

Sorting out the Facts in the Midst of the Ongoing Ad Blitz

Rivers Coalition

May 26, 2016

Gary Goforth

Backdrop – the past 12 months

- The State of Florida failed to exercise the **willing seller** contract to purchase 46,000 acres of land south of the lake - even though funding was available through Amendment 1
- For the 2nd year in a row the Florida Legislature failed to enact the will of the people to purchase lands for restoration and conservation (Amendment 1)
- The Florida Legislature passed and Gov. Scott signed into law the “2016 Water Bill” – virtually ensures that Lake Okeechobee water quality goals will not be met for decades; weakens estuary water quality protection
- Several national environmental groups took to the media to expose these environmental setbacks
- A strong El Niño was coming – forecasts for a very wet winter and massive destructive Lake discharges to the estuaries

Ads Contain Mixture of Accurate, Inaccurate and Missing Information

- Examples of critical missing information – adverse impacts of Lake discharges to region
 - Documented hundreds of millions of dollars of economic impact to local businesses, tourism and real estate values attributable to poor water quality
 - Millions of pounds of nitrogen and phosphorus from lake Okeechobee that feed algal blooms and wreak havoc on the ecology of the river, estuary, lagoon and near-shore reefs. In their BMAP progress reports for the St Lucie River the State of Florida ignores this loading from the Lake.
 - Hundreds of millions of pounds of Lake Okeechobee sediment that turned a once sand-bottom clear water estuary into a muck-filled lagoon that belches blackwater every time it rains

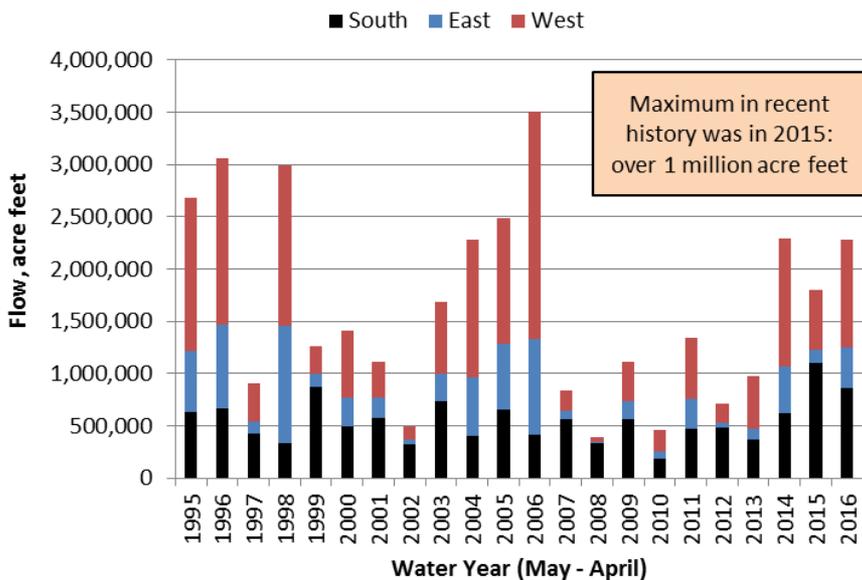
Ad Blitz by US Sugar and Others Ignore Missing Link

- The ads ignore the consensus of expert opinion, including the UF Water Institute study, that **more storage, treatment and conveyance is needed south of the Lake.**
 - *The upper limit – 43,000 acres – is less than ¼ of the amount of land US Sugar was willing to sell to the state*
- ***Failure to secure needed land south of the Lake is the single biggest obstacle to long-term protection of the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries from destructive Lake discharges, and providing Florida Bay and lower east coast wellfields with needed water.***

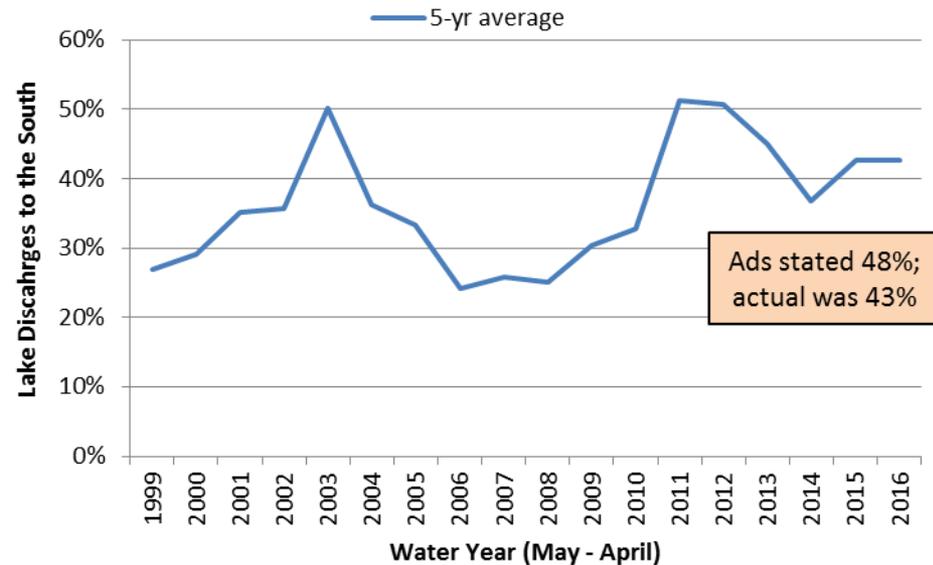
Example of Inaccurate Information: Lake Water Sent South

- Ads state “48% of Lake water sent south” (2011-2015)
- Actual amount was 43%
 - I didn’t see SFWMD “Get the Facts” correct this 120 billion gallon mistake
 - Majority of water used for irrigation – 13% reached Everglades
- Annual flows to south are highly variable, dependent on rainfall and Lake water level
 - More than 1 million acre feet (325 billion gallons) sent south in 2015
- **Bottom line – misinformation aside, the more sent south the better!**

Lake Discharges



Lake Discharges to the South: average = 34% 10% reached Everglades



"South" includes discharges to the EAA and L-8 Basins for irrigation and water supply to the Everglades and Lake Worth Lagoon

More Misinformation – Benefits to Florida Bay from Lake Okeechobee

- From ad: “Historic flows of freshwater into Florida Bay came from Miami-Dade, NOT Lake Okeechobee”
- From the SFWMD ***Get the Facts***: “Historically, Lake Okeechobee combined with direct rainfall to hydrate the entire Everglades ecosystem, including Florida Bay.”

Brought to you by the mayors of the Glades Communities:

Phillip Roland
Mayor of Clewiston

Joe Kyles
Mayor of South Bay

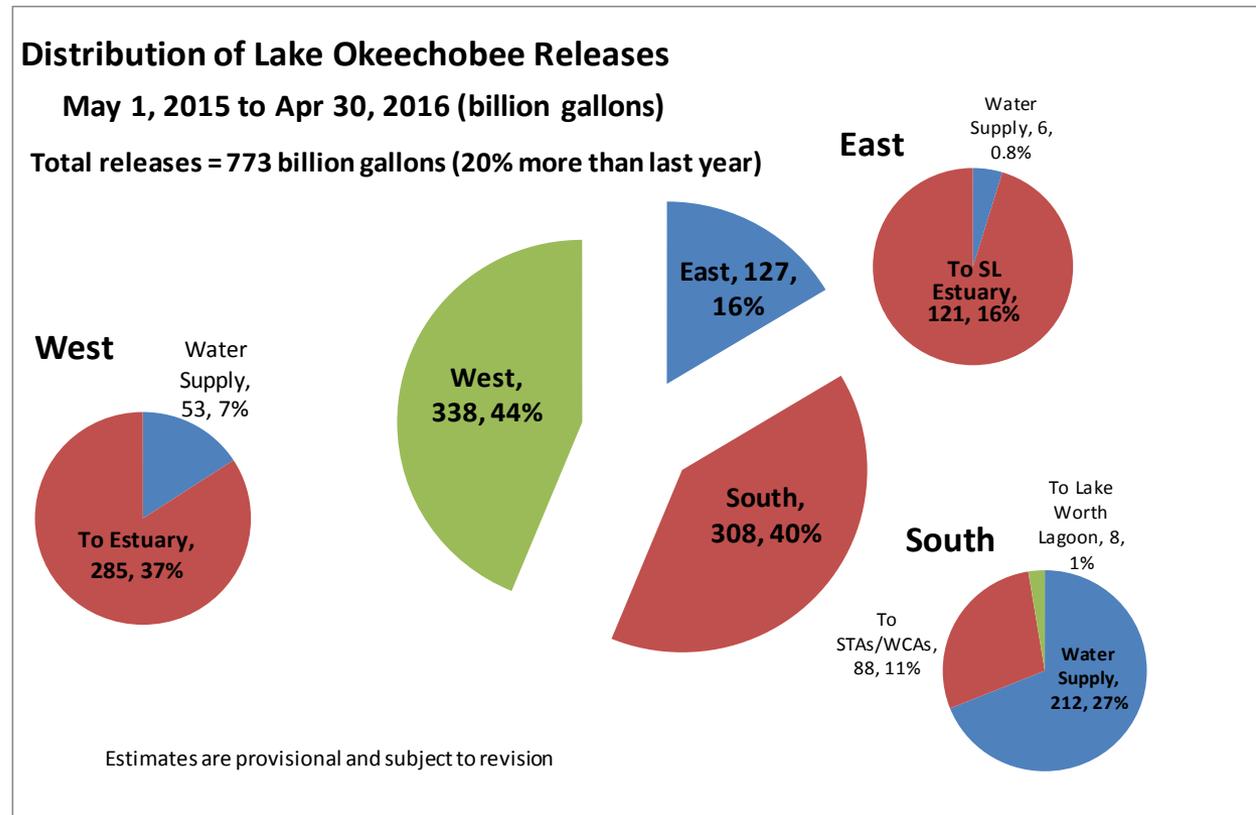
Steve Wilson
Mayor of Belle Glade

Keith W. Babb, Jr.
Mayor of Pahokee

J.P. Sasser
Former Mayor of Pahokee

Missing Information: Flows from Lake O this Past Year

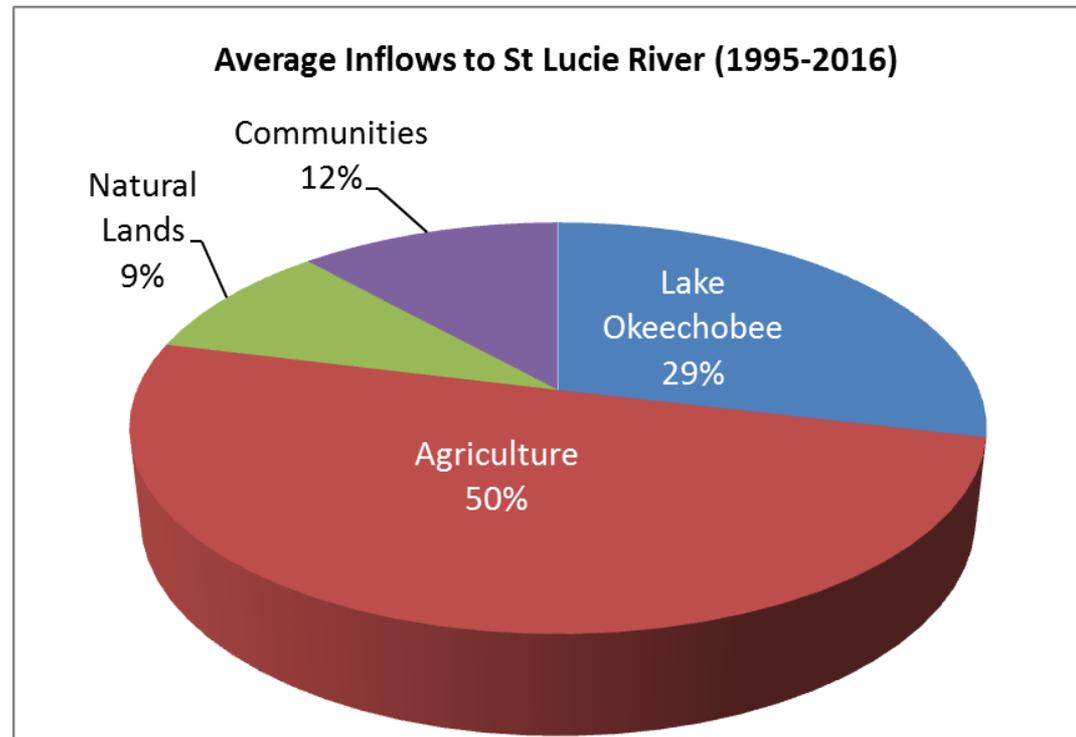
- For the water year that ended April 30, more than 400 billion gallons of untreated polluted Lake water was sent to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries, yet less than 90 billion gallons of Lake water (all of it treated) was sent south to the Everglades.
- Environmental and economic state of emergency declared



Missing Information:

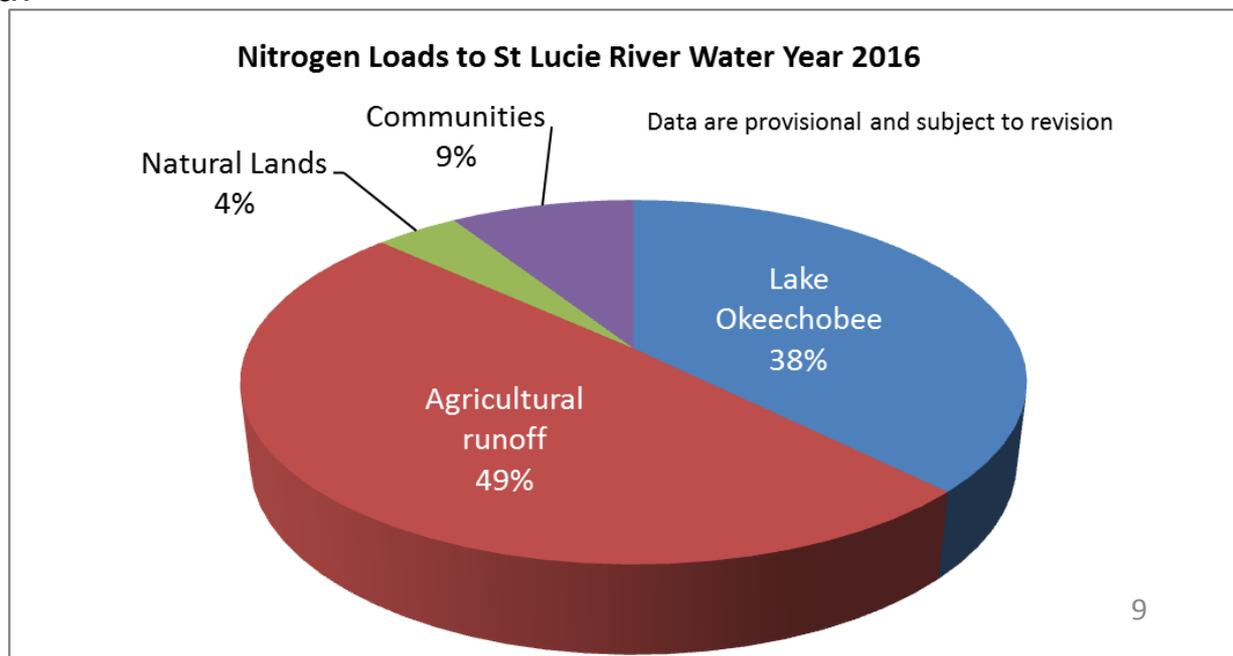
“Local Waterways” Consist Mainly of Ag Land

- Most of the area that the ad calls “local waterways” did not flow into the St. Lucie River (SLR) until after the major agricultural drainage canals (C-23, C-24, C-25 and C-44) were dug, connecting more than 250,000 acres to the SLR. Historically these areas flowed north into the St. Johns River watershed, south into the Loxahatchee and Everglades watersheds, evaporated or recharged the groundwater.
- According to the State’s Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), almost 60 percent of the SLR watershed is agriculture. **Only 16% of the watershed consists of communities and associated areas.**



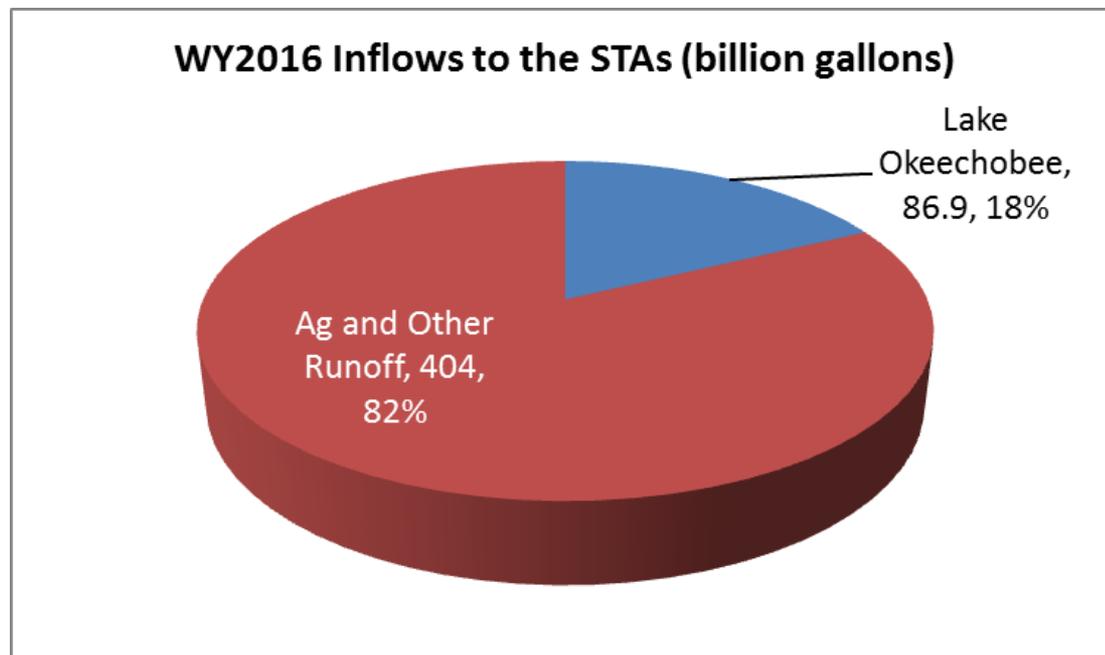
Missing Information: Loads from Lake O This Past Year

- The ads are silent on the enormous nutrient and sediment load contained in Lake Okeechobee discharges to the St. Lucie River and Estuary. For the water year ending April 30, Lake discharges have contributed
 - more than 1.6 million pounds of nitrogen
 - more than 190,000 pounds of phosphorus, and
 - More than 35 million pounds of total suspended sediment.
- While these pollution loads are high, runoff from agricultural areas contributed an even greater nutrient load:
 - more than 2.1 million pounds of nitrogen, and
 - more than 500,000 pounds of phosphorus



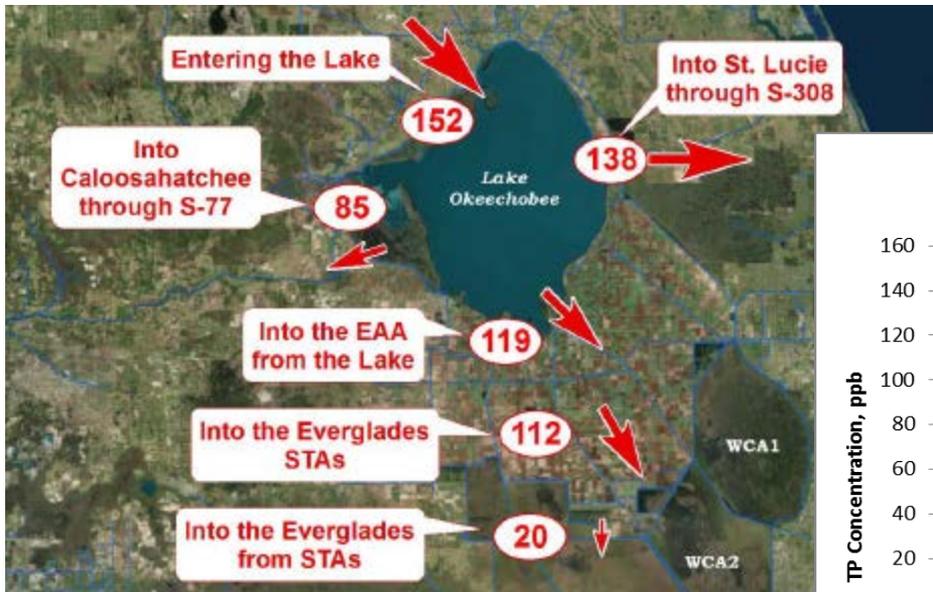
Missing Information: Funding of Stormwater Treatment Areas

- Ads identify over \$400 million (22%) have been contributed by farmers to construction of STAs and other projects; ads omitted that taxpayers picked up the balance (\$1.4 billion, 78%).
- Since 1995, Lake inflows to the STAs have run about 12%, while runoff from agricultural and other sources amounted to 88%.
- Best STA performance in history was in 2015 – when historic high flows of Lake water sent – **190 billion gallons**

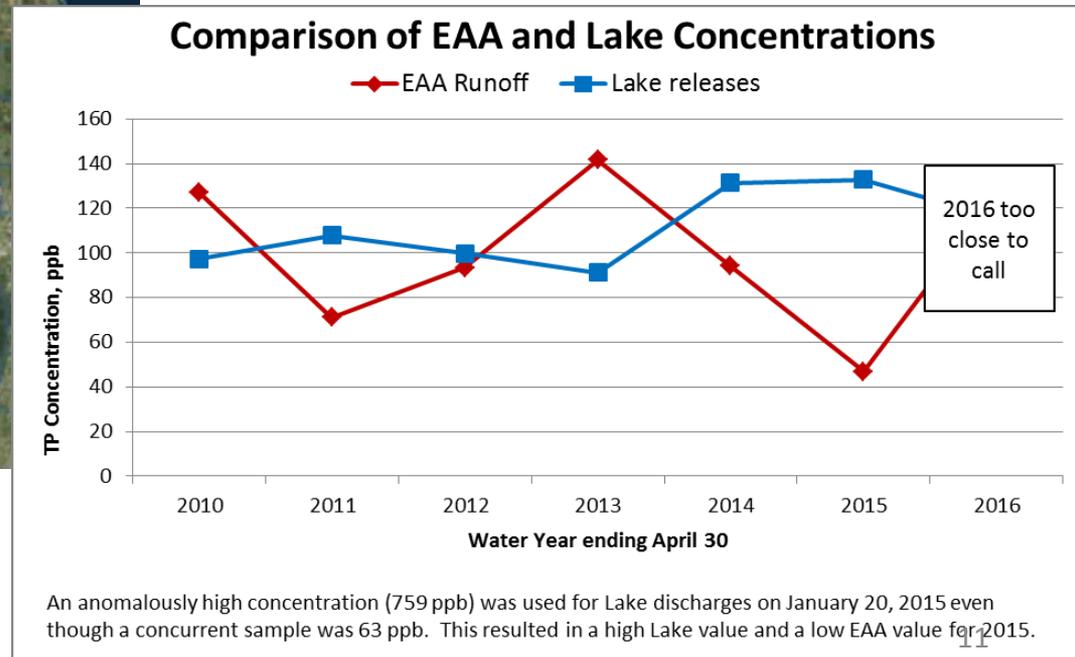


Incomplete Information: Lake O Water Cleaner than EAA Runoff?

- Annual values are highly variable, with some years having Lake water cleaner than EAA runoff, and *vice versa* in other years.
- Ad states water leaving farms was twice as clean as Lake water for 2015
 - In part a result of a single highly suspicious sampling result for Lake water (759 ppb vs 63 ppb)
 - Nevertheless, STA performance was the best in history concurrent with historic high Lake inflow

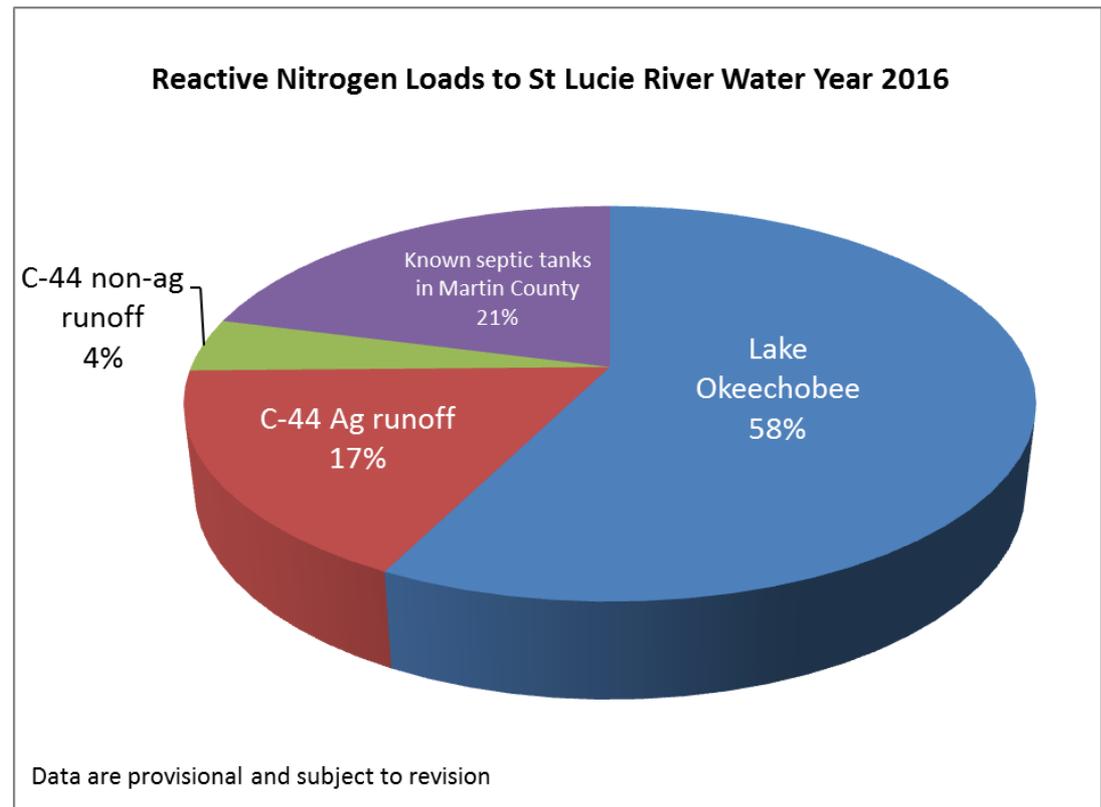


5-yr average (WY2011-2015; from SFWMD)



Incomplete Information: Nitrogen Loads from Septic Tanks

- Compared to estimates from FDEP, recent estimates of loading from septic tanks in Martin County have been overstated by upwards of 200-300%.
- Nutrient loading and sediment from Lake Okeechobee and ag runoff constitute a greater threat to the health of the St. Lucie Estuary than does loading from Martin County septic tanks.
- Nevertheless, nutrient loads from septic tanks along the Indian River Lagoon need to be addressed in cost-effective ways based on good science.
 - Not all tanks contribute loading to river and lagoon
 - Recommend State funding of septic-to-sewer conversion in amounts equal to funding for agricultural pollution controls



Summary - More Storage, Treatment and Conveyance is Needed South of Lake

- Send the water south!
 - ***secure needed land south of the Lake for long-term protection of the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries from destructive Lake discharges, and providing Florida Bay and lower east coast wellfields with needed water.***
- Questions?