

# It's Time to Set the Record Straight on the Lake Okeechobee Discharges

We share in the frustration over the Lake Okeechobee discharges. We want to collaborate in finding solutions that improve water storage and reduce the risk of discharges occurring again. But the Sierra Club's reckless and mean-spirited attacks – which are part of their ongoing vendetta against sugarcane farmers – misdirect the focus away from any meaningful discussion of the facts that will lead us to real solutions. That these radicals are blaming a single company, U.S. Sugar, for systemic regional problems wrought by over 100 years of change is utterly ridiculous.

## FACT:

Only 3% of the water and 4% of the phosphorus in Lake Okeechobee is coming from south of Lake Okeechobee, where the farming communities are located.

**How did we get here?** The month of January brought historically high levels of rainfall – 476% above the monthly average. To prevent a catastrophic flood and lower Lake Okeechobee, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began discharging in January. At the same time, as a flood control measure, SFWMD automatically began back pumping water from canals south and east of the lake to protect the Glades communities.

## FACT:

Back pumping only occurred over a period of 4 days (January 27th through January 31st) and accounted for 9 billion gallons in total. By comparison, until recently, the Army Corps was releasing 11 billion gallons per day.

## More facts about back pumping:

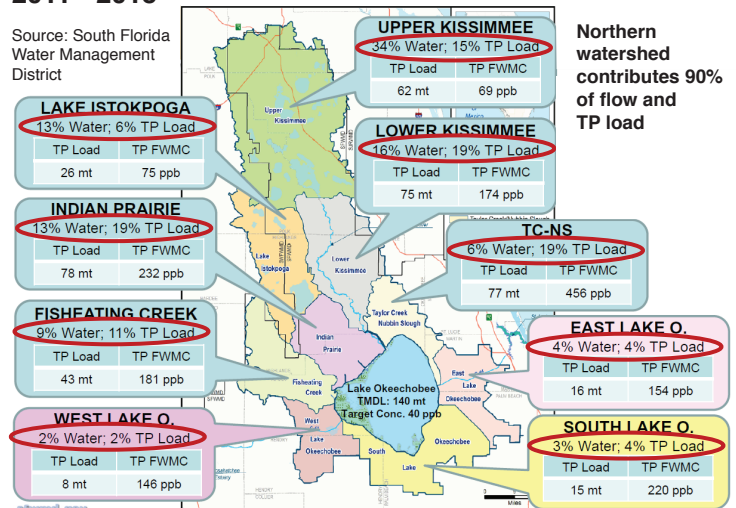
- U.S. Sugar does not pump water from its fields into Lake Okeechobee. Nor do any other sugarcane farmers.
- Back pumping into the lake wouldn't even be possible – U.S. Sugar's property does not connect directly to Lake Okeechobee.
- Back pumping is strictly controlled by SFWMD.
- Back pumping accounted for less than three quarters of an inch of the more than 13 inches of rain added to Lake Okeechobee in January.
- Back pumping is conducted to protect Glades-area communities, businesses, hospitals, schools and farms from catastrophic flooding and according to SFWMD, benefits "thousands of families and businesses."

**The Sierra Club is wrong and misleading the community.** Like you, we too are frustrated by the high volume of discharges the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has continued every day, along with the harmful impacts. We understand that people are upset, but the rage is directed at the wrong source. U.S. Sugar is part of the solution, not the problem. For decades, our farmers have worked to improve water quality and create sustainable environmental solutions. U.S. Sugar supports local, state, and federal efforts to fund water projects that are waiting to be completed.

These are regional problems that require collaborative, regional solutions based on facts, not finger-pointing and lies. We want to partner with our coastal neighbors to help solve our region's water problems.

## Northern Everglades Lake Okeechobee Inflow 2011 - 2015

Source: South Florida Water Management District

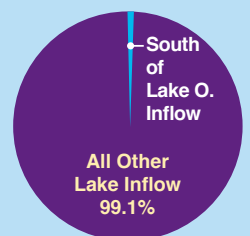


Northern watershed contributes 90% of flow and TP load

90 percent of the water and phosphorus flowing into Lake Okeechobee comes from the northern watershed, not from south of the lake.

## Inflows from the South of Lake Okeechobee vs. All Other Areas Water Years: 2006-2015

Over a 10-year period, less than one percent of all the water entering Lake Okeechobee came from south of the lake.



Source: SFWMD South Florida Environmental Reports 2006-2015

## What Local Leaders Are Saying About Reports on the Lake Okeechobee Discharges

"The Sierra Club and many Everglades Foundation supporters claim that agriculture in general, and sugar cane growers in particular, are destroying the state's waters. Never mind that the water that flows off sugar cane land is cleaner than when it flowed onto the land, far exceeding any state requirement. Never mind that sugar cane farmers actually have made the largest private investment, \$400 million, for the restoration of the Everglades. And especially never mind that it isn't water from the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) that is ending up in the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers in the first place. Lake Okeechobee's water comes from the north, east and west."

Hendry County Commissioner Janet Taylor, February 26, 2016

"Despite the initiation of increased Lake Okeechobee regulatory releases, over the last four days approximately 70% of the current water flow is runoff from the Caloosahatchee watershed. While championing the need to move water from Lake Okeechobee to the south, the City of Sanibel has consistently recognized our need for water storage within the Caloosahatchee watershed."

Sanibel Mayor Kevin Ruane, February 5, 2016

"The discoloration is caused almost entirely from naturally occurring tannins in the 1,400-square-mile Caloosahatchee River Basin involving runoff from 900,000 acres on both sides of the river. And yes, when you open the floodgates from Okeechobee, the brown water does come in huge volumes."

Lee County Commission Chairman Frank Mann, February 16, 2016

"You want to kill your tourism? Start talking about the toxic water in Lake Okeechobee and how it's discharging to our coastal communities. No. It's good, clean fresh water that a whole lot of people use for a drinking water source, including the fancy people over here on the coast. In fact, there's just too much fresh water in a saltwater environment. So definitely, technically, it's causing problems. But it's not toxic in the way people are connoting it is toxic."

D. Albrely Arrington Ph.D., Executive Director of the Loxahatchee River District, March 3, 2016, Water Resource Advisory Meeting

Get the facts on the Lake Okeechobee discharges and what U.S. Sugar is doing to improve water quality. Visit [www.ussugar.com/releases/](http://www.ussugar.com/releases/).

