



FLORIDA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

The Voice of Agriculture in Florida



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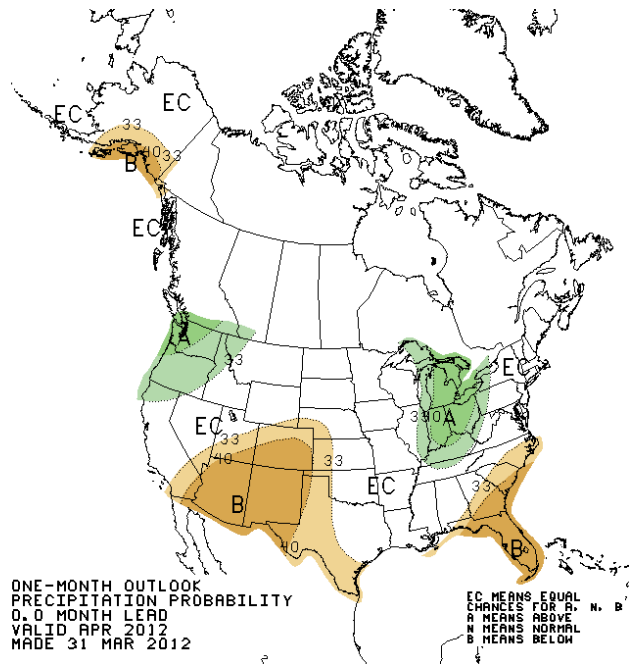
TO: South Florida Water Issues Network
FFBF Board of Directors
FFBF Water & Natural Resources Advisory Committee

FROM: Charles M. Shinn III, Assistant Director
Government & Community Affairs

RE: South Florida Water Management District
April Agricultural Highlights Report

Lake Okeechobee Falls Rapidly as Dry Conditions Continue

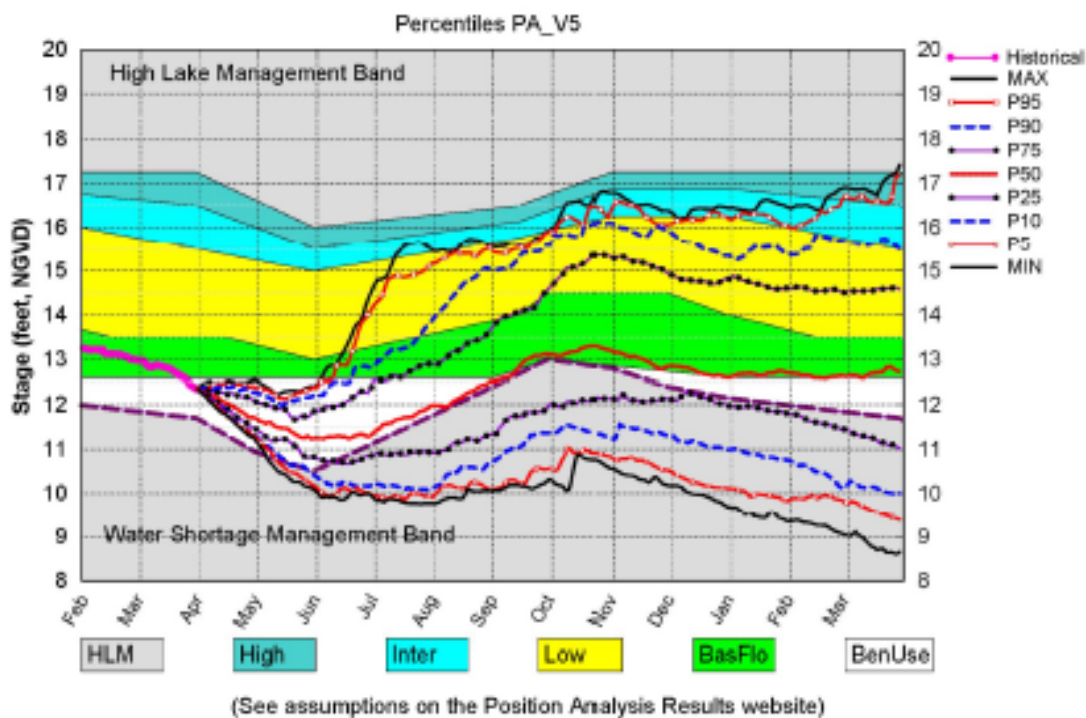
As extremely dry conditions persist across central and south Florida, water levels in Lake Okeechobee continue to fall rapidly. The current level is 11.69' NGVD and the littoral areas of the lake are now mostly dry. The 30-day outlook from the US Climate Prediction Center predicts dryer than normal conditions to linger.



Agriculture is highly concerned about the availability of water if the drought persists into the summer months. Last year, the summer daily rainfall pattern never became persistent and if it wasn't for a flooding event in October, the lake would be at record low levels today. A dryer-than-normal summer followed by another dry winter will be catastrophic to South Florida agriculture as well as the natural environment.

The following graph is from a lake elevation model that predicts lake stage using past rainfall/lake stage data. Of particular note is the P50 line which is the 50th percentile. With a dryer-than-normal summer rainfall pattern, the lake stage will likely fall below this line.

Lake Okeechobee SFWMM April 2012 Position Analysis



As one can clearly note, the concern is not so much the lake level this year but the level next winter and spring without ample summer rainfall. Florida Farm Bureau continues to coordinate with Water Management District staff to minimize the impacts to growers and ranchers.

The Ultimate Solution to Water Shortages - Storage

The cycle of water shortages in South Florida will continue until additional storage is created. The condition of water shortage was exacerbated when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers created a new schedule for Lake Okeechobee lowering the lake due to concerns with the integrity of the dike surrounding the lake.

As repairs are made to the dike, Florida Farm Bureau is urging the Corps to use flexibility in the schedule to incrementally raise the lake level as dike confidence improves. Repairs to the dike are a long-term process extending past 2020 even with adequate Federal funding.

Raising the level of Lake Okeechobee still will not provide the amount of storage needed to adequately supply agriculture, a growing population and increased needs for the environment. Dispersed water storage is one avenue being pursued (discussed below) and deep water storage projects are being planned though these require Federal authorization and funding. Aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) wells are a tool that can be used in some areas where water is pumped into the aquifer during high flows and recovered when the water is needed.

Everyone wants a solution today to their water problems but the solutions take time... and patience. Florida Farm Bureau will continue to work hard to make sure that agriculture can get the water needed to grow food, fiber and fuel while promoting technology and education to conserve as much water as possible.

Florida's climate is unique and though well adapted to year-round production, water continues to be our limiting factor.

Farm Bureau Notes the Importance of Maintaining Ag Acreage

Florida Farm Bureau is presenting the economic benefits of agriculture before groups of people that have limited knowledge of agriculture. Statewide, for every \$1 paid in property taxes, the farmer will only use approximately 25 cents in services.

Agriculture also has a positive ripple effect on the economy by providing direct and indirect jobs as a result of growing, harvesting, manufacturing and processing farm products.

The economic benefits of agriculture need to be carefully considered by long-term planners in local and state government agencies. The land 'out there' that seems to not be producing much to the untrained eye may very well be one of the greatest assets in the county. Florida Farm Bureau will gladly help communities to understand the importance of agriculture to their region.

Water Management District Conducting Multiple Water Supply Plan Reviews

The South Florida Water Management District is in the process of reviewing both the Lower East Coast and the Lower West Coast Water Supply Plans. These plans are required by the State of Florida to develop dependability in future regional water supply. The plans look out to a 20 year horizon and are updated every five years.

The Lower East Coast plan includes Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and the eastern portions of Collier and Hendry Counties. The Lower West Coast plan includes balance of Collier and Hendry Counties not included in the Lower East Coast Plan.

Of particular importance to agriculture is maintaining acreage while providing flexibility in the plan to allow for changes in cropping resulting from changing demands in agricultural products (food, fiber, and fuel).

Farm Bureau's Water & Natural Resources Advisory Committee to Tour Dispersed Water Storage Project.

The Water and Natural Resources Advisory Committee will be touring Lykes West Waterhole as a part of their meeting in Brighton on Monday, April 23rd. The West Waterhole is a 2500 acre dispersed water storage project that is a cooperative effort where a private landowner is paid to store water. The water is then released as needed back into the system for water supply.

Dispersed water projects provide multiple benefits including reducing harmful discharges to the estuaries during high flow events and providing supplemental water during dry periods. The taxpayer benefits because water is stored efficiently and inexpensively during the contractual period.

The West Waterhole project is one of several in the Northern Everglades. The concept has become very beneficial for agricultural lands that can be taken out of production for a period of years. Additional lands are being sought as favorable candidates for shallow storage as funding becomes available. This win-win concept provides the farmer/rancher with a secondary stream of income while benefiting the residents and environment of South Florida.

The Water and Natural Resources Advisory Committee is one of several advisory committees that Florida Farm Bureau delegates depend on for technical input in developing policy.

Monthly Reports Available on Florida Farm Bureau Federation's Website

This report is also available on Florida Farm Bureau Federation's website (www.floridafarmbureau.org). Click on 'Issues and Public Policy' on the left side of the home page, then click on the 'Water and Natural Resources' subheading. If you do not wish to receive this report in the future or are receiving multiple copies, please contact me.