

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jason Engle, Chief, Engineering Division (USACE)
FROM: John Mitnik, Chief District Engineer (SFWMD)
DATE: September 18, 2025
SUBJECT: System Operational Position Statement September 16, 2025 to September 22, 2025

This Position Statement is to provide operational input for the one-week period from September 16, 2025 to September 22, 2025 based on system conditions and data observed during the previous Monday to Sunday 7-day period.

Current climate conditions: District September rainfall to date is above normal (121% normal). The rainfall forecast (issued September 17) calls for near normal rainfall for the coming 7-day period and near to above normal for the following period.

Climate and weather forecasts: The most recent CPC precipitation outlook for Sep 2025 is substantial increased chance (50-60%) in the likelihood of above normal rainfall for South Florida. ENSO-Neutral is most likely through the late Northern Hemisphere summer 2025. Thereafter, a brief period of La Niña conditions is favored in the fall and early winter 2025-26 before reverting to ENSO-neutral. The 3-month window of Sep 2025 – Nov 2025 indicates an increased chance (40-50%) in the likelihood of above normal rainfall for the entire District. The transition into the 2025 – 2026 Dry Season goes through the 3-month window of Oct 2025 – Dec 2025 showing equal chances of below, normal and above normal rainfall (EC) for the entire District. The outlooks for the 3-month windows from Nov 2025 – Jan 2026 to Feb 2026 – Apr 2026 indicate increased chances (40-50%) of below normal rainfall for the entire District. The 3-month windows Mar 2026 – May 2026 shows equal chances of below, normal and above normal rainfall (EC) for the entire District. The transition into the 2026 wet season shows slightly increased chances (30-40%) of above normal rainfall for the state of Florida.

Hydrologic and tropical outlooks: Current climatological conditions are Normal. Current hydrological conditions are Normal. The lake stage is projected to remain in Zone D3 for the next 2 months.

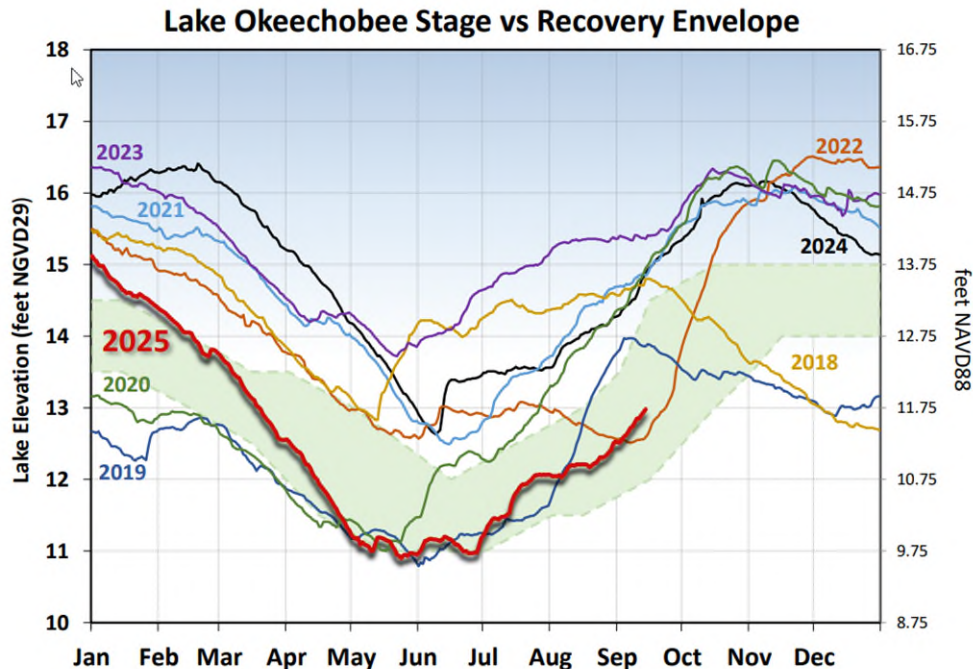
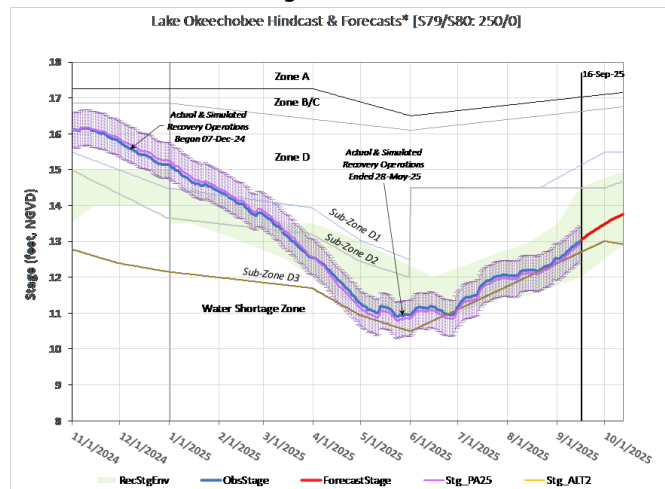
Water-supply conditions: The Lake Okeechobee seasonal net inflow outlook is Normal to Extremely Wet and at Low risk for water supply. The multi-seasonal net inflow outlook is Normal and at Moderate risk for water supply.

Estuary conditions: For the 7-day period, September 8 to 14, 2025, total inflow to the Caloosahatchee Estuary averaged approximately 7,400 cfs with no flow coming from Lake Okeechobee through S-77. The mean salinities were in the optimal range (0-10) for tape grass in the upper estuary. Salinities were in the optimal range (10-25) for adult eastern oysters at Shell Point and in the upper stressed range (>25) at Sanibel, and in the lower stressed range (5-10) at Cape Coral. Total discharge to the St. Lucie Estuary was about 1,750 cfs with no flow coming from Lake Okeechobee and the C-44 Basin, about 200 cfs coming from the C-23 Basin, about 600 cfs coming from the C-24 Basin, about 200 cfs coming from Ten Mile Creek, and about 800 cfs coming from the Tidal Basin. The average salinity in the middle estuary was within the optimal range (10-25) for adult eastern oysters.

Lake Okeechobee stage and ecological conditions:

On September 14 the daily average Lake Okeechobee stage was 11.69 feet NAVD88 (13.00 feet NGVD29), which placed it within the lower portion of Zone D (Zone D3 of the PA25 simulation) of the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM). Lake stage increased by 0.27 feet over the preceding 7-day period. ENSO-neutral conditions are present and are likely during the summer. The District will continue to monitor conditions in the estuaries, as well as the systemwide conditions, as the wet season progresses. With the initiation of the wet season, Normal Lake Operations have resumed pursuant to the considerations in LOSOM as informed by PA25. To maintain favorable salinity levels in the estuaries and continue to conserve water, it is recommended that flow targets for the Caloosahatchee Estuary should rely on rainy season basin flows which are expected to occur over the next week to ensure the delivery of the Minimum Flow and Level, but use Lake Okeechobee flows from S-77 to ensure S-79 flows remain above a targeted steady release of 250 cfs; flow targets for the St. Lucie Estuary and Lake Worth Lagoon should remain at 0 cfs consistent with Normal Operations within Zone D. The District will continue to monitor salinity conditions in the estuaries and water supply conditions within the Lake Okeechobee Service Area to assess whether further reductions are warranted in future operational recommendations. 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



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.

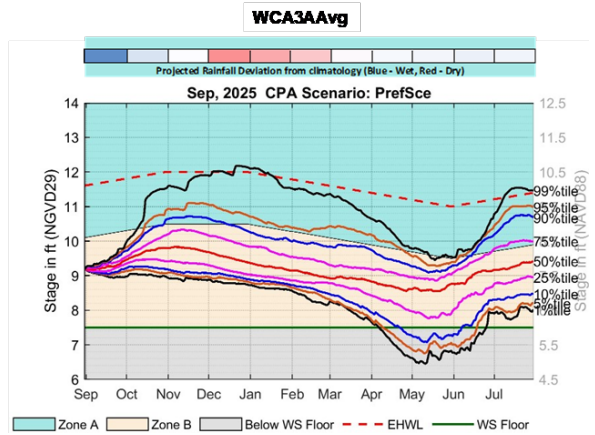
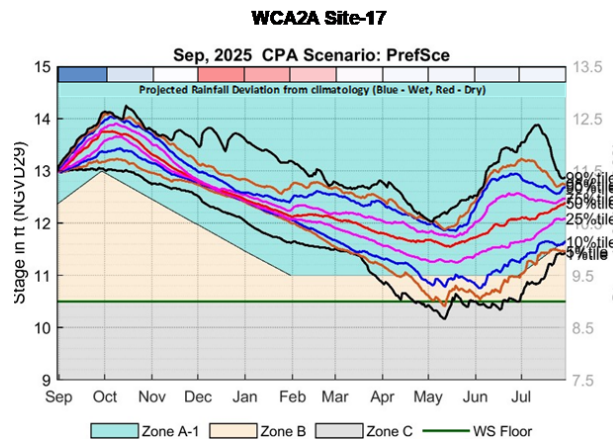
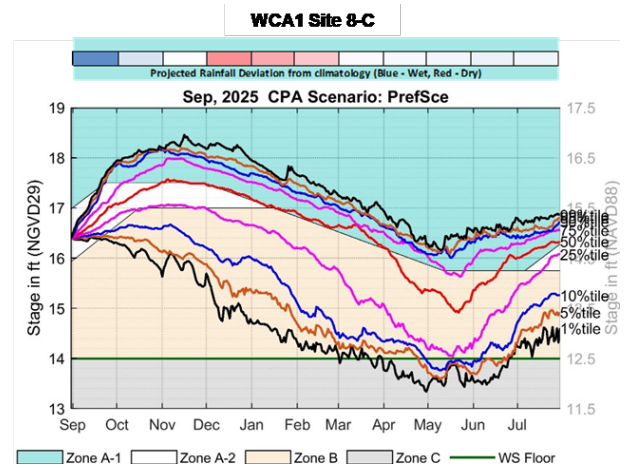
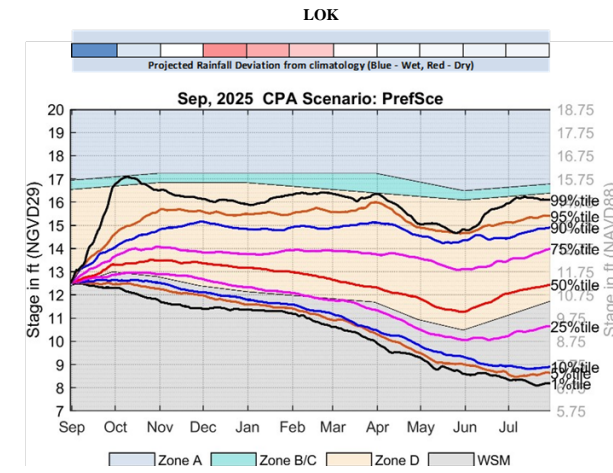
Algal Bloom conditions: The Fish and Wildlife Research Institute reported on September 12, 2025, that *Karenia brevis*, the Florida red tide dinoflagellate, was not observed at bloom concentrations in any samples collected within the District region. In the most recent non-observed satellite image from September 14, 2025, NOAA's Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring System suggests moderate cyanobacteria potential along most of the nearshore areas of the lake.

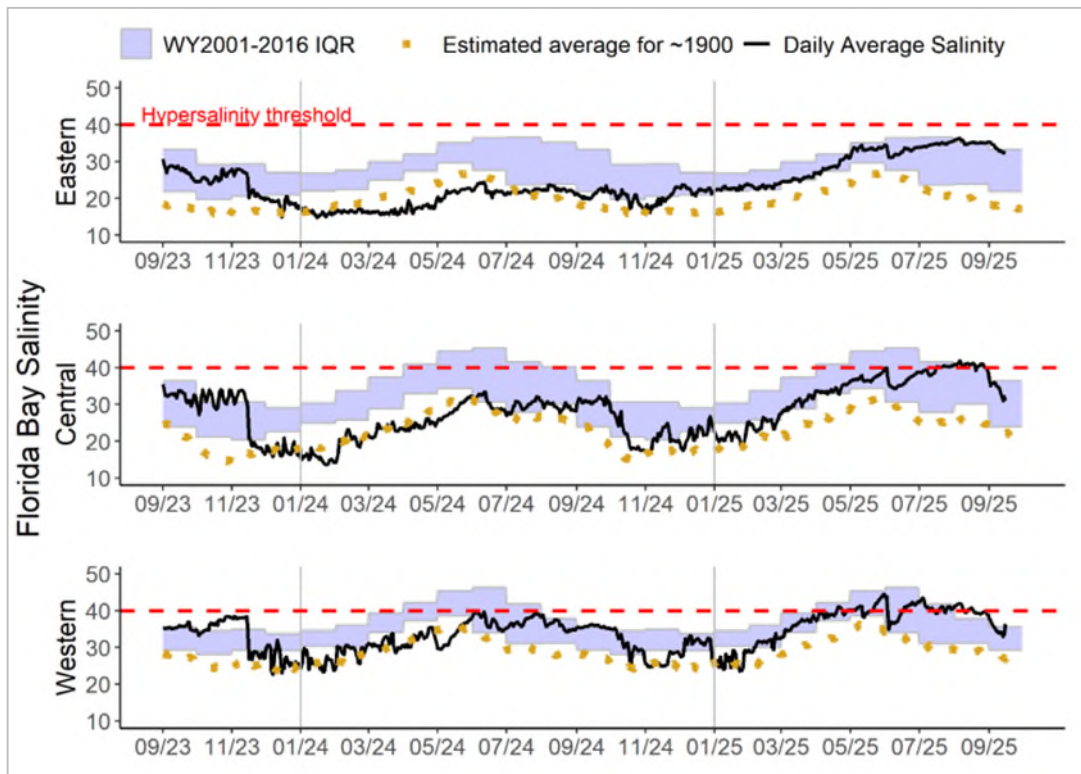
STA conditions: In STA-1E, Central Flow-way is offline for construction activities. An operational restriction is in place in the Western Flow-way for post-construction vegetation grow-in. Online SAV treatment cells are at target stage, EAV cells are above target stage. In STA-1W, Eastern Flow-way is online with restrictions for G-253 structure replacements. Treatment cells are slightly above target stage. Vegetation in the Western and Eastern flow-ways is highly stressed. The 365-day PLRs for the Eastern and Northern Flow-ways are below 1.0 g/m²/yr. The 365-day PLR for the Western Flow-way is high (≥ 1.0 g/m²/yr). In STA-2, operational restriction is in place in Flow-way 3 for post-drawdown vegetation grow-in and in Flow-ways 2 and 4 for vegetation management activities. Treatment cells are above target stage. The 365-day PLRs for all flow-ways are below 1.0 g/m²/yr. In STA-3/4, Eastern Flow-way is under limitations for post-drawdown vegetation grow-in. Treatment cells are above target stage, vegetation in the Central flow-ways is highly stressed, and the 365-day PLRs for the Eastern, Central and Western Flow-ways are below 1.0 g/m²/yr. For the current operational period, USACE is not requesting flows 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 as regional conditions allow.

WCA conditions: On September 14 the daily average stage in WCA-1 was at 15.18 feet NAVD88 (16.78 feet NGVD29), in Zone A2 and 0.50 feet below regulation schedule. The daily average stage in WCA-2A was at 12.08 feet NAVD88 (13.59 feet NGVD29), in Zone A and 0.93 feet above regulation schedule. The daily average stage in WCA-3A was at 7.90 feet NAVD88 (9.42 feet NGVD29), in Zone B and 0.77 feet below regulation schedule. Over the 7-day period, September 8 to 14, 2025, no regulatory releases were sent from Lake Okeechobee south to the STAs. No Lake regulatory releases reached the Lake Worth Lagoon through the C-51 canal during this period.

ENP conditions: Releases from WCA-3A to the ENP continue through the S-12s and S333 structures. Hydrologic connectivity has improved compared to one month ago in all three of the major sloughs within ENP. The SFWDAT model output illustrates a continued rehydration of WCA-1, but a very small portion of the north remains just slightly above ground level. WCA-2A depths have risen quickly over the last two months toward average and above average in the south. Depths increase towards average in WCA-3A North but remain relatively low in WCA-3A South limiting aquatic prey production. Big Cypress Basin depths have risen over the last two months, but dry conditions remain near Tamiami Trail. Stages increased in Taylor Slough last week are now above the recent average. Salinity decreased on average in Florida Bay compared to last week and is above the estimated historical average and near the WY2001-2016 Interquartile Range (IQR) 75th percentile in the eastern and western regions but is closer to the 50th percentile in the central region. The Tamiami Trail Flow Formula (TTFF) recommends 866 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.

September 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 hyper salinity threshold indicates the level at which salinities start to become harmful to seagrass.