



Resolution: 2-2020

May 28, 2020

**RESOLUTION SUPPORTING LAKE OKEECHOBEE SYSTEM OPERATING MANUAL
PROVIDING SUFFICIENT FLOWS FOR CALOOSAHATCHEE RIVER AND ESTUARY
WHILE BALANCING AGRICULTURAL AND MUNICIPAL WATER SUPPLY NEEDS**

WHEREAS, the Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP) encompasses parts or all of ten counties and twenty-seven cities in Central and Southwest Florida, as well as state and federal entities that work collaboratively together to protect water and wildlife in the region; and

WHEREAS, the aforementioned ten counties in Central and Southwest Florida represent approximately 15% of the total number of counties in the State of Florida, are physically linked one to the other by rivers flowing to estuaries that are along the Gulf of Mexico coastline, and share some of the world's most renowned natural resources such as the greater Everglades ecosystem and world-class lakes and beaches; and

WHEREAS, the CHNEP is an important forum to bring up regional issues that affect natural resource protection efforts in the CHNEP area, in an effort to build understanding and consensus amongst the members of the Partnership on how to advance the natural resource protection actions in its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP); and

WHEREAS, the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) governs how Lake Okeechobee is managed with regards to its water level and the discharges that exit from it to the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary in the CHNEP area; and

WHEREAS, LOSOM has five stated purposes: flood control, water supply, navigation, recreation and the preservation of fish and wildlife resources; and

WHEREAS, the LOSOM impacts the following CHNEP CCMP Objectives: Water Quality Improvement 2.1 - Implementation of water quality criteria & targets, Hydrological Restoration 2.1 - Implementation of Minimum Flows & Levels and 3.2 - Implementation of projects including Everglades restoration and restoring natural flow conditions, and Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Protection 1.2 - Promote Best management practices for rivers, etc. that support native aquatic life; and

WHEREAS, CHNEP member Lee County is dependent on Lake Okeechobee discharge flow management that protects water quality, fisheries and water supply for its residents and visitors, and sent a letter on June 2, 2020 that requested LOSOM include “750-1000 cubic feet per second (cfs) to the Caloosahatchee River during the dry season and must prevent harmful discharges during the wet season”; and

WHEREAS, CHNEP member City of Fort Myers Beach, whom is also dependent on Lake Okeechobee discharge flow management that protects water quality and fisheries to support its tourism and real estate based economy, sent a letter on May 18, 2020 that requested a “level playing field” in providing sufficient freshwater flows to the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary in the dry season and less damaging high-level releases during the wet season; and

WHEREAS, CHNEP member Glades County as well as the City of Clewiston in the CHNEP area, whom depend on agricultural and municipal water supply from Lake Okeechobee, were signatories to a letter from the City of Palm Beach sent on April 23, 2020 stating that it is “imperative that our water supply be preserved for our communities’ health and safety and our Nation’s food security”;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COASTAL & HEARTLAND NATIONAL ESTUARY PARTNERSHIP ON THIS 28th DAY OF MAY 2020 THAT:

The Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership supports a science-based process for development of the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual, one that addresses all the defined project purposes and provides the desired flows to the Caloosahatchee to meet the defined salinity targets for the river and estuary, while balancing the needs of agriculture and municipal water supply.