

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Government Official

The St. Lucie River Estuary and the Indian River Lagoon are in critical condition due to large discharges of polluted freshwater from Lake Okeechobee and the agricultural canals. Discharges now exceed 4.5 billion gallons per day! The water has high levels of phosphorus, nitrogen and pesticides while depositing over 500 cubic yards of sediment into the estuaries daily during the discharges. This is also a direct loss of billions of gallons of freshwater to the ocean that would normally recharge south Florida's drinking water aquifers.

Direct impacts of the discharges include fish with lesions, dying oyster populations and loss of seagrass habitat. Declines in tourism, boating, fishing, and all water-related activities are causing a major economic loss in our community. Here, the environment IS the economy. Protected areas are also being impacted, including two State Aquatic Preserves, the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary, NOAA Essential Fish Habitat, EPA Critical Habitat for Seagrass, the St. Lucie Inlet State Preserve Reefs, and St. Lucie Nearshore Reefs nominated for National Marine Sanctuary. These estuaries and coastal ecosystems are habitat for over 4,300 species of plants and animals, including 33 endangered and threatened species, the most biodiverse ecosystem in North America.

What Needs to Happen NOW for True Restoration of the South Florida Ecosystem ?

1. Restore the natural winding Kissimmee River and the four mile-wide flood plain.
2. Keep Lake Okeechobee at lower levels, around 13.5 feet to 15.5 feet ("Zone D Diet) and keep the Upper Chain Lakes at lower levels.
3. Buy back the Everglades Agricultural Area south of Lake Okeechobee and Restore the "River of Grass" to sheetflow water to the Everglades and rehydrate the freshwater aquifers in South Florida.
4. Require on-site storage and treatment of water in agricultural areas. Stop pollution at the "source", not down stream. There should be no discharges from canals into the coastal estuaries.

This critical situation demands your immediate attention and I will await your response.

Respectfully,

Name: _____

Address: _____
