

## MEMORANDUM

To: USACE Colonel James L. Booth, Major Cory Bell, Richard McMillen, SFWMD Governing Board,  
Executive Director Drew Bartlett, Jennifer Reynolds, Lawrence Glenn, DEP Secretary Shawn Hamilton

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

Harry Phillips & Maya Robert - City of Cape Coral

Allie Pecenka, Rick Bartleson PhD, Matt Depaolis & Leah Reidenbach - Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation

In coordination with Lee County

Subject: Caloosahatchee & Estuary Conditions Report

Reporting Period: **March 12–18, 2024**

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 **2,377 cfs** at **S-79** with a 7-day average of **1,942 cfs (82%)** coming from the lake at **S-77**. **The 14-day moving average flow at S-79 is 4,660 cfs and has been in the damaging** flow envelope (>2,600 cfs; RECOVER 2020) for **29 days**. The 14-day average flow at S-77 was **3,456 cfs**.

**Recommendation:** The Corps has made the decision to increase flows to a 14-day average of 4,000 cfs measured at S-77 in a pulse release schedule resulting in damaging flows (>2,600 cfs) to the CRE. While we acknowledge the need for increased flows to lower the higher than normal lake level, a strategy for achieving this should have been developed and implemented in late 2023 to avoid the high volume, damaging discharges currently being released. We ask that the Corps monitor flows at S-79 given the El Niño forecast and the high likelihood of increased basin runoff that will compound the high volume releases and reduce flows at S-77 if possible. Furthermore, we ask that flow volume be reduced significantly by April 1 to protect oyster and fish spawning in the CRE or if a red tide event initiates off the coast of Lee County.

**USACE Action:** With Lake Okeechobee stage in the Intermediate Sub-band, the Tributary Hydrologic conditions in the Normal category, Part D of the 2008 LORS suggests up to 4,000 cfs at S-77 and 1,800 cfs at S-80. On 2/17/24 the USACE increased releases from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee Estuary from the Julian Keen Jr. Lock and Dam (S-77) to 4,000 cfs, 1,800 cfs at St. Lucie Lock and Dam (S-80), and up to 500 cfs to the Lake Worth Lagoon through the C-51 canal.

**Lake Flows:** In the past 7 days the total outflow from Lake Okeechobee was **52,339 AF\*** with **27,151 AF** to the Caloosahatchee through **S-77**, **3,552 AF** to the St. Lucie canal through **S-308**, **1,550 AF** through the **L8 canal**, and **20,086 AF** to the EAA through **S-351**, **S-352**, and **S-354**. The total net inflow to the Lake was **19,994 AF (19,994 AF** from Fisheating Creek, S-71, S-72, S-84s, S-65EX, and S-65EX1). Water conservation areas received flows of **3,015 AF**, **8,406 AF**, and **2,632 AF** at **WCA1**, **WCA2**, and **WCA3**, respectively. Everglades National Park received **10,559 AF**.  
\*Data missing for S-310 from 3/12 -3/18 and for ENP from 3/12 -3/14.

**Lake Level: 15.75 (Intermediate Sub-Band)**

**Last Week: 15.94 ft**

**Last Year: 14.94 ft**

**7-Day Lake Recession Rate: -0.19 ft/week**

**Lake Okeechobee Inflow: 1,310 cfs**

**Lake Okeechobee Outflow: 5,137 cfs**

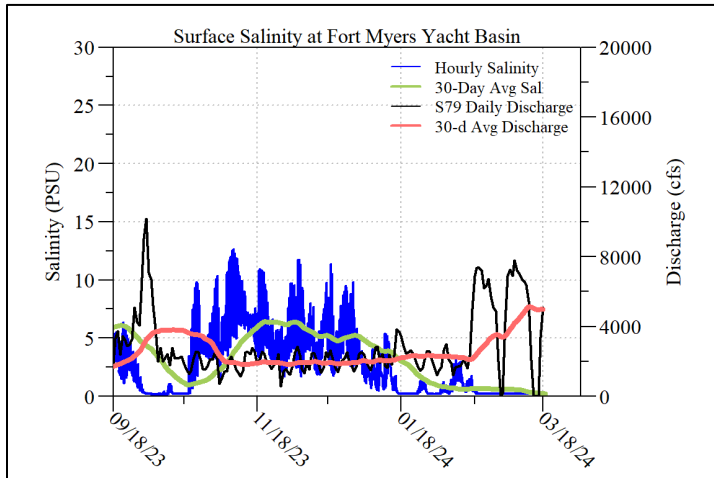
**Weekly Rainfall Total: WP Franklin: 0.07"**

**Ortona: 0.07"**

**Moore Haven: 0.04"**

**Cyanobacteria Status:** On 3/18/24 sampling for cyanobacteria by the Lee County Environmental Lab reported **moderately abundant** *Microcystis*, *Dolichospermum*, and cyano filaments at the **Alva Boat Ramp** with streaks and accumulation on the ramp/shore, and at the **Davis Boat Ramp** with streaks and accumulation. *Dolichospermum* and cyano filaments were **moderately abundant** at **North Shore Park** where no cyanobacteria were visible due to choppy conditions.

**Red Tide:** On 3/15/24, the FWC reported that the red tide organism *Karenia brevis* was **observed at background concentrations** in one sample each from Southwest Florida, Northwest Florida and along Florida's East Coast over the past week. In **Southwest Florida** over the past week, *K. brevis* was observed at background concentrations in one sample from Manatee County. *K. brevis* was **not observed** in samples collected from or offshore of Pinellas, Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee, Collier, or Monroe counties.



Site	Light Penetration		Turbidity	Target Values
	25% I <sub>z</sub>	Target Values		
	meters		NTU	
Fort Myers	0.7	> 1	3.6	< 18
Shell Point	0.9	>2.2	1.6	< 18
Causeway	1.8	> 2.2	4.7	< 5

25% I<sub>z</sub> 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 0.3 psu, within the suitable range for tape grass.

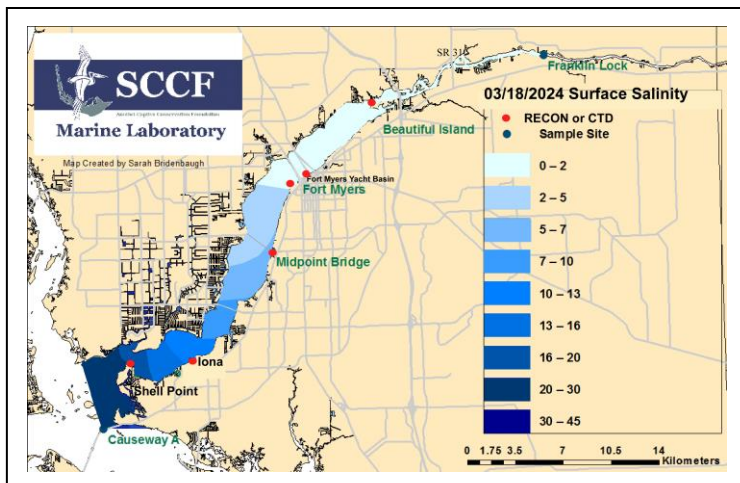
**Lower Estuary Conditions:** The average salinity at Shell Point RECON was 19 psu, in the optimal range for oysters but below optimal for seagrass. Salinity at Shell Point dropped to 2.2 on 3/12/24.

**Water Quality Conditions:**

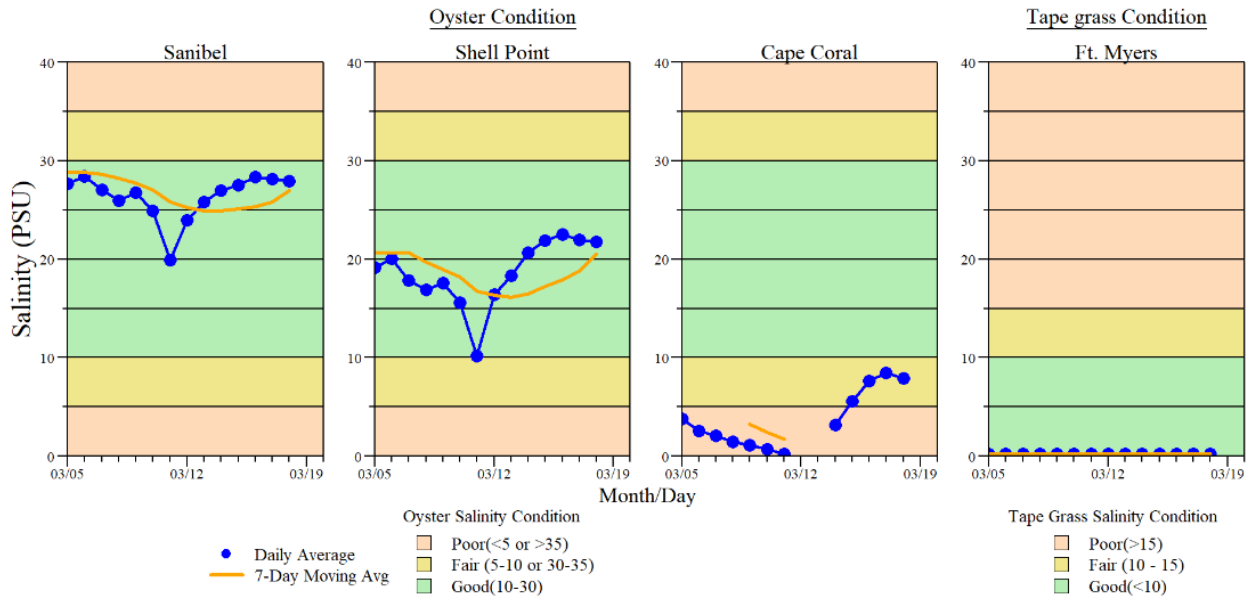
Monitor Site	Salinity (psu) <sup>a</sup> [previous week]	Diss O <sub>2</sub> (mg/L) <sup>b</sup>	FDOM (qsde) <sup>c</sup>	Chlorophyll (µg/L) <sup>d</sup>	Temperature (°F)
Beautiful Island	0.2 – 0.2 [0.2 – 0.2]	3.6 – 7.4	161 – 175	8.0	76.3 – 86.8
Fort Myers Yacht Basin	0.2 – 0.2 [0.2 – 0.2]	4.6 – 9.6	165 – 180	5.3	74.7 – 81.1
Shell Point	2.2 – 30 [1.3 – 30]	5.2 – 8.0	49.8 – 220	2.4	72.7 – 80.6
McIntyre Creek	24.1 – 28.0 [24.7 – 28.6]	2.8 – 9.3	65.9 – 103.9	1.6 – 4.2	70.6 – 81.1
Tarpon Bay	22.9 – 31.1 [22.5 – 32.6]	5.2 – 7.8	29.5 – 86.0	1.0 – 3.0	71.6 – 80.7
Wulfert Flats	----- [------]	-----	-----	-----	-----

- Red values are outside of the preferred range.
- <sup>a</sup> Salinity target values: BI < 5, FM < 10, SP = 10 – 30
- <sup>b</sup> Dissolved O<sub>2</sub> target values: all sites > 4
- <sup>c</sup> FDOM target values: BI < 70, FM < 70, SP < 11
- <sup>d</sup> Chlorophyll target values: BI < 11, FM < 11, SP < 11
- <sup>s</sup> Single sonde lower and surface layer or surface grab lab measurement
- no data

**Wildlife Impacts:** In the past week, the CROW wildlife hospital on Sanibel admitted 2 patients with suspected red tide/toxicosis: 1 juvenile laughing gull (still at CROW) and 1 adult laughing gull (still at CROW).



ACOE Daily Reports			
Date	S79 Flow (cfs)	S78 Flow (cfs)	S77 Flow (cfs)
3/12/24	5437	5073	4428
3/13/24	2051	1467	1744
3/14/24	0	0	0
3/15/24	0	0	104
3/16/24	0	0	94
3/17/24	3390	2997	2721
3/18/24	5760	4730	4500
7-day avg	2377	2038	1942



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 3/18/24 at 1:58 PM on a rising tide (1.8 ft).