MEMORANDUM

To: USACE Colonel Brandon L. Bowman, Major Cory Bell, Richard McMillen, SFWMD Governing Board, Executive Director Drew Bartlett, Jennifer Reynolds, DEP Secretary Alexis Lambert

From: Periodic Scientists Conference Call Participants
Kevin Godsea & Avery Renshaw - J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex
Holly Milbrandt & Dana Dettmar - City of Sanibel
Allie Pecenka, Rick Bartleson PhD & Matt Depaolis- Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
With contributions from Harry Phillips & Maya Robert PhD- City of Cape Coral

Subject: Caloosahatchee & Estuary Conditions Report

Reporting Period: **May 13- 19, 2025**

This report provides a scientific assessment of Caloosahatchee River and Estuary conditions and how these conditions affect the health, productivity, and function of the system.

Caloosahatchee Conditions Summary: Flow to the Caloosahatchee Estuary had a 7-day average of **797 cfs** at **S-79** with a 7-day average of **329 cfs** (100%) coming from the lake at **S-77. The 14-day moving average flow at S-79 was 572 cfs** and has been **below the optimum flow envelope** (<750 cfs) for **22 days. The 14-day moving average flow at S-77 was 371 cfs.**

Recommendation: The Corps must manage releases from Lake Okeechobee to ensure flows at S-79 are meeting the currently stated flow schedule. Actual flows have been consistently lower than the posted 500 cfs constant flow schedule, creating potentially damaging salinity levels in the estuary. With daily flows well below the RECOVER 2020 optimum flow envelope of 750- 2,100 cfs and the 14-day average flow at S-79 below optimum for 22 consecutive days, harm to the Caloosahatchee estuary is likely if this trend continues. For weeks, salinities have been above the optimum salinity envelope for oysters (10- 25 psu; RECOVER 2020), a trend that may have long-term impacts on populations. We respectfully request that the Corps take all necessary measures to provide beneficial flows to the Caloosahatchee in accordance with the stated schedule, though optimum flows would be in the 750- 2,100 cfs range.

USACE Action: Lake Okeechobee stage is in the lower portion of Zone D (Zone D3 of the PA25 simulation) of the LOSOM regulation schedule. ENSO-neutral conditions are present and is favored during the summer. The District continues to monitor conditions in the estuaries, as well as the systemwide conditions, as the dry season progresses. As such, the District recommends that USACE should continue non-harmful Recovery Operations for Lake Okeechobee as described in LOSOM recognizing that there is a higher chance to achieve Recovery targets. To maintain favorable salinity levels in the estuaries and begin to conserve water, it is recommended that flow targets for the Caloosahatchee Estuary should ensure the delivery of the Minimum Flow and Level via a targeted steady release of 500 cfs and operational changes at S-77, S-78, and S-79 should be implemented to ensure the 500 cfs is delivered on a daily basis; flow targets for the St. Lucie Estuary should remain at 0 cfs, and the flow target for the Lake Worth Lagoon should remain at 0 cfs. The District will continue to monitor salinity conditions in the estuaries and water supply conditions throughout the system as the dry season progresses to assess future operational recommendations.

Lake Flows: In the past 7 days the total outflow from Lake Okeechobee was **6,988 AF** with **4,317 AF** to the Caloosahatchee through **S-77**, -**1,816 AF** to the St. Lucie canal through **S-308** and **4,487 AF** to the EAA through **S-351**, **S-352**, and **S-354**. The total net inflow to the Lake was **7,521 AF** from Fisheating Creek, S-71, S-72, S-84s, S-65EX, and S-65EX1. Water conservation areas received flows of **2,375 AF**, **5,869 AF**, and **2,412 AF** at **WCA1, WCA2, and WCA3**, respectively. Everglades National Park received **301 AF.**
***Data missing from S-310 and L-8 on 5/13/25- 5/19/25 and from S-78 on 5/15.**

Lake Level: 11.14 ft (Zone D3) **Last Week**: **10.98 ft** **Last Year: 13.52 ft**

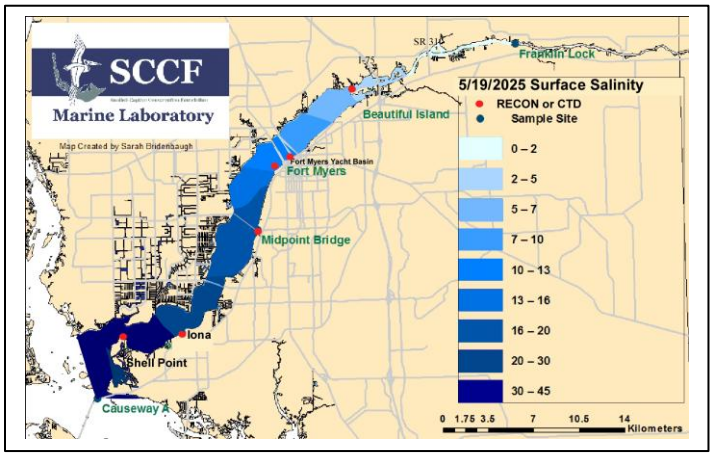
7-Day Lake Recession Rate: +0.16 ft/week

Lake Okeechobee Inflow: 331 cfs **Lake Okeechobee Outflow: 641 cfs**

Weekly Rainfall Total: **WP Franklin: 0.00"** **Ortona: 0.00"** **Julian Keen Jr.: 0.00"**

Cyanobacteria Status: On 5/5/25, sampling for cyanobacteria by the Lee County Environmental Lab reported **abundant** streaks and some accumulation of primarily *Dolichospermum* and some *Microcystis* at the **Alva Boat Ramp**. Some specks of cyanobacteria were observed **upstream of the Franklin Locks.**

Red Tide: On 5/16/25, the FWC reported that the red tide organism, *Karenia brevis*, was detected at background concentrations in three samples from Florida's Gulf Coast; in Manatee, Sarasota and Charlotte Counties.



Light Penetration

Site	25% Iz	Target Values	Turbidity	Target Values
	meters		NTU	
Fort Myers	1.2	> 1	4.0	< 18
Shell Point	1.9	>2.2	2.0	< 18
Causeway	4.3	> 2.2	1.8	< 5

***25% Iz** is the depth (z) where irradiance (I) is 25% of surface irradiance. Target values indicate the depth of light penetration needed for healthy seagrass.*

Upper Estuary Conditions: The 30-day average surface salinity at the Fort Myers Yacht Basin was 5.1 psu, in the range for tape grass and the weekly average was 11 psu.

Lower Estuary Conditions: The weekly average salinity at the Shell Point RECON was **31 psu**, in the optimal range for seagrass, but **above optimal for oysters**.

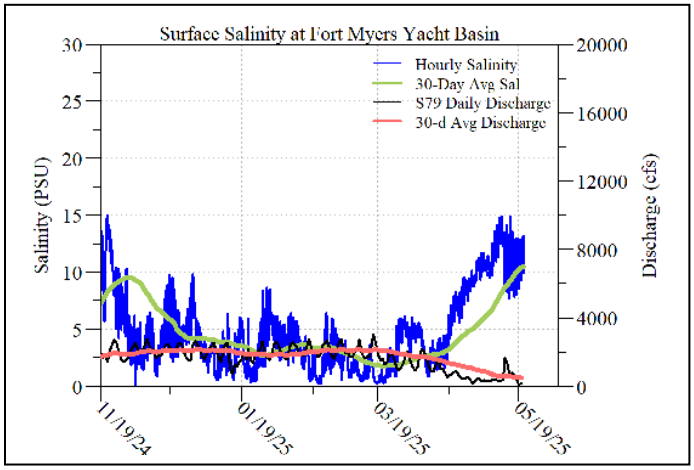
Water Quality Conditions:

Monitor Site	Salinity (psu)[a] [previous week]	Diss O_2 (mg/L)[b]	FDOM (qsde)[c]	Chlorophyll (µg/L)[d]	Temperature (°F)
Beautiful Island	2.5 – 5.4 [4.2 – 6.0]	3.1 – 6.6	120	6.0	82.2 – 91.2
Fort Myers Yacht Basin	6.1 – 12 [9.3 – 15]	2.2– 6.3	65	3.9	80.4 – 88.7
Shell Point	24 – 35 [27 – 36]	4.2 – 7.1	28	1.0	80.4 – 89.0
McIntyre Creek	34.0 – 35.6 [33.3 – 36.3]	2.1 – 6.6	13.5 – 33.8	0.8 – 2.0	79.7 – 89.9
Tarpon Bay	34.2 – 35.8 [33.9 – 36.7]	3.0 – 8.5	10.6 – 24.9	0.7 – 2.1	80.2 – 89.2
Wulfert Flats	35.4 – 36.3 [34.3 – 36.2]	3.4 – 8.5	-------	2.8 – 16.9	80.1 – 90.0

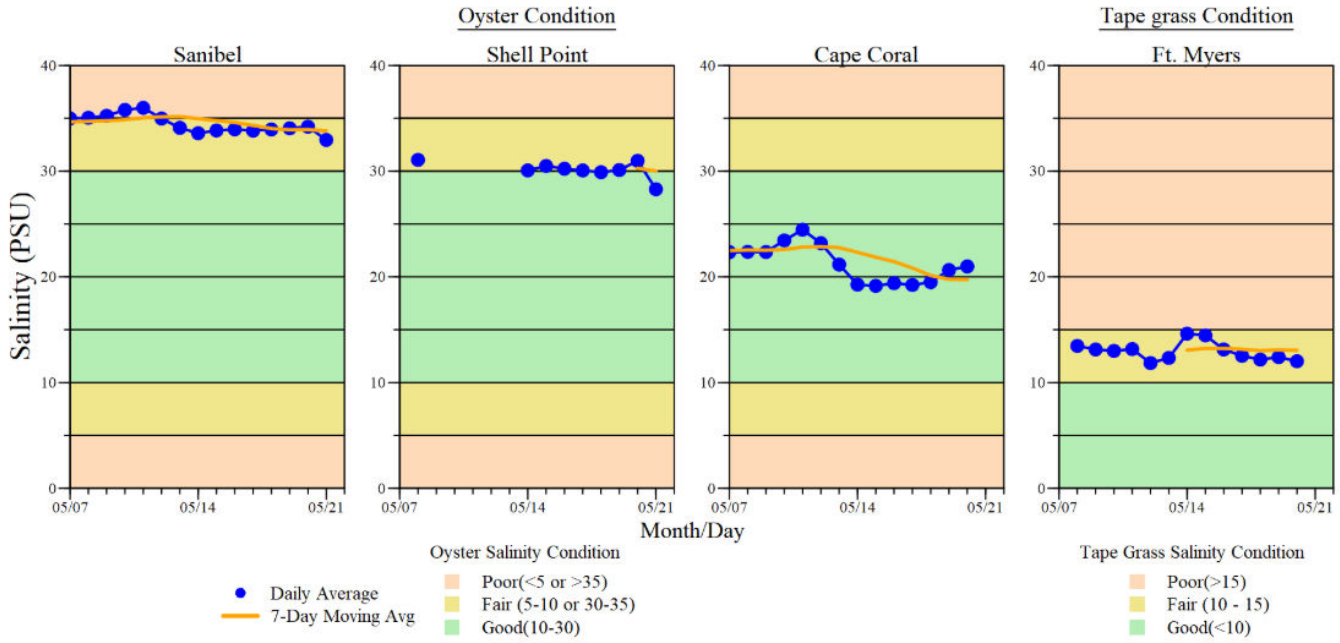
Red values are outside of the preferred range.
[a] Salinity target values: BI < 5, FM < 10, SP = 10 – 30
[b] Dissolved O_2 target values: all sites > 4
[c] FDOM target values: BI < 70, FM < 70, SP < 11
[d] Chlorophyll target values: BI < 11, FM < 11, SP < 11
[f] Temperature target values: < 90
[s] Single sonde lower and surface layer or surface grab lab measurement
ND: no data

Wildlife Impacts: In the past week, the CROW wildlife hospital on Sanibel admitted **2 patients** with suspected red tide/toxicosis: 2 juvenile double-crested cormorants (both still in care).

Shellfish Advisory: Shellfish harvest area #6212 (Pine Island Sound Section 1; Aquaculture Lease and Public Reef) is **OPEN** by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) as of 4/3/25. SHA #6222 (North Matlacha Pass) is **OPEN** as of 4/15/25. SHA #6232 (South Matlacha Pass) is **OPEN** as of 3/21/25.



ACOE Daily Reports			
Date	S79 Flow (cfs)	S78 Flow (cfs)	S77 Flow (cfs)
5/13/25	1662	815	-128
5/14/25	1311	729	412
5/15/25	655	467	328
5/16/25	831	464	396
5/17/25	622	268	364
5/18/25	374	175	328
5/19/25	123	226	604
7-day avg	**797**	**449**	**329**



Daily average bottom salinity data for the last 14-days from sampling locations within the tidal Caloosahatchee River Estuary relative to oyster health (Sanibel, Shell Point and Cape Coral) and tape grass (*Vallisneria americana*) health (Ft. Myers only) conditions.

*Ft. Myers sensor is in the lower strata

Water clarity at Lighthouse Beach Park on 5/19/25 at 2:56 PM on a rising tide (2.5 ft).