



Dr. Gretchen Ehlinger
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Blvd.
Jacksonville, FL 32217

February 26, 2024

Submitted by email: LOCAR@usace.army.mil

Subject: LOCAR Public Comments

Dear Dr. Ehlinger:

We the undersigned organizations appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments on the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the North of Lake Okeechobee Reservoir Section 203 Study. There is widespread agreement that more storage upstream of Lake Okeechobee is needed to meet water quality and water level management goals for the Lake and downstream systems, and this project will significantly help achieve these goals. Indeed, the Lake Okeechobee Component A Reservoir (LOCAR) is the largest Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan storage feature north of the Lake, representing a major advancement toward meeting the 200,000-acre-foot storage goals for the area.

To that end, we support the preferred Alternative 4 in the EIS, which has the smallest footprint and avoids sensitive areas. While no single project can meet all upstream storage needs for Lake Okeechobee, LOCAR will complement other projects in the region including the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project, Kissimmee River Restoration, and several ongoing state efforts. This reservoir is also near the Brighton Valley water quality feature which offers the opportunity of linking the two projects for synergistic benefits to the watershed.

Commendably, the South Florida Water Management District and Army Corps worked in record time to create a robust proposal, ready for authorization under the Water Resources and Development Act of 2024. When complete, this project will increase storage and treatment capacity north of the Lake – a need underscored by high Lake levels and recent releases to the coastal estuaries.

We support this project moving forward and appreciate consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Kelly Cox, Esq. | Director of Everglades Policy
Audubon Florida

Michele Arquette-Palermo | Water Policy Manager
Conservancy of Southwest Florida

Matt DePaolis | Environmental Policy Director
Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation

Cara Capp | Senior Everglades Program Manager
National Parks Conservation Association

Bradley Watson | Vice President of Policy and Engagement
The Everglades Foundation

Jessie Ritter | Associate Vice President, Water and Coasts
National Wildlife Federation

Mark Perry | Executive Director and CEO
Florida Oceanographic Society

Elizabeth Fata Carpenter | Executive Director
Everglades Law Center

Caitlin Wall | Director of Water Policy
National Audubon Society