

Board of County Commissioners

Okeechobee County



304 NW Second Street – Room 123, Okeechobee, FL 34973
Phone: 863-763-6441 Ext.1 or Fax: 863-763-0118

August 7, 2023

Mr. Drew Bartlett
Executive Director
South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33406

Re: Okeechobee County's Opposition to the South Florida Water Management District's Proposed Lower Kissimmee Basin Stormwater Treatment Area (LKBSTA) Project

Dear Mr. Bartlett:

On behalf of the Okeechobee County Board of County Commissioners, I am writing to formally notify the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) of the County Commission's strong opposition to the design and construction of the District's proposed Lower Kissimmee Basin Stormwater Treatment Area (LKBSTA) Project, which would include the proposed expansion of this project to include the adjacent property that is either owned and/or controlled/managed by HGS, LLC d.b.a. RES Environmental Operating Company (RES property).

Our Commission is an advocate and strong supporter of the need for STA's within our region to reduce nutrient discharges prior to entering Lake Okeechobee. However, together, we must be concerned and respectful of the negative impacts that these types of facilities bring to our communities and develop/identify opportunities to improve the environmental issues that we are challenged with today without placing a significant impact on our homeowners and property owners.

Although the County and surrounding areas within our region are faced with significant drainage and stormwater treatment issues, the Okeechobee Board of County Commissioners are not in support of the proposed LKBSTA Project due to reasons that would impact the safety and the quality of life for our citizens within our County, including:

The proposed project is expected to result in significant flooding concerns for the surrounding residential communities in Okeechobee. Thus, our residents and property owners would be faced with a reduction in their property valuation while also being challenged with a cost increase in their homeowner's insurance rates (above the significant increases that we are already seeing within our County and throughout the state of Florida before this project is constructed).

[1028-00033367.1ADMIN]

David Hazellief
District 1

Frank DeCarlo
District 2

Bradley G. Goodbread
District 3

Terry Burroughs
District 4

Kelly Owens
District 5

Our homes are one of our greatest investments and the safety and cost impacts that this project would create are valid to real concerns/fears for our homeowners in this area. This project would increase the risk of our property owners having to pay more for homeowner's insurance (with the possibility of losing their insurance entirely due to the inherent flooding that will occur from this project) or losing their home due to flooding.

To date, this project has progressed through the District's design stage without notice to the public nor the acceptance of comments/suggestions from the community. Our residents, businesses and stakeholders should have the opportunity to voice their thoughts and/or concerns on this significant infrastructure project during the conceptual (or feasibility) stage.

The project is expected to have significant costs, which would require significant tax-payer funding support to not only design and construct this proposed facility, but it would also require an amount of annual funding to support the operations, maintenance and staffing for this project.

Thus, the total cost of this project is not justified by the projected nutrient load that is expected to be removed from our waterways (13 to 15 metric tons of phosphorus per year depending on design). *[There are better options as identified below that are available today that do not threaten the safety of our community's homes and are not nearly as financially taxing to our residents and businesses].*

Unanimously, the Okeechobee County Board of County Commissioners, on behalf of the citizens of Okeechobee County, is urging the SFWMD Governing Board as well as the District's executive leadership to reconsider this project due to the many safety concerns and cost impacts that it will have within our community.

Further, the Board is requesting the District to strongly consider other options/locations to build this type of stormwater treatment area (STA) project, including north of the State Road (SR) 60 or in the northern portion of the County on the +/- 40,000 acres of land where several government agencies maintain ownership and/or flowage easements (Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park).

Thus, the County Commission is requesting the SFWMD's Governing Board to vote against any request to proceed with this project in its current location during your upcoming discussion and consideration of the inclusion and/or expansion of the project to include the RES property into the District's larger project. Additionally, we are requesting the Governing Board to vote against moving the entire project from the design stage to the implementation stage.

Should you have any questions and/or require additional information regarding our County's position on this project, please do not hesitate to contact either myself or Ms. Deborah Manzo, County Administrator at 561.763.6441 (Option #1).

Page 3
August 7, 2023

Thank you in advance for your support of the need to find better solutions (and locations) to this important environmental issue while also protecting the safety of our community's homes and citizens' quality of life.

Respectfully submitted,



David Hazellief, Chairman
Board of County Commissioners

cc: Okeechobee County Board of County Commissioners
The Honorable Benjamin Butler – Okeechobee County Area Representative - South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board
The Honorable Charlette Roman – Okeechobee County Area Representative - South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board
The Honorable Chauncey Goss – Chairman – South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board
The Honorable Scott Wagner– Vice-Chairman – South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board
The Honorable Members of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board

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