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104 West Jefferson Street, Tallahassee, FL 32301-1713 • 850.224.3427

July 11, 2016

Ms. Gracia Szczech, Regional Administrator
FEMA Region IV
Federal Emergency Management Agency
3003 Chamblee Tucker Road
Atlanta, GA 30341

Subject: Request for Federal Emergency Declaration/Discharges from Lake Okeechobee

Dear Ms. Szczech:

On behalf of Florida's 67 counties, and the hundreds of local cities, towns, and villages that constitute the membership of Florida's regional planning councils, I am writing to express the Florida Regional Councils Association's (FRCA) support of Florida Governor Rick Scott's recent request of President Obama to declare a federal emergency in Florida to eliminate the imminent threat to the public health and safety caused by the discharge of water from Lake Okeechobee.

As outlined in Governor Scott's letter of July 6, 2016, these discharges by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have caused devastating algal blooms in the St. Lucie Estuary, Indian River Lagoon, and Lake Worth Lagoon to the east; and there are serious concerns of similar outbreaks in the Caloosahatchee River and its associated water bodies and estuaries to the west. Toxic algal blooms may be linked to severe respiratory problems and skin irritations, among other symptoms, and have resulted in the closure of several public beaches, marinas, and local businesses. Our members consider this issue of such importance, the statewide Policy Board of FRCA approved a resolution urging President Obama to declare a federal emergency declaration under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. The resolution, a copy of which is attached hereto, was passed on July 11, 2016 after recognizing that past and current efforts to address the impacts have been insufficient, and that the continuing degradation of the ecosystem creates an immediate crisis.

In light of these concerns, and given the role and authority of the federal government to appropriately address this issue, we urge you to act favorably on Governor Rick Scott's request that these areas be subject to a federal emergency.

Ms. Gracia Szczech
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Barbara Sheen-Todd". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Barbara Sheen-Todd, President
Florida Regional Councils Association

Attachment

cc: President Barack Obama
Governor Rick Scott
Senator Bill Nelson
Senator Marco Rubio
Congressman Patrick Murphy
Treasure Coast Legislative Delegation
Treasure Coast Regional League of Cities
Treasure Coast Council of Local Governments
National Estuary Program – Indian River Lagoon Council
Florida Regional Councils Association

RESOLUTION OF THE FLORIDA REGIONAL COUNCILS ASSOCIATION

A RESOLUTION OF THE FLORIDA REGIONAL COUNCILS ASSOCIATION RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR SWIFT FEDERAL EMERGENCY ACTION REGARDING NUTRIENT OVERENRICHMENT IN AND AROUND THE INDIAN RIVER LAGOON AND OTHER AFFECTED WATER BODIES, LAGOONS AND ESTUARIES, RESULTING IN TOXIC ALGAL BLOOMS THAT ENDANGER PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY, FISH AND WILDLIFE POPULATIONS, AND SENSITIVE SEAGRASS AND WETLAND AREAS CAUSING SUBSTANTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS THE RESPONSE TO WHICH IS BEYOND THE PRESENTLY AVAILABLE CAPABILITIES OF THE STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS SUCH THAT FEDERAL ASSISTANCE IS NECESSARY.

WHEREAS, the State of Florida is a diverse state, now ranking as the 3rd largest state in the Nation and a leader in providing a high quality of life; and

WHEREAS, the State of Florida is experiencing an environmental catastrophe in and around the Indian River Lagoon, Lake Okeechobee and other affected water bodies, lagoons and estuaries, and needs immediate and decisive action from response partners and agencies to assist with mitigation, solutions, support and recovery; and

WHEREAS, over the course of Florida's history, human activity has caused the runoff of nutrients into the Indian River Lagoon and other affected watersheds from a number of sources; and

WHEREAS, Lake Okeechobee is the largest freshwater lake in Florida and the second largest freshwater lake contained entirely within the contiguous 48 states; and

WHEREAS, because the Atlantic Hurricane Season officially began on June 1, 2016, and will end on November 30, 2016, the likelihood of these discharges is increased; and

WHEREAS, past and current efforts to minimize nutrient runoff and address the impacts of nutrient runoff have been insufficient, resulting in the continuing degradation of the ecosystem and the current immediate crisis; and

WHEREAS, success in reversing this devastating trend will require the support and cooperation of the federal and state governments, along with supporting agencies and groups; and


WHEREAS, The Florida Regional Councils Association (FRCA) is a statewide organization of the State of Florida's ten Regional Planning Councils (RPCs) tasked, as one of their main objectives, with supporting state, regional and local governments in preparing for and responding to emergencies and natural disasters within Florida; and

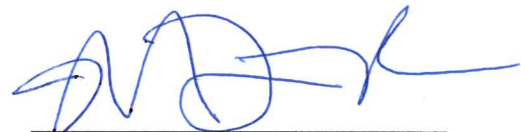
WHEREAS, in order to continue supporting solid regional planning efforts and emergency and natural disaster responses, FRCA and its constituent RPCs stand with state, regional and local government and offers our expertise, support and readiness to address this current crisis, considering that the situation is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the currently available capabilities of state and local governments; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE FLORIDA REGIONAL COUNCILS ASSOCIATION RESPECTFULLY REQUEST THAT PRESIDENT OBAMA:

1. Provide an immediate Emergency Disaster Declaration on the affected water bodies-to be accompanied by assistance from FEMA and USDA, in addition to the announcement of emergency SBA loans;
2. Request an immediate review of the current Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS) which was last revised in 2008;
3. Request and provide better State, Federal and associated outside agencies coordination on issues related to the management of Lake Okeechobee, including the Herbert Hoover Dike repairs and water basin and human development planning and coordination; and
4. Request and provide Everglades restoration funding and the fast tracking of high impact Everglades' projects in both construction and planning phases.

DULY ADOPTED by the Florida Regional Councils Association this 8th day of July 2016.


Barbara Sheen-Todd, TBRPC
President


Michael J. Busha, TCRPC
Chairman

Press Release

July 11, 2016

Tampa – The Florida Regional Councils Association (FRCA), at its July 8, 2016 annual meeting, adopted a statewide resolution in support of Governor Scott's request for a federal emergency declaration and emergency actions to mitigate the current environmental and economic crisis caused by ongoing emergency releases from Lake Okeechobee. St. Lucie County Commissioner and 2nd Vice President of the Florida Regional Councils Association, the Honorable Tod Mowery, who drafted the resolution stated:

Over the years, Florida's regional planning councils made their mark on Florida's landscape by helping to equip and prepare its counties and cities for future economic and natural resource needs and emergency management preparedness concerns. As regional planning councils, we are positioned to quickly and professionally respond to this current state crisis and know that a strategic, determined, swift and collective approach must be used. We are committed to helping and supporting our State and local member governments, and thus this Resolution is a symbol of our message to protect our residents, the environment and the economy.

FRCA consist of 10 regional planning councils statewide whose membership covers all 67 counties and the hundreds of incorporated cities, towns, and villages from around Florida. FRCA authorized each of its regional planning councils to stand with its local governments and all involved state, local, and regional agencies to offer any and all assistance to help unify support statewide for addressing the current ecological and economic crisis and to move forward with future long-term solutions.