



AGENDA MEMORANDUM

*Natural Resources
Department*

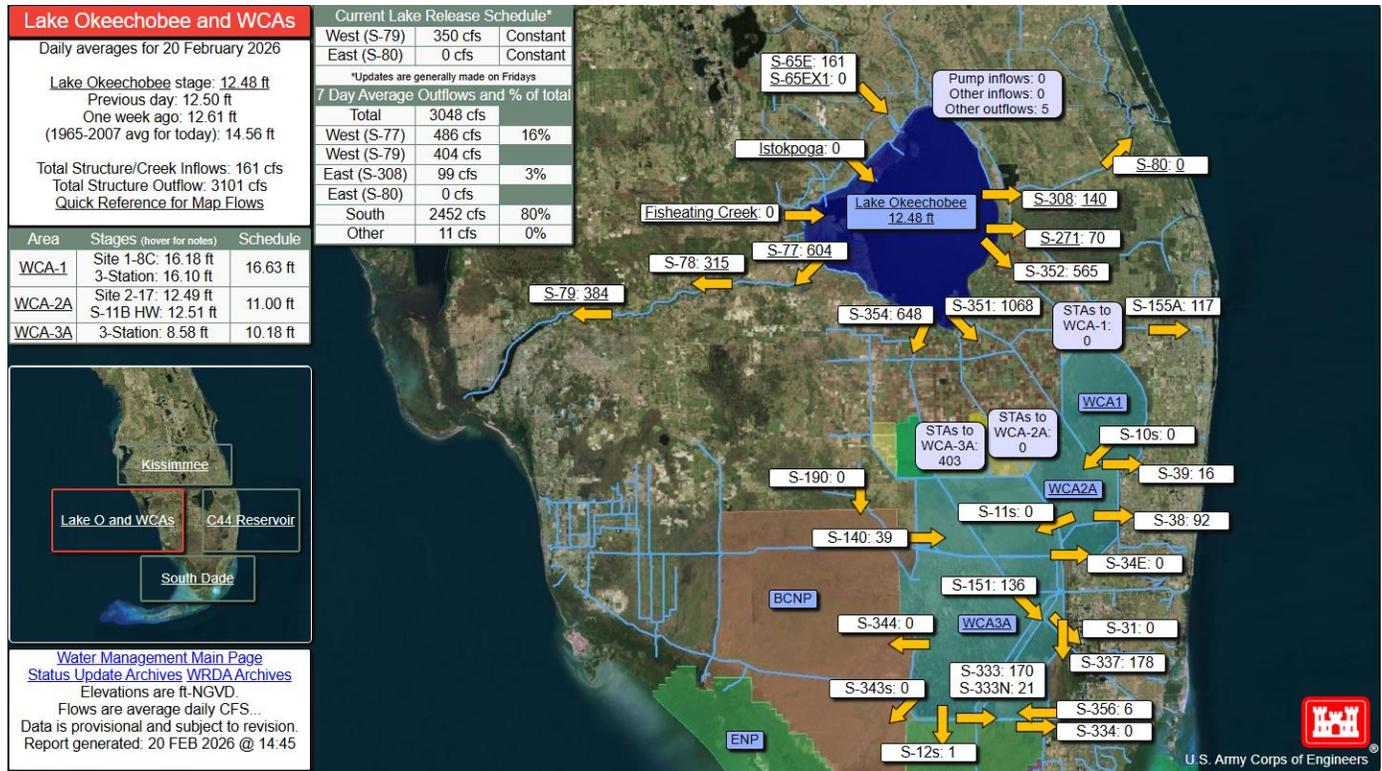
City Council Regular Meeting Date: **March 3, 2026**

To: City Council
From: Holly Milbrandt, Natural Resources Director
Date: February 20, 2026

SUBJECT: Natural Resources Water Quality Updates

BACKGROUND:

CALOOSA HATCHEE RIVER & ESTUARY CONDITIONS REPORT



Click to view: [February 10, 2026 Caloosahatchee Conditions Report](#)

CURRENT RAINFALL AND CLIMATE OUTLOOK

SFWMD rainfall for February 2026 to date is below normal at 0.29" (21% of normal). Areas north and west of Lake Okeechobee have received the most rainfall in the SFWMD but still well below normal.

<https://www.sfwmd.gov/weather-radar/rainboard>

For the 2025/2026 dry season to date (October 11, 2025-February 19, 2026), the SFWMD has received 3.67" of rain (34% of normal). Rainfall varied some across the District, with the Upper Kissimmee and regions along the east coast and the FL Keys being slightly wetter (40-53% of normal).

<https://www.sfwmd.gov/weather-radar/rainboard>

The NOAA Climate Prediction Center one-month Probability Outlook for March 2026 indicates a 40-50% chance of below normal rainfall for most of peninsular Florida and a 33-40% chance of below normal rainfall for the southernmost tip.

https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/long_range/lead14/

The three-month outlook for Mar-Apr-May 2026 indicates equal chances of above normal, below normal, and normal rainfall; while the Apr-May-Jun 2026 outlook shows a 33-40% chance of above normal rainfall.

https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/long_range/lead01/off01_prpcp.gif

NOAA ENSO Report (updated on 2/17/2026):

- La Niña is present.
- Equatorial sea surface temperatures (SSTs) are below average across the east-central and eastern Pacific Ocean.
- A transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral is expected in February-April 2026 (60% chance), with ENSO-neutral likely persisting through the Northern Hemisphere summer (56% chance in June-August 2026).

https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/lanina/enso_evolution-status-fcsts-web.pdf

ALGAE BLOOMS

Red Tide: FWC Update for February 20, 2026

<https://myfwc.com/research/redtide/statewide/>

Over the past week, the red tide organism, *Karenia brevis*, was observed in six samples from Northwest Florida and one sample each from Southwest Florida (Monroe County) and Florida's East Coast. Bloom concentrations (>100,000 cells/liter) were not observed.

Fish kills & respiratory irritation suspected to be related to red tide were not reported.

Sanibel is and shall remain a barrier island sanctuary



Blue-Green Algae: [ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov](https://www.protectingfloridatogether.gov)

On 2/17/2026, blue green algae cautions were in effect for the Caloosahatchee River-Sebastian Canal, Caloosahatchee River-Caloosahatchee Drive Canal, and for C43 Canal – S77, along with the S354 and Pahokee Marina stations in Lake Okeechobee.

Red Drift Algae: Since early October, periodic deposits of red drift algae have been reported on Sanibel's beaches in association with winds and cold fronts. The location of deposits is unpredictable, and they can range from light to heavy and be short-lived or persist for days/weeks. Beach patrol reports from Officer Royka noted algae deposits on most dates in February.



Lighthouse Beach Park 2/16/2026



Silver Key/Clam Bayou 2/20/2026

Trichodesmium: No reports

Sargassum: No reports

PAST MEETING HIGHLIGHTS & UPDATES

41st Annual Everglades Coalition Conference

Everglades Strong: All In for Restoration

January 28-30, 2026

Naples, FL

<https://www.evergladescoalition.org/conference>

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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

February 4 & 5, 2026

8:30 AM

Tallahassee, FL

<https://myfwc.com/about/commission/commission-meetings/february-2026/>

- FWC commissioners approved adding two species to the state's endangered and threatened species list including the Wilson's plover and the blackbanded sunfish. The Wilson's plover is a shorebird that nests across Florida's Atlantic and Gulf coasts but has seen a 30% reduction in population in the past decade with fewer than 1,000 adults remaining. Wilson's plovers last nested on Sanibel in 2021 near the western end of Bowman's Beach.

SFWMD Governing Board Meeting

February 12, 2026

9:00 AM

West Palm Beach, FL

<https://www.sfwmd.gov/news-events/meetings>

- SCCF Public Comment (letter attached to agenda) regarding extended low flows the Caloosahatchee
- Approved contract for benthic habitat and substrate mapping of the Northern estuaries
 - This supports the RECOVER assessment of the Northern Estuaries by providing consistent, repeatable surveys of oyster resources and benthic substrates within each system to determine if CERP Interim Goals are being met, or likely to be met.
- Presentation: Preparations for Water Shortages and Low Lake Okeechobee Levels
 - https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/3916247/26_Maran_Virgil_Water_Shortage_Low_Lake_Levels.pdf
- Technical Report
 - https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/3916306/27_Mitnik_Armstrong_Water_Eco_Combined_Feb_2026_Draft.pdf

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force

TBD, February 2026

St. Petersburg, FL

<https://myfwc.com/research/redtide/taskforce/meeting/>

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C&SF Water Management: Local Engagement and Collaboration - Seasonal Assessment Point – Mid-Dry Season

March 3, 2026

9:30 AM-1:30 PM

Virtual

As part of the Lake Okeechobee System Operations Manual (LOSOM) implementation and to continue the model of seasonal assessments in the Combined Operations Plan (COP), the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) system operating agencies, will be hosting a Seasonal Assessment Point on Tuesday Feb 24th, 2025. The Seasonal Assessment Point will cover both the northern and southern regions of the C&SF system with the intent to identify the desired outcomes for the remainder of the 2025/26 dry season. A part of the workshop will be focused on a review of the system-wide conditions over the past several seasons (a look back) and climate projections (a look forward). The workshop discussion will help assess operational goals and strategies for the dry season across the south Florida system – which in turn will set the trajectory that can be reviewed at each subsequent monthly meeting for the north and south regions. Each stakeholder will have an opportunity to provide data, assessments, and desired outcomes/goals for the dry season – which can be provided in writing or verbally during the meeting.

SFWMD 2026 Open House for South Florida Environmental Report

March 4 & 5, 2026

1:00 PM

West Palm Beach, FL

<https://www.sfwmd.gov/news-events/meetings>

Draft Report: <https://www.sfwmd.gov/science-data/scientific-publications-sfer>

SFWMD Governing Board Meeting

March 5, 2026

9:00 AM

West Palm Beach, FL

<https://www.sfwmd.gov/news-events/meetings>

SFWMD Governing Board Meeting

April 9, 2026

9:00 AM

West Palm Beach, FL

<https://www.sfwmd.gov/news-events/meetings>

CHNEP Technical Advisory Committee

April 9, 2026

9:30 AM

Port Charlotte, FL

<https://www.chnep.org/technical-advisory-committee>

FUNDING SOURCE: N/A

RECOMMENDED ACTION: N/A

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