



# Protect. Educate. Inspire.

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

## The Need for Shared Adversity

by Jim Metzler, DDWS Advocacy Committee Co-Chair

As described in [a previous article](#), the Army Corps of Engineers is part way through a process to create a new set of guidelines, referred to as the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM). When completed, LOSOM will drive decision-making about when water is released out of Lake Okeechobee and how much water is released east to the St Lucie estuary; west to the Caloosahatchee estuary; or south to the Everglades. As such, LOSOM will have a dramatic impact on the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

The purpose of the Lake O release guidelines is to enable the corps to manage the water releases in a way that considers all the congressionally authorized purposes for the lake, [according to the Army Corps](#). This includes flood control, navigation, water supply for a variety of constituents, enhancement of fish and wildlife, and recreation. Due to conflicting interests, it is impossible for LOSOM to drive decision-making in a way that satisfies all of the stakeholders all of the time. As a result, it is critical that the Army Corps adopt a policy of shared adversity whereby all stakeholders accept that, for the greater good, they have to accept compromises.

Until projects such as the EAA reservoir are completed, only a small volume of water can be sent south. As such, when there are large releases of water from the lake, most of it goes to either the St. Lucie or the Caloosahatchee estuary. The two estuaries, however, are very different. While high volume discharges are harmful to both, the Caloosahatchee estuary needs water flow in the dry season to maintain the health of the estuary. The St. Lucie estuary does not.

[In a March 2 blog and email blast](#), U.S. Rep. Brian Mast (R-Palm City) commented that the Army Corps is seeking public input on the creation of LOSOM. In the email blast, Mast said, "I have told them to select what they call a '4C-1' plan, which is the option that eliminates regulatory discharges to the St. Lucie." He encouraged his readers to also write to the corps in support of the 4C-1 plan.

Since the 4C-1 plan calls for no discharges to the St. Lucie estuary, that means that when there are high volume discharges from Lake O, almost all of the discharge would be diverted to the Caloosahatchee estuary. In addition, the plan calls for runoff from the St. Lucie basin to backflow into Lake O when the lake is below 14.5 feet. This would cause nutrient-rich water to flow into the lake, much of which would later flow into the Caloosahatchee estuary.

The 4C-1 plan represents the antithesis of shared adversity and is a significant threat to the Refuge and the surrounding area. The plan is also a great example of why we must work diligently to encourage the Army Corps to recognize the needs of the Caloosahatchee estuary while it goes through the process of creating LOSOM. We will continue to work with partners, such as SCCF, the City of Sanibel, and the Sanibel & Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce, to achieve that goal and will ask for your support when appropriate.

**ICYMI:** Starting in mid-February the Caloosahatchee estuary was receiving more water than is healthy for the estuary (2,000 cfs) while the St. Lucie estuary was not receiving any water. As of March 6, the St. Lucie estuary started receiving 500 cfs. See [more](#).