

117TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# H. R. 7520

To direct the Corps of Engineers to develop a comprehensive plan for Lake Okeechobee and northern estuaries ecosystem restoration, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 14, 2022

Mr. MAST introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

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## A BILL

To direct the Corps of Engineers to develop a comprehensive plan for Lake Okeechobee and northern estuaries ecosystem restoration, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. LAKE OKEECHOBEE AND NORTHERN ESTU-**  
4 **ARIES ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION, FLORIDA.**

5 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

6 (1) CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN FLORIDA  
7 PROJECT.—The term “Central and Southern Florida  
8 Project” has the meaning given that term in section

1       601 of the Water Resources Development Act of  
2       2000.

3           (2) NORTHERN ESTUARIES.—The term “north-  
4       ern estuaries” means the Caloosahatchee Estuary,  
5       Charlotte Harbor, Indian River Lagoon, Lake Worth  
6       Lagoon, and St. Lucie River Estuary.

7           (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means  
8       the Secretary of the Army, acting through the Chief  
9       of Engineers.

10          (4) SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM.—

11               (A) IN GENERAL.—The term “South Flor-  
12       ida ecosystem” means the area consisting of the  
13       land and water within the boundary of the  
14       South Florida Water Management District in  
15       effect on July 1, 1999.

16               (B) INCLUSIONS.—The term “South Flor-  
17       ida ecosystem” includes—

- 18                       (i) the Everglades;  
19                       (ii) the Florida Keys;  
20                       (iii) the contiguous near-shore coastal  
21       water of South Florida; and  
22                       (iv) Florida’s Coral Reef.

23           (5) STUDY AREA.—The term “study area”  
24       means Lake Okeechobee and the northern estuaries,

1 including all lands and waters in the upstream wa-  
2 tershed of those receiving bodies within—

3 (A) the South Florida ecosystem; or

4 (B) the study area boundaries of the In-  
5 dian River Lagoon National Estuary Program  
6 and the Coastal and Heartland Estuary Part-  
7 nership, authorized pursuant to section 320 of  
8 the Federal Water Pollution Control Act.

9 (b) COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.—

10 (1) IN GENERAL.—

11 (A) DEVELOPMENT.—The Secretary shall  
12 develop, in cooperation with the non-Federal  
13 sponsors of the Central and Southern Florida  
14 project and any relevant Federal, State, and  
15 Tribal agencies, a comprehensive plan for the  
16 purpose of restoring, preserving, and protecting  
17 Lake Okeechobee and the northern estuaries.

18 (B) INCLUSIONS.—In carrying out sub-  
19 paragraph (A), the Secretary shall ensure that  
20 the comprehensive plan provides for the protec-  
21 tion and improvement of water quality within  
22 the study area through activities that include—

23 (i) the elimination of harmful dis-  
24 charges from Lake Okeechobee;

1 (ii) the reduction and elimination of  
2 harmful algal blooms;

3 (iii) the restoration of hydrological  
4 connections and conditions;

5 (iv) the enhancement of habitat, emer-  
6 gent and submerged aquatic vegetation,  
7 and keystone species populations; and

8 (v) the dredging and beneficial reuse  
9 of harmful silt and muck deposits in Lake  
10 Okeechobee and the northern estuaries.

11 (C) SUBMISSION.—Not later than 3 years  
12 after the date of enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
13 retary shall submit to Congress—

14 (i) the comprehensive plan developed  
15 under this paragraph; and

16 (ii) a feasibility report and a pro-  
17 grammatic environmental impact state-  
18 ment for any proposed Federal actions set  
19 forth in such plan.

20 (D) INTERIM REPORTS.—Not later than 1  
21 year after the date of enactment of this Act,  
22 and annually thereafter until the submission of  
23 the comprehensive plan under subparagraph  
24 (C), the Secretary shall submit to Congress an

interim report on the development of the comprehensive plan.

(E) ADDITIONAL STUDIES AND ANALYSES.—Notwithstanding the submission of a feasibility report under subparagraph (C), the Secretary shall continue to conduct such studies and analyses after the date of such submission as are necessary for the purpose of restoring, preserving, and protecting Lake Okeechobee and the northern estuaries.

(2) WATER QUALITY.—In carrying out this subsection, the Secretary shall take into account the protection of water quality, in consultation with the State of Florida and by considering applicable State water quality standards.

(3) INTEGRATION OF OTHER ACTIVITIES.—In carrying out this subsection, the Secretary shall integrate the activities included in the comprehensive plan with ongoing Federal, State, and Tribal projects and activities, including—

(A) the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual and any subsequent water control plan for Lake Okeechobee; and

1 (B) the projects authorized under the Cen-  
2 tral and Southern Florida project and the Com-  
3 prehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.

4 (c) JUSTIFICATION.—Notwithstanding section 209 of  
5 the Flood Control Act of 1970 (42 U.S.C. 1962–2) or any  
6 other provision of law, in carrying out any activity in-  
7 cluded in the comprehensive plan developed under sub-  
8 section (b), the Secretary may determine that—

9 (1) the activity is justified by the environmental  
10 benefits derived by Lake Okeechobee and the north-  
11 ern estuaries; and

12 (2) no further economic justification for the ac-  
13 tivity is required, if the Secretary determines that  
14 the activity is cost-effective.

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