Why Blame the Corps? by Nathaniel Reed

Billions of gallons of polluted water are flowing into the St. Lucie River, the Indian River and the Caloosahatchee Estuary from Lake Okeechobee.

The environmental damage is massive.

Every time a wet event hits Florida, such as the hurricanes of 2004-5, or simply several non-tropical thunderstorms such as last October, the lake rises very rapidly 3-4 feet within days - threatening the Hoover Dike and the communities south of the lake.

The Corps has no options. They must reduce the water level in the lake in case of another wet hurricane, common even in October like Hurricanes Wilma and Isaac.

The Corps has no options because after wet and deadly hurricanes early last century, at the request of the state, the Corps of Engineers studied the average size of the lake and designed a dike to surround it. The Corps also made a fateful engineering decision to cut off the natural flow way from the lake to the downstream everglades and dump it more ‘efficiently’ to the east and west estuaries.

That decision was made more than 60 years ago and decades of money was spent to build that water management dream of the day. Today, this system is disastrously outdated and it is our turn to rebuild it to meet modern needs.

This is an outline of what needs to be accomplished IF periodic massive drainage into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee is to be ended:

A)    Far more storage must be constructed north of the lake to prevent high levels in the first place, and far more land must be acquired south of the lake to allow water storage and cleansing so the estuary dumps can be safely redirected to the everglades and away from the estuaries.

B)    Before any southward redirection can be done, the following must occur:

1)   A five mile bridge must be built on the Tamiami Trail to let the huge water flows released from the lake enter the traditional flow ways in the park.

2)  The eastern dike in Water Conservation Area 3B (WCA3B) must be strengthened to prevent leakage or the area can never be used as it was supposed to be used.

3) The barriers between WCA3A and 3B must be broken, removed, pierced - whatever term is most accurate and cost effective.

1. Farms and cities everywhere must clean their pollution before they release water to any of our incredibly valuable waterways.

If the state and the federal government don’t embark on a plan that is far more expensive than what we can afford as a state, then the almost too regular discharge of billions of gallons of polluted water will haunt us long into the future.

These are tall orders, but think for a moment before we continue to rail against the Corps’ decision to lower Lake Okeechobee to protect the integrity of the Hoover Dike.

The governor’s reduction in the ability of the SFWMD to pay for much more than operating costs does not help.

Everything on my ‘must do list’ represents one week of the Afghanistan war expenses.

Everything on my ‘wish list’ is obtainable.

Our congressional delegation has significant power in the Congress. Our Governor and the Florida Commissioner of Agriculture are very persuasive with our legislature even in times of recession.

Despite the need to reduce the incredible national deficit, don’t you think manmade disasters like what is threatening our rivers and the everglades ecosystem are worthy of national and state investments?

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For a more detailed history, please visit <http://nathanielpreed.blogspot.com/>. Mr. Reed served as the Environmental Advisor to Governors Kirk and Askew, as Assistant Secretary of Interior for Fish, Wildlife and National Parks under President Nixon and Ford, served 14 years on the Board of the South Florida Water Management District, Chaired the Commission on Florida’s Environmental Future whose principal recommendation was the issuance of a series of bond issues that have been supported by successive governors before Governor Scott and have preserved more than 2 million acres of ‘the best of native Florida’. Mr. Reed is presently serving as Vice Chairman of the Everglades Foundation.