



Board of County Commissioners

Date

Brian J. Armstrong, P.G.
Executive Director
Southwest Florida Water Management District
2379 Broad Street
Brooksville, FL 34604-6899

Dear Mr. Armstrong,

On behalf of the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners, I express our strong support for advancing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Section 216 Feasibility Study for the Lake Tarpon Outfall Structure (S-551) and Outfall Canal (C-351). This study is essential to ensuring Lake Tarpon continues to receive the flood protection and freshwater management benefits the structure was designed to provide.

S-551 has long supported our community by regulating lake levels, preventing saltwater intrusion, and mitigating flood risk for surrounding neighborhoods, parks, roadways, and businesses. Lake Tarpon, the county's largest freshwater lake, is a vital natural asset whose top-10 ranking as a bass fishery in Florida supports significant recreation and tourism.

Hydrologic conditions have changed significantly since the project's original design. Higher tidal elevations and more frequent coastal storms have reduced the hydraulic head needed for gravity discharge to Old Tampa Bay. Recent events including Hurricanes Idalia (2023) and Debby (2024) caused storm surge overtopping, extended gate closures, and the inability to release floodwater for more than 24 hours, increasing risks to public safety and emergency response.

With these challenges expected to intensify, a comprehensive feasibility study is needed to establish the technical basis for long-term strategies that maintain flood protection, safeguard nearby communities and infrastructure, and preserve Lake Tarpon as a freshwater resource. The recent USACE Section 216 Assessment confirmed that changing physical conditions warrant further evaluation, and the District has committed approximately \$1.5 million in matching funds.

Federal participation is critical to advance this effort. A jointly funded USACE–District feasibility study will provide the hydraulic, hydrologic, and alternatives analyses necessary to identify practical, cost-effective solutions that uphold the structure's authorized purposes.

Pinellas County strongly supports the District's request and urges full funding and authorization of the USACE Section 216 Feasibility Study for S-551. We appreciate the District's continued partnership in ensuring the long-term resilience of this essential regional asset.

Thank you for your consideration and continued commitment to protecting the communities we serve.

Sincerely,

Commissioner Dave Eggers
Chair, Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners

315 Court Street
Clearwater, FL 33756
Phone (727) 464-3377
Fax (727) 464-3022
V/TDD (727) 464-4062
Pinellas.gov