and is now above the estimated average for 1900 and at the WY2001-2016 Interquartile Range (IQR) 25th percentile in the eastern region, and within the IQR in the central and western regions. The Tamiami Trail Flow Formula (TTFF) recommends 654 cfs of daily target releases from WCA-3A to ENP. The District recommends continuing with the current operations for the releases from WCA-3A in accordance with the Combined Operating Plan.

March 2025 Conditional Position Analysis (CPA) results for Lake Okeechobee, WCA-1, WCA-2A and WCA-3A under LOSOM Recovery Operations.





Eastern (top panel), Central (middle panel) and Western (bottom panel) Florida Bay daily average salinities with WY2001-2016 interquartile (25-75 percentile) ranges (IQR) and estimated historical daily average salinities. The hypersalinity threshold indicates the level at which salinities start to become harmful to seagrass.