



Southwest Florida
Coastal Mayors

Representing the
Cities of:

Bonita Springs
Cape Coral
Fort Myers
Fort Myers Beach
Naples
Sanibel

March 30, 2006

The Honorable Jeb Bush
Governor, State of Florida
The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor Bush:

The Coastal Mayors from Lee and Collier Counties in Southwest Florida represent waterfront areas impacted by releases from Lake Okeechobee that exceed biologist recommendations.

We represent the SW Florida gateway to fishing, boating, swimming, birding, turtle watching and all aspects of tourism. The cost to our environment—which is our economy—will be devastating if the South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers do not act quickly to prevent irreparable damage. We meet with you to explain that, while we appreciate your fast-tracking long-term Everglades Restoration projects, we need short-term management decisions that will protect our water resources until long-term solutions are in place.

Impact on tourism: Lee and Collier Counties host almost 4 million visitors a year—5% of the 79 million who make tourism Florida's largest industry. Visitors expect turquoise water, fish and bird life—not brown water full of green algae and canals full of scum balls that come when Lake Okeechobee releases are excessive—not slime in the protected waters of the nation's most visited Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

The annual economic impact of tourism coming through our coastal cities is over \$3 billion (\$2 billion in Lee County and \$1.1 billion in Collier County) or 5.3% of the \$57 billion impact of tourism in Florida. This economic investment must not be ignored. Once the life cycle of our coastal waters is lost—if excess polluted fresh water kills our already damaged sea grasses that host the fish that feed the birds—our economic growth will not be sustained. It will take a decade or more to recover—if that is even possible.

Impact on Jobs: Our cities are the gateway to tropical waters for 5% of Florida's population. These waters are why nearly one million people live and work here. Nearly 67,325 thousand households support themselves on tourism jobs (40,000 jobs in Lee County and 27,325 tourism jobs in Collier County). These jobs are crucial to our economic vitality. Without a pristine environment to attract people, how will those who live and work here support their families?

Impact on Property Valuation: These same tropical waters off the shores of our coastal cities make it possible for the property valuation to be over \$160 billion in Lee and Collier Counties. Property owners are the anchor for our private sector economy and make it possible for the public sector to provide needed services. Without maintaining the strength in our coastal economy, how can the adjacent inland counties find



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the links needed to grow their economies? Real estate values could plummet if water quality is not maintained.

Short-term Relief Critical: The stakes are too high to risk lasting damage to our coastal waters. Southwest coastal city beaches were rendered unsafe and unusable during the release events. Mayor Feichthaler of Cape Coral is concerned about the algae and scum balls in the 400 miles of Cape Coral canals at a time when his city is expanding its tourist accommodations. Mayor Arend of Bonita worries that if water quality is damaged, then Bonita's tourism, real estate, boating and fishing economy will be damaged. Mayor Barnett of Naples points to recent reports on declining water quality in Naples and doesn't want this trend to continue. Mayor Boback of Ft. Myers Beach notes constituent concerns about the water in Estero Bay and undesirable brown water at the beach. Mayor Humphrey of Ft. Myers has made a strong commitment to Caloosahatchee Riverfront investment—properties that are more attractive without algae and scum balls. Sanibel Mayor Johnston, whose city organized this delegation of coastal mayors, points to the environmental damage at the Ding Darling Wildlife Refuge—the nation's number one refuge destination. Together, as coastal mayors, we agree that the health of the SW Florida economy is closely tied to preserving the health of our environment.

A list of actions to accomplish short-term relief for the coastal cities without damaging interests across the rest of South Florida includes the following:

- 1) Keep a steady Lake Okeechobee water release--within biologist accepted levels--rather than a pulse release, and calculate (and operate within) maximum tolerable phosphate and nitrogen levels in 2006, not in 2009.
- 2) Release water from the middle depth level of the lake rather than from the most polluted waters at lake bottom as is present practice.
- 3) Gradually lower lake to 12 ½ feet prior to rainy season with use of forward pumps for dry season access to water supply and irrigation—reducing likelihood of excessive releases in rainy season.
- 4) Dredge the worst of Lake Okeechobee sludge to reduce the pollution and hence the absence of light caused when this water surrounds the sea grasses.
- 5) Add a stormwater treatment (STA) water quality element to the C-43 reservoir that's now being designed so that SW Florida has the same water quality protection that SE Florida is afforded.
- 6) Implement E.A. Hanlon's proposal for water farming in recyclable water containment areas—using appropriate parcels for adding water storage capacity.
- 7) Update the Lake O models for lake inflows to reflect wet cycle water management.
- 8) Reexamine regulatory schedules for Water Control Areas (WCA) that release water into canals in order to balance capacity and releases in ways that add wet cycle storage.

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss these important issues with you. We are hopeful that, because of your interest in protecting the economic and environmental well-being of coastal and inland Florida, you will assist us in realizing specific short-term management practice changes within the Water Management District and the Army Corps of Engineers. Timing is critical. To maintain our economy, our SW Florida coastal waters must recover from last year's blow and must not lose their splendor.




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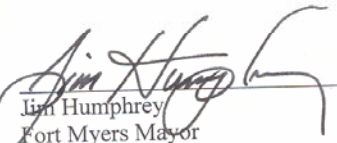
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Sincerely,

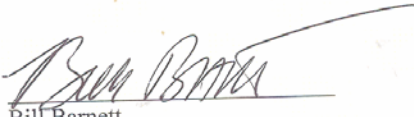
SOUTHWEST FLORIDA COASTAL MAYORS

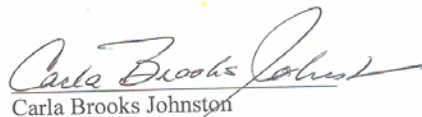

Jay Arend
Bonita Springs Mayor


Eric Feichthaler
Cape Coral Mayor


Jim Humphrey
Fort Myers Mayor


Dennis Boback
Town of Ft. Myers Beach Mayor


Bill Barnett
Naples Mayor


Carla Brooks Johnston
Sanibel Mayor

