



Key Messages for September 4, 2008 Media Conference Call

- In the aftermath of Tropical Storm Fay, Lake Okeechobee has quickly risen over two feet in the last several weeks.
- Because there is nowhere to store additional water that continues to accumulate in the lake, public safety is threatened, the health of our waterways and estuaries is in jeopardy and the resulting economic losses would be significant.
- If the storms heading in our direction result in additional rainfall over Lake Okeechobee, the Kissimmee River and other tributaries that feed the lake, the Corps will be forced to accelerate harmful releases of polluted water into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers, creating a disastrous situation much like we last experienced in 2004-05.
- This is precisely why Governor Crist's proposal to purchase the US Sugar lands south of Lake Okeechobee is so critical.
- By storing excess water south of the lake on former sugar cane fields, we can protect the lake communities from massive flooding threats resulting from a breach of the dike surrounding the Lake and minimize the risk of harmful releases into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers.
- When water from Lake Okeechobee is released into these two estuaries, the ecosystem is severely damaged, algae blooms erupt and the economic impact is devastating: fishing, boating and tourism industries suffer, real estate values drop and coastal communities lose millions of dollars in lost revenues.
- Without the US Sugar acquisition, there would be virtually no way to prevent these harmful lake water releases from occurring every time we have an especially heavy "wet" season.
- These storms serve as a wake-up call across this state. We must close the deal on the US Sugar land acquisition and accelerate the restoration process.
- Failure to acquire these much-needed lands and begin the restoration process will continue to put the residents of the lakeside communities at risk, jeopardize the health of our rivers and estuaries and cause untold economic harm to our already weakened economy.