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April 1, 1938

Honorable Leroy Collins
Governor of Florida

Attention: Mr. John Perry

Dear Governor Collins:

I wish to confirm by telephone conversation with Mr. Perry on March 28th regarding the emergency conditions prevailing in the Gilchrist River Basin.

There are three sets of controls in this basin, each operated by a separate Authority. The water level in Lake Apopka is controlled by the Apopka Reclamation and Water Conservation and Control Authority by a dam and lock on the Apopka-Immokalee canal. Discharge from this structure flows through Lake Immokalee, Lake Nora, and Lake Iustis into Salinas Creek on which the Gilchrist Reclamation and Water Conservation and Control Authority operates a dam and lock. The discharge from Salinas Creek flows through Lake Griffin into the Gilchrist River on which the U. S. Corps of Engineers operates a dam and lock at Ross Bluff.

In recent weeks, unprecedented winter rains and lack of operating experience on the part of the Orange and Lake County authorities has resulted in Lake Apopka and all of the lower lakes being filled to a dangerous level. The entire north-west shore of Lake Apopka is bordered by reclaimed sink lands known as hollowed farms, comprising literally thousands of acres of extremely rich truck farms. This area is protected from inundation by a dike along the lake. Two weeks ago the water was very close to the top of this dike, and a serious break occurred requiring some 15 hours to repair at a cost of several thousand dollars.

In order to prevent a recurrence of this catastrophe, the Lake County Authority agreed to receive a greater amount of discharge from Lake Apopka, but in doing so, they raised Lake Nora and Lake Iustis very close to the flood stage. They in turn discharged a greater quantity of water into Lake Griffin which was also raised to the flood stage. The U. S. Corps of Engineers has stated that the maximum which they can safely discharge at Ross Bluff is 600 sec-ft. The Lake County Authority is discharging around 500 sec-ft into Lake Griffin. Any rain such as occurred this weekend seriously increases the already hazardous condition.

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The controlling factor of the West Bluff operation is the condition of a levee along the river protecting an area known as Gilchrist Farms, owned by the Morris Cattle Company. This is another area of several thousand acres of rich creek land developed for truck farming. The Corps of Engineers owns the levee, but it apparently has been neglected it appears to be in unstable condition. The water level at the time of my inspection was about 18 inches below the levee crest, and water was seeping through the levee at a number of points. The U. S. Geological Survey measured the flow in the river on that day and found that it was approximately 2000 csc-ft. In the discussion at Tavares, Mr. Oscar Rada, of the Corps of Engineers, agreed to request the District Engineer, Colonel Treadler, to release emergency funds to strengthen the dike along the Gilchrist farm area so that the discharge into the river could be increased, thus permitting a greater discharge through the other two control structures.

My request for a telegram to the Florida Congressional Delegation was at the request of the Gilchrist Recreation and Water Conservation and Control Authority (De Lake County Authority), and the Apopka Recreation and Water Conservation and Control Authority of Orange County, in hopes that this would strengthen Mr. Rada's request and assure agreement by all concerned.

Respectfully yours,

John W. Wakefield
Director

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cc: Mr. E. J. Surrall - Gilchrist Basin Authority - Durlis
Mr. John Talquin - Orange County - Chairman of Co. Commissioners - Orlando
Mr. Ted Jensen - Coe & Jensen Associates - West Palm Beach
Connell & Associates - Mr. John S. Telfair - West Palm Beach
Colonel Treadler - District Engineer - U S Army - Jacksonville
Morris Cattle Company - Anthony, Florida