

A Resolution of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Urging the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and South Florida Water Management District to Prioritize in Their Updates to the Lake Okeechobee Systems Operating Manual (LOSOM) the Freshwater Flows to the Southern End of the Everglades System Critical for Maintaining the Health of Everglades National Park, Florida Bay, and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

WHEREAS, the Florida Keys are part of a complex hydrological system that is influenced by waters from the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean, as well as the Greater Everglades ecosystem, which includes Lake Okeechobee and its headwaters, the Everglades Agricultural Area, Water Conservation Areas, Everglades National Park, Florida Bay, Biscayne Bay, Biscayne National Park, and mainland South Florida; and

WHEREAS, the waters of the Florida Keys are connected to and dependent on the Everglades landscape as the primary source of freshwater that serves as the foundation of the nearshore estuarine environment; and

WHEREAS, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) helps protect the unique marine waters of the Florida Keys that are a national treasure and of international significance; and

WHEREAS, the FKNMS has the authority to coordinate the conservation and management of these marine areas and activities affecting them and to ensure cooperation between Sanctuary managers and other Federal, State, and local authorities with jurisdiction within or adjacent to the Sanctuary; and

WHEREAS, Florida Bay is a vitally important ecosystem located between the mainland and the Florida Keys, with approximately 20% of Florida Bay within the boundaries of the FKNMS and approximately 80% of Florida Bay within the boundaries of Everglades National Park; and

WHEREAS, the ecological health of the FKNMS is inextricably linked to that of Florida Bay, Everglades National Park, and the Greater Everglades ecosystem; and

WHEREAS, Florida Bay and the interconnected habitats of the South Florida coral reef ecosystem are vital to the multi-billion dollar fishing and tourism industry of the Florida Keys and South Florida, including commercial and recreational fishing, snorkeling, diving, boat and equipment rentals, other tourism related businesses, and taxable property values in South Florida; and

WHEREAS, chronic lack of freshwater flow, coupled with increasingly high temperatures and salinity in Florida Bay, has contributed to mass seagrass die-offs, algal blooms, sponge die-offs, and degraded fishery species habitat; and

WHEREAS, the dire situation in Florida Bay is a sign of a larger water crisis plaguing Florida whereby northern coastal estuaries are being inundated by polluted Lake Okeechobee discharges while Everglades National Park and Florida Bay are starved for freshwater due to lack of infrastructure for treatment and storage of water and restoration of flow; and

WHEREAS, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project (CERP) was passed by Congress in 2000 as a roadmap to protect, preserve, and restore the Greater Everglades ecosystem; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and South Florida Water Management District are the federal and local sponsors, respectively, for the implementation of CERP and are actively advancing the planning, construction, and operations of numerous restoration projects that stand to impact Florida Bay and the southern coastal system; and

WHEREAS, the new Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) that is currently being updated needs to take into account the needs of the southern end of the system, namely water supply and sufficient freshwater flows that Florida Bay; and

WHEREAS, the FKNMS Advisory Council (SAC) recognizes that the restoration of America's Everglades is critical to the long-term sustainability of South Florida's economy, quality of life, public health, and environment; and

WHEREAS, the FKNMS and NOAA have identified the need to restore the coral reefs of the Florida Keys, partly through the implementation of the \$100,000,000 Mission: Iconic Reefs project, the success of which depends on clean, clear, oligotrophic waters within the FKNMS.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council:

1. Urges the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District to prioritize in their updates to the Lake Okeechobee Systems Operating Manual (LOSOM) the need for adequate freshwater flows to the southern end of the Everglades system, *particularly during the dry season when most hypersaline events occur and cause ecological degradation such as sea grass die-offs and algal blooms that adversely affect Sanctuary waters.*
2. Requests the Sanctuary Superintendent transmit copies of this resolution to Col. Andrew Kelly, District Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville District and Drew Bartlett, Executive Director, South Florida Water Management District.

Disclaimer: The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council is an interactive liaison between the residents and visitors of the Florida Keys and the staff and management of the FKNMS. The opinions and findings of this publication do not necessarily reflect the position of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.