

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0918**

April 7, 2021

Colonel Andrew Kelly  
Jacksonville District Commander  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
701 San Marco Boulevard  
Jacksonville, FL 32207

Dear Colonel Kelly,

Since March 6, 2021, the Army Corps has been discharging water from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie. During a call with the media on March 25, 2021, you said that releases to the St. Lucie would be continuing “indefinitely.”

These releases are already having an impact on the health of the fragile ecosystem in the St. Lucie. There have been reports of the lake water impacting the estuary’s salinity and damaging oyster beds, which as you know, is a key indicator that the health of the estuary is declining.

Additionally, as we move towards summer, the warming temperatures increase the likelihood of toxic algal blooms on Lake Okeechobee. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has stated that water containing microcystin over 8 parts per billion as a result of these algal blooms is unsafe for human contact. According to the EPA, potential risks to human health including liver failure, kidney damage, pneumonia and even death. As a result, in Congressional testimony on July 10, 2019, Major General Scott Spellmon was forced to acknowledge that the Army Corps had knowingly discharged toxic water into densely populated areas of Florida.

Therefore, in response to your statement that discharges will continue “indefinitely,” my question is this: if the water being discharged from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie tests above the EPA’s standard of what is considered safe for humans, will the Army Corps continue discharging water despite knowing it is putting human lives at risk?

While I understand your goal is to make preventative discharges now in an effort to avoid discharges during the summer, continuing these releases “indefinitely”—even if the water is toxic—will put lives at risk. I, therefore, look forward to hearing back from you as soon as possible with a direct “yes” or “no” answer to my question.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Brian Mast', with a large loop at the beginning and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Brian Mast  
Member of Congress