



City of Sanibel

800 Dunlop Road
Sanibel, Florida 33957-4096

www.mysanibel.com

AREA CODE – 239

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CENTER4LIFE	472-5743

November 17, 2022

Colonel James L. Booth
Jacksonville District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Boulevard
Jacksonville, FL 32207
Email: James.L.Booth@usace.army.mil

Colonel Booth,

On behalf of the Sanibel City Council and the citizens of Sanibel, I want to sincerely thank you for participating in this week’s Lake Okeechobee periodic scientists call and then taking the time to visit Sanibel to witness first-hand the impacts of the current red tide bloom on Sanibel. We know it is certainly within your purview to simply make a Lake Okeechobee release decision in accordance with the regulation schedule and move on. The fact that you identified a need to better understand the concerns expressed by the Caloosahatchee stakeholders and reached out to City staff to request an opportunity to see the conditions for yourself gives us great confidence that under your leadership the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has a sincere desire to manage Lake Okeechobee in a manner which is equitable for all stakeholders and takes into consideration the significant impacts those decisions can have on our economy, ecology, and our way of life on Sanibel and throughout southwest Florida. We know this is an extremely difficult task and that conditions can and do change rapidly.

As you were able to witness, Sanibel’s beaches are currently littered with dead mullet, snapper, baitfish, and other marine life and respiratory irritation from the aerosolized toxin ranges from noticeable to severe. Although a red tide bloom was detected in the Gulf of Mexico just after Hurricane Ian, Sanibel’s beaches remained unimpacted until the passage of Hurricane Nicole on Thursday November 10 and her associated onshore winds. By Friday, November 11, dead fish were present along nearly all of Sanibel’s shoreline. Water samples collected on Sanibel’s beaches by the SCCF Marine Lab on Monday November 12, revealed high concentrations of the red tide organism.

While we know that red tide is not caused by Lake O releases, recent peer-reviewed science has confirmed that these releases and watershed runoff from Hurricane Ian can certainly fuel the intensity and duration of an active bloom. We urge you to consider this in making your short-term release decisions. With repairs to the Herbert Hoover Dike nearly complete, forecasts for a drier than normal dry season, and watershed flows to the Caloosahatchee at or above the upper end of the optimal range, we would suggest that there is an opportunity to proceed with caution to minimize the risk of exacerbating the current bloom. While our recommendations are most often focused on flows to maintain appropriate salinities in the Caloosahatchee, this is always done recognizing that the tradeoff with nutrient loading presents additional challenges and risks.

Again, thank you for the time you afforded Director Milbrandt and myself. We appreciate your responsiveness, open communication, and genuine desire to understand how this complex system works, both from an engineering and an ecological perspective. While we do hope the current red tide bloom will disappear quickly, in the meantime, we thank you for considering all options to minimize further impact to our community as we continue down the long road of hurricane Ian recovery.

With sincere thanks,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Holly D. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Holly" being more prominent.

Mayor Holly D. Smith

Cc: Sanibel City Council
Dana Souza, City Manager
John Agnew, City Attorney
Scotty Lynn Kelly, City Clerk
Holly Milbrandt, Natural Resources Director