

Lake Okeechobee Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Management Plan

Stakeholder Engagement Process



This presentation introduces a new initiative by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to develop a management plan for FWC's management of Lake Okeechobee. The presentation provides an overview of the stakeholder engagement process, including the steps of stakeholder involvement, projected timeline, and how stakeholders can help during each step of the way.

Ways we Manage Lake Okeechobee

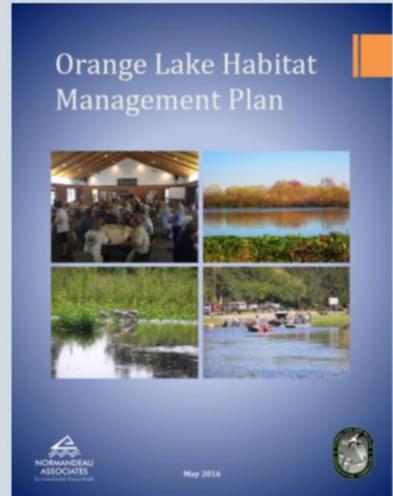


Spanning roughly 730 square miles, Lake Okeechobee is the nation's second largest freshwater lake and is a central feature in South Florida Ecosystem. The lake is characterized by its shallow mean depth and extensive marsh system supporting numerous fish and wildlife populations, including world-renowned sport fisheries, commercial fisheries, waterfowl, and federally and state-listed species.

As the state agency responsible for fish and wildlife management, the FWC takes a comprehensive approach to managing Lake Okeechobee's fish and wildlife populations and the habitats they depend on. As shown through several examples on this slide, staff conduct a variety of restoration projects, such as muck removal, prescribed fires, and vegetation plantings, invasive plant control, monitoring fisheries through independent surveys and reporting, and the monitoring of other wildlife such as the Everglades snail kite.

Management Plan

- This management plan effort will guide FWC's fish, wildlife, and habitat management for Lake Okeechobee.
- Involve stakeholders from the beginning of the process.
 - **Stakeholder:** any individual, group, or organization that can affect, be affected by, or perceives themselves/itself to be affected by FWC's management of Lake Okeechobee.
- Specific goals, objectives and actions
- Plan will cover management activities within FWC's jurisdiction while providing recommendations to partner agencies on items outside of that jurisdiction.



To more effectively manage Lake Okeechobee, a management plan will help guide the FWC's efforts on fish, wildlife, and habitat management toward a healthy lake that is supported by stakeholders.

To gain full stakeholder support, stakeholder involvement is important from the beginning of the process. For this effort, a stakeholder is defined as any individual, group, or organization that can affect, be affected by, or perceives themselves/itself to be affected by FWC's management of Lake Okeechobee.

The completed plan will ultimately contain specific goals and objectives as driven by stakeholder input, and specific actions designed to achieve them.

The plan will generally cover all management activities within FWC's jurisdiction. However, because some activities that play an important role in Lake Okeechobee's habitat fall outside of FWC's jurisdiction such as water management, the importance of Lake Okeechobee to the greater South Florida Ecosystem will be acknowledged and the plan may additionally provide recommendations to our partner agencies on such items.

Keys to Successful Engagement

- FWC will use multiple methods to gather stakeholder input that targets a wide representation of user groups.
- Clearly communicate about the overall process, how input will be gathered, how input will be used, and what we hope to accomplish with these plans
- Engagement will occur at the “Involve” level. [The International Association of Public Participation](#)



Staff have identified several key strategies to ensure a successful level of stakeholder engagement. Throughout the process, staff will use multiple methods to gather stakeholder input at different stages. This will ensure a wide representation of stakeholder groups and geographic areas.

Staff will also clearly communicate the overall process, how input will be gathered, and what we hope to accomplish.

Finally, stakeholder engagement will occur at the “Involve” level, meaning that staff will work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood, considered, and directly reflected in the alternatives developed.

Stakeholder Engagement Techniques

Stakeholder Engagement will consist of:

- Stakeholder Input Workshops
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Public Meetings



This slide provides an overview of the stakeholder engagement process. The overall process will start with a broad focus and incrementally narrow down towards drafting the actions of the final plan. Each step will be described in detail on the following slides.

Stakeholder Input Workshops

- These workshops will be used as the initial outreach tool
- Facilitators will guide stakeholder groups, between 10-20 individuals through a discussion to identify main issues and provide input on potential solutions
- Information will be used to inform subsequent engagement activities and initial plan drafts
- Workshops will take place between May and June of 2020



As the initial outreach tool, stakeholder workshops will consist of 10-20 individuals to have thorough and open discussions about FWC's management of Lake Okeechobee. These workshops will provide the opportunity for broad discussions about the main issues and interests of stakeholders, as well as an opportunity to provide input on potential solutions. This information will be used to inform the subsequent steps of the process.

The stakeholder workshops for Lake Okeechobee will take place between May and June of 2020.

Stakeholder Interviews

- Stakeholder Interviews will be used to gather input from stakeholders such as Tackle Shops/Marinas and other managing agencies (ACOE, SFWMD, etc.)
- This input will be utilized in the writing the initial drafts of the management plans
- Interviews will be conducted between March and June of 2020



During a similar timeframe as the stakeholder workshops, stakeholder interviews will be conducted to gather similar information from business owners and partner agencies.

These interviews will be conducted throughout the months of March through June of 2020.

Surveys

- Utilizing the information gained through interviews and workshops FWC will draft a focused survey
- Surveys will be used to gather more information, preferences, and opinions on the items identified through the previous engagement activities
- These surveys will be conducted in the Fall/Winter of 2020 to ensure non-resident populations are surveyed



Using the information learned from stakeholder workshops and interviews, staff will develop a focused survey with help from the FWC's Center for Conservation Social Science Research. This survey will be designed to gather more focused opinions and preferences on the items discussed.

These surveys will be conducted through the Fall and Winter of 2020 to capture non-resident stakeholders who seasonally visit the lake during this time each year.

Focus Groups

- With input gathered from stakeholders via workshops, interviews, and surveys, a first draft of the management plans will be written that will include goals and objectives
- Focus Groups will be used to gather focused feedback on these goals and objectives and further inform actions within the plan
- These Focus Groups will take place between February and June 2021



Using the preferences and opinions of the various management topics revealed in the stakeholder survey, a first draft of the plan will be completed by January of 2021 and will include a set of draft goals and objectives for the plan. Focus groups of stakeholders will then be convened to help determine if the goals and objectives are suitable for the needs of Lake Okeechobee and to further inform any potential actions that may be appropriate to achieve them.

With the help of the focus group critiques, a second draft will be completed in the Summer of 2021, and a final draft by the Fall of 2021. Between each of these drafts, stakeholders will have ample opportunity to provide further feedback on their contents.

Public Meetings

- Public Meetings will be held twice per year as a way to inform the public about interim lake management and provide updates on the Lake Management Planning Process
- Public Meetings will not be used as a main vehicle for gathering input, but will be used as an informational tool
- To increase our reach with this information we plan to make these meetings widely accessible through digital media



Finally, throughout the stakeholder engagement process, public meetings will be held in the spring and fall of each year. These public meetings will be used as a way to inform the public about the interim management of Lake Okeechobee and the progress of the plan, and will be made widely accessible through digital media.

Public Meeting Schedule

- Feb. 18 – Okeechobee County Civic Center, 1750 Highway 98 North, Okeechobee, FL 34972
- Feb. 20 – South Florida Water Management District B-1 Auditorium, 3301 Gun Club Rd, West Palm Beach, FL 33406
- Feb. 26 – John Boy Auditorium, 1200 W C Owen Ave, Clewiston, FL 33440



This slide provides the three dates and locations of this first round of public meetings.

Promise to Stakeholders

FWC promises to provide opportunities for stakeholders to provide input into development of the FWC's Lake Okeechobee Management Plan. We promise to consider all stakeholder input and recommendations for lake management goals, objectives, and actions. We promise to address and balance, where feasible, the needs of all stakeholder groups and FWC management guidelines for the lake.

FWC is committed to a Management Plan that consists of stakeholder supported management actions that are within FWC's jurisdiction and FWC will make the final decisions on content of the plan.



The FWC's mission is to manage fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people. Including stakeholder involvement in our management of fish and wildlife is a crucial component of achieving this mission and we have developed the above promise to stakeholders as our assurance to developing this plan with our stakeholders.

How Can I be Involved?

- Stakeholders interested in provided input to this process should:
 - Provide your email to LakeOkeechobee@MyFWC.com
 - Fill out and return a Workshop Questionnaire
 - Respond to upcoming surveys



To become involved, please provide your email to LakeOkeechobee@MyFWC.com to be added to our email distribution list.

If you are interested in joining a stakeholder workshop, please fill the Workshop Questionnaire found at the Lake Okeechobee Management Plan web page and return to the above email address.

Finally, when receiving upcoming surveys, please respond to the best of your ability.

Thank You



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