MEMORANDUM

To: USACE Colonel Brandon L. Bowman, Major Cory Bell, Richard McMillen, SFWMD Governing Board, Executive Director Drew Bartlett, Jennifer Reynolds, DEP Secretary Alexis Lambert

From: C&SF Water Management Call Participants
Kevin Godsea & Avery Renshaw - J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex
Holly Milbrandt & Dana Dettmar - City of Sanibel
Allie Pecenka, Rick Bartleson PhD & Matt DePaolis- Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
With contributions from Harry Phillips & Maya Robert PhD- City of Cape Coral

Subject: Caloosahatchee & Estuary Conditions Report

Reporting Period: **October 20- 26, 2026**

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 **202 cfs** at **S-79** with a 7-day average of **0 cfs** coming from the lake at **S-77. The 14-day moving average flow at S-79 was 711 cfs** and has been **below the optimum flow envelope** (<750 cfs; RECOVER 2020) for **1 day** after 21 days in the **optimum flow envelope** (750- 2,100 cfs). **The 14-day moving average flow at S-77 was 0 cfs.**

Recommendation: In the past week, flows at S-79 have quickly fallen below the optimum flow envelope (750- 2,100 cfs) with 0 cfs moving through the structure in recent days. The lack of fresh water moving through S-79 coupled with low rainfall within the Caloosahatchee watershed this past week will negatively impact salinity levels in the estuary and cause stress/harm to key indicator species including Eastern oysters and tape grass. Restoring optimum flows at S-79 is critical to maintain the salinity gradient of the Caloosahatchee Estuary and avoid further ecological harm.

USACE Action: On October 18, the daily average Lake Okeechobee stage was 11.17 feet NAVD88 (12.48 feet NGVD29), which placed it within the Water Shortage Management Zone (WSMZ) of the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM). Lake stage increased by 0.17 feet over the preceding 7-day period. El Niño is present and continues to strengthen, with a strong-to-very strong El Niño likely through January-March 2027. The District will continue to monitor conditions in the estuaries, as well as the systemwide conditions. Normal Lake Operations continue pursuant to the considerations in LOSOM as informed by PA25. Given the estuary salinity conditions, it is recommended that flow targets for the Caloosahatchee Estuary should rely on basin flows only, and not be supplemented with Lake Okeechobee water; flow targets for the St. Lucie Estuary and Lake Worth Lagoon should remain at 0 cfs.

Lake Flows: In the past 7 days the total outflow from Lake Okeechobee was **-3,142 AF** with **19 AF** to the Caloosahatchee through **S-77**, **-3,161** to the St. Lucie canal through **S-308** and **0 AF** to the EAA through **S-351**, **S-352**, and **S-354**. The total net inflow to the Lake was **44,645 AF** from Fisheating Creek, S-71, S-72, S-84s, S-65EX, and S-65EX1. Water conservation areas received flows of **5,704 AF**, **14,148 AF**, and **10,876 AF** at **WCA1, WCA2, and WCA3**, respectively. Everglades National Park received **4,778 AF.**
***Data missing from S-310 and L-8 from 10/20- 10/26.**

Lake Level: 12.52 (WMSZ) **Last Week**: **12.48 ft** **Last Year: 13.93 ft**

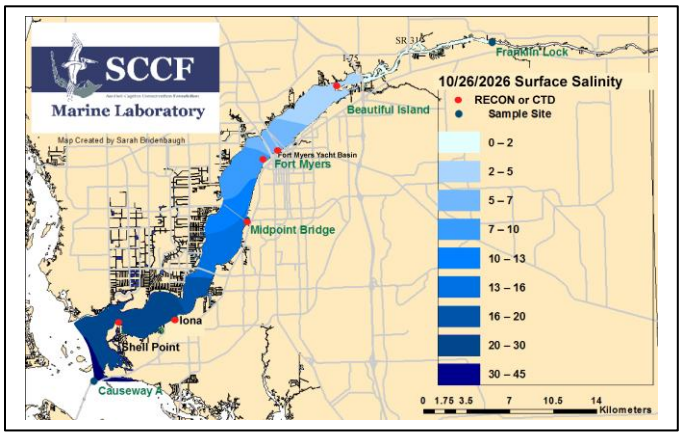
7-Day Lake Recession Rate: +0.04 ft/ wk.

Lake Okeechobee Inflow: 3,712 cfs **Lake Okeechobee Outflow: 289 cfs**

Weekly Rainfall Total: **WP Franklin: 0.00"** **Ortona: 0.10"** **Julian Keen Jr.: 0.55"**

Red Tide: Over the past week, the red tide organism, *Karenia brevis*, was observed in 12 samples collected along Florida's Gulf Coast. *K. brevis* was observed at background concentrations in 4 samples offshore of Lee County.

Cyanobacteria Status: No cyanobacteria blooms are currently being observed in the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary.



Light Penetration

Site	25% Iz	Target Values	Turbidity	Target Values
	meters		NTU	
Fort Myers	0.9	> 1	2.5	< 18
Shell Point	1.6	>2.2	2.4	< 18
Causeway	3.5	> 2.2	5.0	< 5

***25% Iz** 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 moving average surface salinity at the Fort Myers Yacht Basin was **3.7 psu, within the suitable range for tape grass**. The weekly average was 5.6 psu.

Lower Estuary Conditions: The weekly average salinity at the Shell Point RECON was **26 psu, in the optimal range** for oysters and seagrass. Diatoms were dominant and no *Karenia* cells were found in SCCF beach samples .

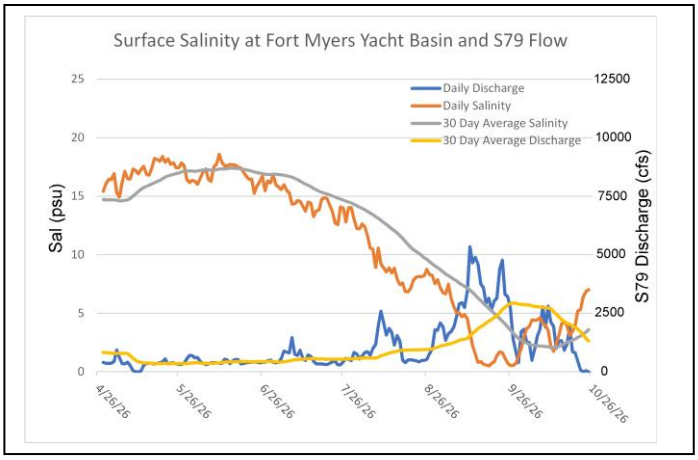
Water Quality Conditions:

Monitor Site	Salinity (psu)[a] [previous week]	Diss O_2 (mg/L)[b]	FDOM (qsde)[c]	Chlorophyll (µg/L)[d]	Temperature (°F)
Beautiful Island	0.7- 3.4 [0.3- 1.1]	5.6 -6.9	125	7.2	75.9 – 83.3
Fort Myers Yacht Basin	2.5- 9.2 [1.1 - 7.2]	6.2 -7.6	120	6.3	72.8 – 79.2
Shell Point	17 – 32 [13 – 33]	4.2-5.7	45	2.0	73.4 – 80.1
McIntyre Creek	28.7 – 32.0 [28.8 – 31.1]	3.8 – 9.9	19.8 – 32.6	1.0 – 3.3	71.7 – 79.7
Tarpon Bay	27.2 – 30.7 [26.1 – 33.6]	5.8 – 9.0	42.2 – 63.2	1.4 – 5.2	72.8 – 78.8
Wulfert Flats	---- [-----]	----	----	----	----

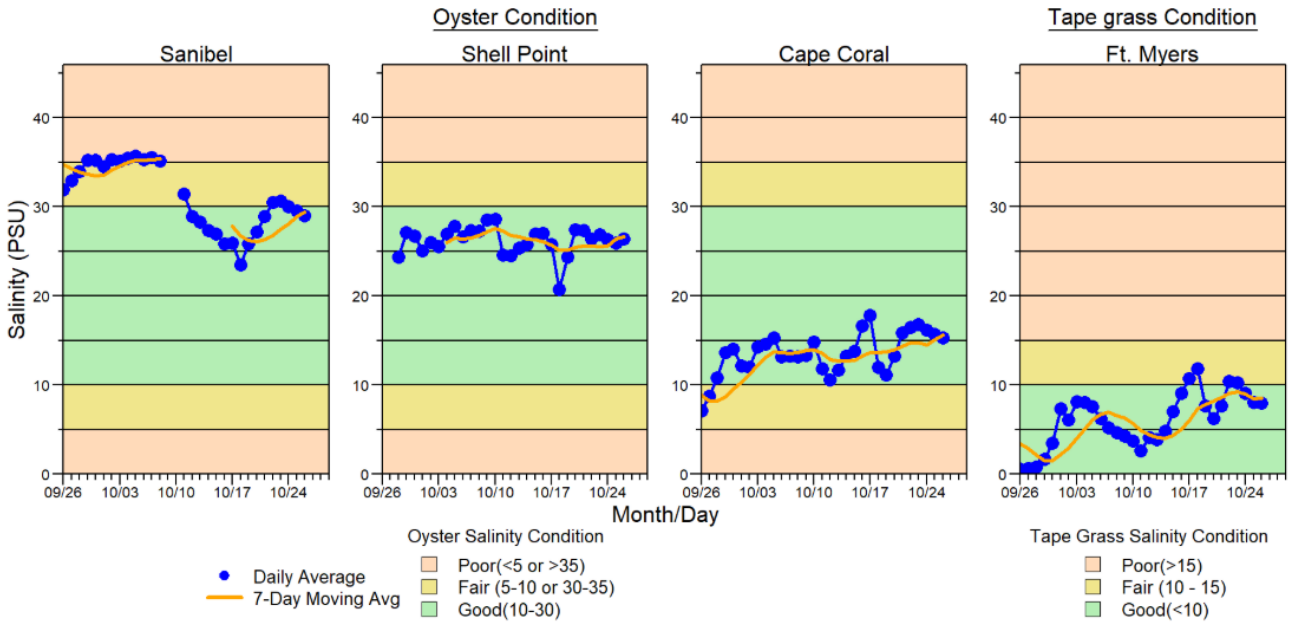
Red values are outside of the preferred range.
[a] Salinity target values: BI < 5, FM < 10, SP = 10 – 30
[b] Dissolved O_2 target values: all sites > 4
[c] FDOM target values: BI < 70, FM < 70, SP < 11
[d] Chlorophyll target values: BI < 11, FM < 11, SP < 11
[f] Temperature target values: < 90
[s] Single sonde lower and surface layer or surface grab lab measurement
ND: no data

Wildlife Impacts: In the past week, the CROW wildlife hospital on Sanibel admitted **2 patients** for suspected red tide/toxicosis: 1 adult great blue heron (still in care) and 1 adult snowy plover (deceased).

Shellfish Advisory: Shellfish harvest area #6212 (Pine Island Sound Section 1); Aquaculture Lease and Public Reef are **OPEN** by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). SHA #6222 (North Matlacha Pass) and SHA #6232 (South Matlacha Pass) are **OPEN**.



USACE Daily Reports			
Date	S79 Flow (cfs)	S78 Flow (cfs)	S77 Flow (cfs)
10/20/26	821	300	0
10/21/26	462	55	0
10/22/26	82	0	0
10/23/26	0	187	0
10/24/26	52	50	0
10/25/26	0	0	0
10/26/26	0	0	0
7-day avg	**202**	**85**	**0**



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