

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District announces an additional public scoping meeting in the Florida Keys regarding the development of the new Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM). This will be the final meeting in a series of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) public scoping meetings held throughout south Florida. After the scoping comments are analyzed, series of workshops will be announced in the future. **The public scoping comment period will be extended through Monday, April 22, 2019.**

The public is invited to provide input during a public scoping meeting on Wednesday, March 20, 2019, from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Marathon Government Center, 2798 Overseas Highway, BOCC Room (second floor), Marathon, FL 33050.

“We had excellent turnout at the public scoping meetings in Lehigh, Okeechobee, Clewiston, Stuart, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and Miami Gardens. More than 1,700 people came out to listen and provide comments on the things that are most important to them. We heard a lot of feedback regarding the priorities and concerns of people from all around the lake and south of the lake,” said Lt. Col. Jennifer Reynolds, Deputy Commander for South Florida. “We added a meeting in the Keys to ensure we have covered all the areas that might be affected by our lake and system operational decisions. It’s important to listen to the people who live, work and recreate near Florida Bay, at the south end of the system. It’s all connected.”

“When people come out to our meetings, we want to know things like, what issues are important to you? What study outcomes do you want to see? How would you measure success? What solutions would you like us to consider? These are some of the important questions we need to explore, and we want to hear your thoughts,” said Tim Gysan, Project Manager for the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual study.

The Corps is beginning preparation of a NEPA assessment for the LOSOM, which is required by Section 1106 of the 2018 Water Resource Development Act.

The purpose of this effort is to reevaluate and define operations for the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule that take into account additional

infrastructure that will soon be operational. The additional infrastructure that will be taken into consideration includes the Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation, Kissimmee River Restoration Project, as well as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir and C-44 Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area.

This effort will result in a System Operating Manual that will include a new lake regulation schedule that addresses the congressionally authorized purposes that include flood risk management; water supply for agricultural irrigation, municipalities and industry, environment, and Native American Tribes; navigation; enhancement of fish and wildlife; and recreation. The process will be informed by public workshops to set goals and objectives, develop and evaluate alternatives (operational scenarios), and NEPA to incorporate CERP projects that will be completed in the near future. Information gained during recent extreme high and low water levels and harmful algal blooms will also be considered. The intent of the new lake regulation schedule is to balance the impacts from operations and achieve multiple authorized project purposes.

Members of the public are invited to provide scoping comments, including the identification of issues with the current regulation schedule for Lake Okeechobee, what aspects need to be changed, and how those issues and changes should be implemented and evaluated.

All comments will be summarized, addressed, and used to inform the LOSOM.

Members of the public are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the water control plan from 2008. It is available for reference at: <https://usace.contentdm.oclc.org/utis/getfile/collection/p16021coll7/id/8423> and on the LOSOM web page at: www.saj.usace.army.mil/LOSOM.

Public Scoping Comments

The Corps believes this effort will benefit significantly from public involvement and encourages participation in the NEPA scoping process. We welcome your

views, comments, concerns, suggestions and solutions. Scoping comments may be provided during public meetings, via email or by mail.

The public comment period has been extended through Monday, April 22, 2019.

Submit comments by email: LakeOComments@usace.army.mil

Submit comments by mail:

Dr. Ann Hodgson
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville District
P.O. Box 4970
Jacksonville, FL 32232-0019

“Scoping” is the step in the NEPA process when the public is invited to participate in identifying issues, alternatives, and potentially significant effects to be considered in the analysis. This helps the Corps identify and eliminate any issues that are not significant or that have been covered by prior environmental review.

The Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) is a component of the Central & Southern Florida (C&SF) System Operating Plan.

Authority: Section 1106 of the 2018 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) directs “The Secretary shall expedite completion of the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule to coincide with completion of the Herbert Hoover Dike project, and may include all relevant aspects of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan described in section 601 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000 (114 Stat. 2680).”

Information will be available at the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) web page: www.saj.usace.army.mil/LOSOM and on social media on the Jacksonville District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/JacksonvilleDistrict/> and on Twitter @JaxStrong.