



## *Practical Solutions to the St. Lucie River & Indian River Lagoon Water Quality Crisis*

### INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Martin County welcomed more than 271,000 visitors who spent a combined \$102.2 million in our community.<sup>1</sup> Many visitors were drawn to Martin County for its scenic waterways and exceptional quality of life. In fact, Marine-related industries account for more than 4,200 jobs, contribute over \$362 million in annual sales revenues, \$123 million in wages and over \$588 million in property values to our local economy.<sup>2 3</sup> Consequently, the long-term health of the St. Lucie River and the Indian River Lagoon is not only of critical environmental importance; it also has major economic significance.

Martin County's quality of life is unique. The *Economic Council of Martin County* is our community's foremost advocate for preserving that quality of life and promoting policies that thoughtfully balance environmental and economic concerns. As a result, we encourage officials to pursue a series of practical steps that will address this water quality crisis without delay.

### THE ISSUE

Above-normal precipitation has placed stresses on Lake Okeechobee's dike system. To protect life and property south of Lake Okeechobee, officials released billions of gallons of lake water into the C-44 Canal on a *daily* basis. Flushing billions of gallons of freshwater into an estuary inevitably carries with it significant environmental impacts, even if the water is clean. However, the discharges that began on May 8<sup>th</sup> also carried over 1 million pounds of nitrogen and over 80,000 pounds of phosphorus into the estuary system, contributing significantly to toxic algae blooms and health department no-contact warnings.

### PRACTICAL STEPS & REMEDIES

While there is no silver bullet solution, there are practical remedies that we can—and must—pursue to ensure that this environmental and economic tragedy does not occur again.

- **Fund the Central Everglades Planning Project** | Congress must approve funding for the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) via the Water Resources Development Act, which will be up for a vote this fall. Constructing the CEPP will divert some water flow south into designated water conservation areas, after proper cleansing.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The TC Palm* | Camille S. Yates, November 4, 2012 [https://www.tcpalm.com/news/2012/nov/04/no-headline--pi\\_tourism\\_overview/](https://www.tcpalm.com/news/2012/nov/04/no-headline--pi_tourism_overview/)

<sup>2</sup> Martin County | Accessed: September 23, 2013 [http://www.martin.fl.us/portal/page?\\_pageid=73,4440204&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://www.martin.fl.us/portal/page?_pageid=73,4440204&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

<sup>3</sup> *The TC Palm* | Rich Campbell, April 17, 2010 <http://www.tcpalm.com/news/2010/apr/17/rich-campbell-creating-protected-boat-haul-route/?print=1>

- **Restore the Herbert Hoover Dike** | The Herbert Hoover Dike must be restored and strengthened so more water can be held in Lake Okeechobee. This will benefit all of South Florida in times of drought and excess rainfall. The federal government must support efforts to improve Lake Okeechobee’s capacity and make good on its funding commitments to this crucial project.
- **Restore the Kissimmee River** | We must complete the restoration of the Kissimmee River, removing water and pollutants from the river before they reach Lake Okeechobee. This is a vital preventative measure.
- **Pursue Sensible Public-Private Partnerships** | We must encourage more public-private water farming projects, which will allow farmers to store excess water on private lands in times of need. This commonsense solution should be modeled and expanded.
- **Thoughtfully Strengthen and Streamline Regulations** | Nonsensical environmental regulations that impede the construction of storage areas must be addressed so that we are better prepared for future discharges.
- **Enact Commonsense Septic Rules** | Septic tanks remain a very significant cause of local water pollution. In coastal areas, local government must support the replacement of septic systems with properly run sewer systems. Where this is not possible—most notably in rural areas—septic systems should be pumped, inspected and upgraded to alleviate the most detrimental effects.
- **Expedite Completion of the C-44 Storm Water Treatment Area** | The Governor recently pledged \$40 million to complete this essential project. Policymakers must do everything in their power to expedite construction and complete other vital improvements in the basin, such as C-23, C-24 and C-43.

#### ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF ACTION

There are practical economic, as well as environmental benefits, to moving forward on the “Practical Steps & Remedies” listed above. First, these steps are, at minimum, a major down payment on the long-term environmental protection and health of our estuary. Second, these steps will necessitate billions in federal, state and local investment, generate thousands of jobs and bring immediate economic benefits to our community. Third, these steps will guard against future job loss in Marine-related industries, which have been threatened by the recent crisis.

#### SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

There is no reason to delay these projects; all can be addressed within a manageable 10-year timeframe and will have a measurable, positive affect. There may or may not be longer-term solutions to this problem. We hope there are. However, hopes for future plans and projects are no excuse to delay the simple, commonsense steps that are immediately achievable. We must act now.