

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0918

June 20, 2018

COL Jason A. Kirk
District Commander
Jacksonville District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Boulevard
Jacksonville, FL 32207

Dear Colonel Kirk:

As you know, the water laden with algae that you are releasing into our community has now tested positive for toxins. The water management decisions made by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) have life or death consequences for our community.

Our residents deserve answers as to why the health and safety of the citizens of the Treasure Coast is viewed as a lower priority than other factors that the USACE considers when making decisions regarding discharges.

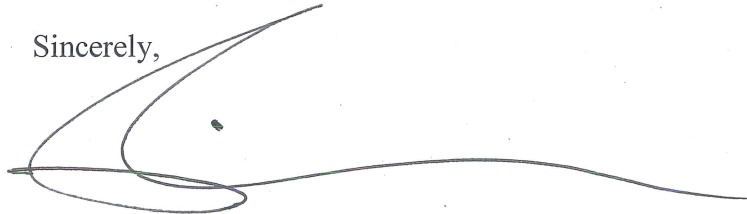
Therefore, I am writing to formally request written answers to the following questions:

1. At what point, if any, is water flowing from Lake Okeechobee via the S-308 too polluted, dirty, or toxic to send into the St. Lucie River? What is the decision making process, if any, by the USACE for deciding if water is too dirty, toxic or polluted to send to the St. Lucie River?
2. What law or laws set the operational priorities for the USACE in operating the Central and Southern Florida Project? Is health and human safety one of the priorities of the operation of the Central and Southern Florida Project? If so, explain how discharging toxic algae into the St. Lucie River is compliant with the mandate of protecting health and human safety. Please include specific legal citations to the document or documents setting the priorities for the Central and Southern Florida Project.
3. From May 14, 2018 to today, how much water has flowed into Lake Okeechobee from south of Lake Okeechobee via the S310 and C-10A? How much water has been discharged into the St. Lucie from May 14, 2018 to today? Please provide your answer in gallons and acre-feet.
4. What decision-making process was undertaken for adding water to an already rising Lake Okeechobee from South of the lake, when discharges were imminent? What agency, state or federal, has the ultimate authority to approve or deny these water diversions into the rising Lake Okeechobee from the canals connecting to the S-310 and C-10A?

5. What percentage of the water flowing into Lake Okeechobee via the S-310 and C-10A primarily come from drainage to agricultural fields? Is the water quality sampled and measured before it is back flowed via these structures into Lake Okeechobee?
6. Why is water still flowing into Lake Okeechobee today via the C-10A while algae-filled water is being discharged to the St. Lucie River?
7. In the last year, how much water went south from the S-351, S-352, S-354, and C-10A for agricultural irrigation in the EAA? How much water went south from the S-351, S-352, S-354, and C-10A directly to the stormwater treatment areas?
8. In 2017, in the wake of Hurricane Irma, water was backpumped into Lake Okeechobee from south of the lake as discharges were occurring and the lake was rising quickly. Why would the USACE discharge to make the Herbert Hoover Dike less likely to breach while simultaneously backpumping, making the Herbert Hoover Dike more likely to breach? How much water was backpumped and discharged simultaneously in 2017?
9. How do operations of Lake Okeechobee change when the USACE discovers or is told about a blue-green algae bloom on the lake? Does the USACE warn county health departments, local officials, or residents in the surrounding communities?
10. How frequently does the USACE test algae blooms for toxicity? How does the USACE communicate the results of tests to the public and stakeholders? Does the USACE warn residents when discharging algae? Does the USACE keep records of when discharges of toxic algae occur?
11. Does the USACE coordinate with other federal agencies when algae blooms occur to help ensure the safety of the public? If not, why? If so, how? Please provide examples of past coordination with federal agencies during algae-bloom discharges warning residents of health and safety hazards.

As this is an ongoing emergency and human health crisis, I appreciate your immediate attention to this issue and answers prior to your scheduled meeting in Stuart, Florida on June 28, 2018.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Mast', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brian Mast
Member of Congress