

## **THAT BROWN WATER IS BACK!!**

The dark brown water has returned to San Carlos Bay, Pine Island Sound, and the Refuge's Tarpon Bay -- a recurring and dismaying reminder that water quality issues associated with the Caloosahatchee River and Lake Okeechobee are far from being resolved. Even though some highly positive steps are now underway to mitigate the problem, it will continue to periodically plague us for some time to come.

However, it's important to recognize that, this time around, Lake O isn't the primary culprit. Hurricane Irma dumped huge amounts of rain onto already waterlogged agricultural, residential, and industrial lands that drain into the Caloosahatchee. The massive nutrient-laden runoff from those lands is the guilty party. That being said, the situation will undoubtedly worsen as Irma-related, rapidly rising water levels in Lake O force the Army Corps of Engineers to restart releases into the river.

The bottom line: We all need to keep pressure on our elected representatives -- whether federal, state, or local -- to support the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, especially increasing the movement, storage, and treatment of water south of Lake O to the Everglades and Florida Bay, the critical component in resolving the issue. At the state and local levels, let your legislators know that they must require the use of environmentally friendly agricultural practices, insist on state-of-the-art approaches to municipal sewage treatment, and enact/enforce residential fertilizer ordinances. All of these things working together can and will ultimately resolve the problem. But it will only happen if we all keep the pressure on our elected officials.