

Guest Opinion for News Press
Regarding Army Corps of Engineers Public Input
last Thursday, September 14 in Ft. Myers

In the popular Broadway musical, "The Music Man", Professor Harold Hill comes to town warning the residents that "Ya got trouble right here in River City." We can certainly echo that statement in our own river city of Fort Myers as it relates to the Caloosahatchee. Last October, the Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association/Riverwatch nominated the river as one of America's Ten Most Endangered Rivers. The Caloosahatchee made the list with a ranking of seventh in the nation. By achieving such a "distinction," it was hoped that the river's plight would alert the public policy makers to the problems of the river and subsequently, be a catalyst for change. The policy makers involved, most notably the South Florida Water Management District and the Army Corps of Engineers, have not been able to correct the problem and their proposed alternative will not solve but exacerbate it. As a result, we have experienced a minimum of five toxic algae blooms this summer, causing health problems to local residents and tourists alike, a ban on local shellfish consumption, and a decrease in the tourism industry, which directly impacts on the local economy. The river's problems affect not only Lee County, but Hendry and Glades counties as well.

The Army Corps of Engineers has been sponsoring a number of public meetings around the state to receive public input regarding their Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Study (LORSS), which will be implemented in January 2007. The period for public comments began August 18th and will extend until October 2nd. For those not familiar with the process, this schedule will detail the amount of water discharges released from Lake Okeechobee during the year and will vary according to the wet and dry seasons. Currently, the schedule that is being followed has increased the nutrient pollutants being discharged from the lake, thereby increasing algal blooms.

At last week's public meeting, over 200 concerned citizens attended and gave their comments after the Corps' presentation of their revised water release schedule. While this new schedule did address some concerns, many issues remained unanswered. The focus was centered on water releases but the proposed schedule neglected the fundamental concerns of water quality and treatment of water runoff. The modeling used as a basis for this schedule was derived from data taken during years of drought and does not take into consideration the volume of water that is needed for storage during the wet years. To avoid further damage to our estuaries, any future disbursement of water should be directed to the south of Lake Okeechobee and to the north, but not to the west. All these problems would be addressed if the Army Corps would incorporate sufficient water storage into their plan. Without this additional storage, the critical issues will not be addressed and the existing water problems will continue in the future.

Make your voice be heard. Speak out for the river before it is too late. The Caloosahatchee has no voice but you do! You can still submit your comments by email at **publicmail.cesaj-cc@saj02.usace.army.mil** or call Pete Milam, Project Manager at 904-232-3432. You can also send written comments to him: Pete Milam, Project Manager, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 701 San Marco Blvd., Jacksonville, FL 32207. When you send your comments, please send a copy to the Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association /Riverwatch at crca.caloosahatchee.org or mail us a copy at P.O. Box 1165, Ft. Myers, FL 33902-1165. We would like to post these comments on our website. Yes, we have trouble right here in River City but the problem can be addressed by storage, storage, storage!

Submitted by Marti Daltry, President, Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association/Riverwatch. The website for C.R.C.A. is www.crca.caloosahatchee.org.