

1 Article

2 Preliminary Design of Nutrient Removal Basins in 3 the Fisheating Creek Watershed Florida, USA Subject 4 to Drought Conditions and Low Water Availability

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9 **Abstract:** The Fisheating Creek watershed located in Florida, USA is the focus of intense efforts to
10 reduce nutrient transport into Lake Okeechobee which is located downstream. Public agencies and
11 private land owners have proposed constructing large nutrient removal basins in the watershed to
12 reduce the overall nutrient load into Lake Okeechobee. This is challenging given the nature of the
13 watershed with its low water availability and sensitivity to drought. This study evaluates the
14 feasibility of implementing nutrient removal systems in such a watershed including the overall risk
15 and uncertainty of system performance. The study uses statistical evaluations of available water
16 resources data and model simulations using HEC-HMS to evaluate watershed flow conditions.
17 Then, the study outlines alternatives for nutrient removal system implementation. The study
18 revealed that considerable nutrient reduction is feasible but not optimal due to low overall water
19 availability. The primary conclusion is that while nutrient removal projects as large as 294 hectares
20 can be constructed, the overall system operation will have to be very flexible to account for widely
21 ranging inflows including very low flows during drought situations.

22 **Keywords:** nutrients; stormwater treatment areas; water availability; Fisheating Creek; Lake
23 Okeechobee

24 PACS: J0101

25

26 1. Introduction

27 This article summarizes research regarding the feasibility of developing nutrient removal project
28 alternatives on the Blue Head Ranch property within the Fisheating Creek watershed for the
29 purposes of reducing nutrient loads into Lake Okeechobee, one of the largest freshwater lakes in the
30 USA. This research article is important as the Fisheating Creek watershed is mostly commercially
31 undeveloped and includes large swaths of undisturbed wetlands and extensive cattle ranch
32 operations. Therefore, opportunities exist within the watershed to reduce nutrient use and nutrient
33 loads which ultimately end up in Lake Okeechobee. However, the feasibility of nutrient removal
34 projects is hindered by the frequent instances of low water availability within the watershed,
35 especially during the dry season or extended droughts. The study uses statistical evaluations of
36 available water resources data and model simulations using HEC-HMS to evaluate watershed flow
37 conditions. Then, the study outlines alternatives for nutrient removal system implementation. The
38 study revealed that considerable nutrient reduction is feasible but not optimal due to low overall
39 water availability. The primary conclusion is that while nutrient removal projects as large as 294
40 hectares can be constructed, the overall system operation will have to be very flexible to account for
41 widely ranging inflows including very low flows during drought situations.

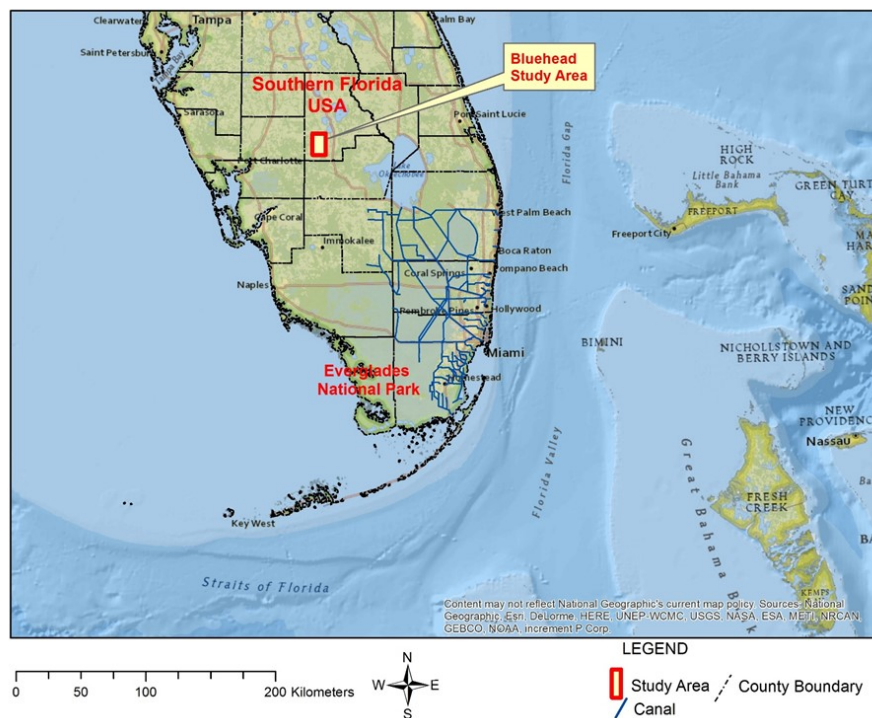
42 The Blue Head Ranch property consists of 127 km² located in Highlands County, Florida USA.
43 The Blue Head Ranch is located within the Fisheating Creek watershed or basin on the northwestern

44 side of Lake Okeechobee. Figure 1 shows the general location of the property in Florida, USA.
 45 Figure 2 shows the boundary of the Fisheating Creek watershed along with the property line for the
 46 Blue Head Ranch.

47 The Fisheating Creek watershed is approximately 1,124 km² in size according to geographic
 48 information system (GIS) analyses completed for this study. Fisheating Creek flows with a gentle
 49 natural gradient of about 0.0095% from its source in Northern Highlands County south and then east
 50 into Lake Okeechobee [1]. The upper portion of the basin contains significant amounts of
 51 agricultural land and cattle pastures while the lower basin is dominated by large wetland areas like
 52 the Cowbone Marsh [2-3]. According to 1999 land use surveys, the watershed is made of 70%
 53 agricultural production, pasture land or rangeland while about 27% consists of wetlands and forest
 54 [4].

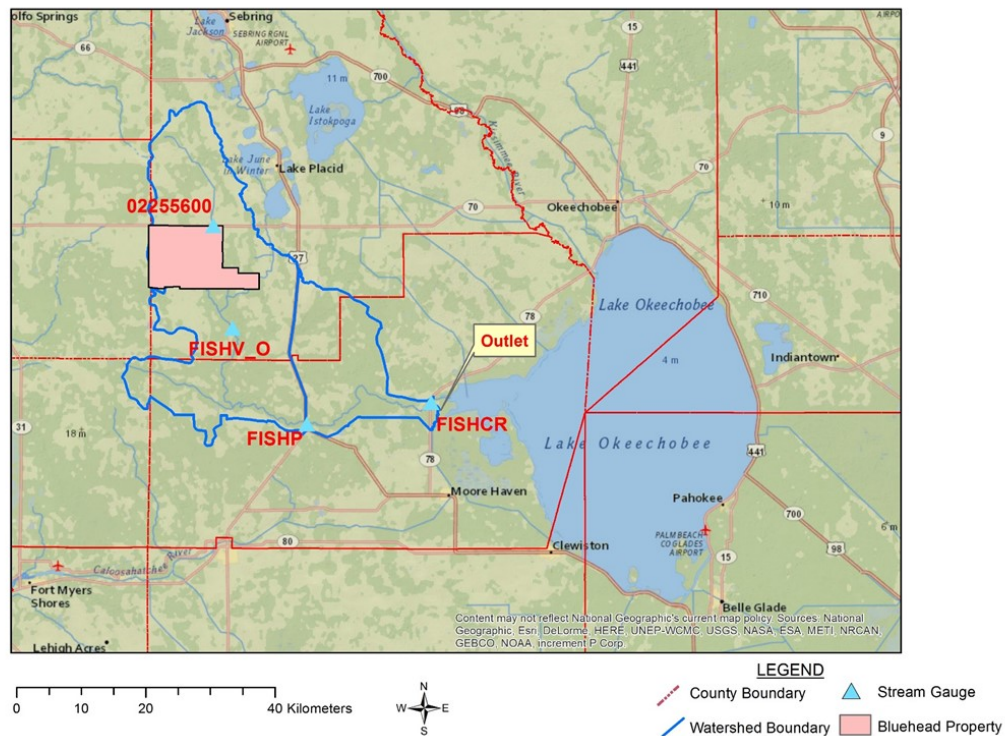
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Base map Source: ESRI



57 **Figure 1.** Project Location in Florida, USA.

Base map Source: ESRI

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58 **Figure 2.** Location of Fisheating Creek basin and the Bluehead Ranch property boundary.
59

60 While Fisheating Creek has been designated an “Outstanding Florida Waters” basin, it is also
61 classified as an impaired water by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection [4] with high
62 nutrient loads, low dissolved oxygen and high iron. Since Fisheating Creek discharges into the Lake
63 Okeechobee, it is subject to nutrient load reduction goals governed by the “Lake Okeechobee
64 Operating Permit or LOOP” which provides total phosphorus (TP) reduction goals for four regions
65 around Lake Okeechobee [5]. Fisheating Creek is in the Northern region of Lake Okeechobee which
66 has an annual TP load target of 78.59 metric tonnes per year [MT/year] [5]. Overall that means a
67 target load reduction of about 212 MT/year TP for the northern region around Lake Okeechobee
68 based upon 2012 TP estimates (e.g. a 73% reduction in TP loads discharging into the Lake).
69 Published TP load estimates entering Lake Okeechobee from Fisheating Creek watershed vary from
70 about 41 MT/year [1] to 66.1 MT/year [5].

71 This study used both statistical analysis of real stream and rain data (see Figure 1 for stream
72 gauge locations) and development of simple water budgets combined with model simulations to
73 evaluate different nutrient reduction alternatives. Four alternatives were evaluated with several
74 appearing to provide some moderate nutrient removal benefits for Lake Okeechobee.

75 2. Materials and Methods

76 The initial task undertaken for the study after developing a study overview was the inventory
77 and analysis of available hydrologic data for the Fisheating Creek watershed. Both stream flow data
78 and precipitation data were evaluated. Data from four stream gauges were reviewed to assess the
79 available period of record (POR), data quality, and completeness. Table 1 shows the POR available
80 for each gauge. Three out of the four gauges had data available through 2016. Gauge FishV_O only
81 collected 11 years of flow data and was ultimately discontinued in 1967. However, the FishV_O
82 gauge was very useful since the POR from 1955 to 1966 included some very dry periods. In addition
83 to the stream gauge data, three different rain gauges were also studied and used in the model
84 development. Key durations when both the stream gauge and rainfall data were available were
85 flagged for use during model development.

86
87**Table 1.** Fisheating Creek stream gauge available data POR.

Gauge Name	Period of Record
0255600	2003 to 2016
FishV_O ¹	1955 to 1966
FishP	1931 to 2016
FishCR	1997 to 2016

88

¹ Gauge no longer operational.

89 After collating the available data, the research attempted to estimate the overall water budget
90 and nutrient mass budget within the Fisheating Creek watershed. Various datasets and existing
91 literature was reviewed and analyzed to develop the overall water budget. Annual estimates were
92 developed for the precipitation, evapotranspiration (ET), surface water runoff, consumptive use,
93 infiltration, and overall change in basin storage. The water quality data available within the
94 watershed was reviewed with a primary emphasis on nutrients including TP and total nitrogen (TN).
95 The data was inventoried, evaluated, and then summarized in order to develop estimates of nutrient
96 mass load at each stream gauge and for the entire watershed discharging into Lake Okeechobee.

97 Moreover, a HEC-HMS rainfall-runoff model [6-7] was developed for the watershed for
98 purposes of evaluating nutrient removal projects include stormwater treatment areas (STAs). The
99 model was calibrated and then validated using existing stream gauge data at the four gauges
100 available for use alongside the three rain gauges that cover the watershed. The model was simulated
101 using the “continuous simulation” process as advocated by Shamsi & Koran [8]. This process is
102 more challenging than event-based hydrologic rainfall-runoff models due to longer calibration and
103 validation periods. For the model calibration period, the period from March 3, 1964 to July 7, 1966
104 was chosen based upon available precipitation data (three rain gauges in the watershed) and
105 available stream gauge data at FishV_O and FishP. The calibration period was also drier than
106 average with the mean annual precipitation at approximately 112 centimeters (cm) versus the long-
107 term average of 132.44 cm. For the model validation period, the period from January 1, 2015 to
108 November 7, 2016 was chosen due to data availability and for the fact that this period was
109 considerably wetter than normal. During this period the mean annual precipitation was about 152
110 cm versus the long-term average of 132.44 cm. This period also permitted the use of Nexrad-gauge
111 corrected precipitation data which involves using Nexrad radar to estimate precipitation
112 continuously across the watershed (<https://www.sfwmd.gov/weather-radar/rainfall-historical/year-to-date>).
113 Each model simulation compared synthetic (simulated) hydrograph data to observed
114 hydrograph data at available stream gauges.

115 For model development and calibration both water budgets and goodness-of-fit parameters
116 were calculated. The Nash-Sutcliffe efficiency coefficient (NSE) [9] compares the observed stream
117 flows at each gauge versus the simulated flows. Then the difference between the two values is
118 calculated. The goal of model calibration is to minimize the difference such that the model predicted
119 flow rate is about the same as the observed flow rate during the period of record modeled while
120 ensuring the overall water mass budgets are similar as well. During calibration, the residual
121 difference between the predicted model flow and actual observed flow is continually reduced in the
122 model by revising various input parameters including the curve number (CN), initial abstraction,
123 storage volume, ET, and baseflow.

124 The NSE is a normalized statistic that determines the relative magnitude of the residual variance
125 compared to the measured data variance and indicates how well the plot of the observed data versus
126 the simulated data fits the 1:1 line [10]. Although this statistic is mostly used to compare simulated
127 discharges versus modeled discharges in hydrologic models, it can also be used to compare simulated
128 stages versus observed stages. The NSE equation can be seen below in Equation 1.

129

$$SE = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (O_i - S_i)^2}{\sum_{i=1}^n (O_i - \bar{O})^2} \quad (1)$$

131 Where: O_i is the observed data on the i th day

132 S_i is the simulated data on the i th day

133 \bar{O} is the observed mean value

134 n is the number of observations

135

136 The ranges for NSE can vary between $-\infty$ to 1, where: NSE=1 corresponds to a perfect match
 137 between simulated data and observed data; NSE=0 shows that the model predictions are as accurate
 138 as the mean of the observed data; and $-\infty < \text{NSE} < 0$ occurs when the observed mean is a better predictor
 139 than the model, which indicates unacceptable performance [10].

140 Since this model is a preliminary version to be used for planning and preliminary design the
 141 research team established the following realistic calibration goals:

- 142 • Match simulated flow budgets at each gauge within 15% of observed values; and,
- 143 • NSE coefficient goodness-of-fit statistics for all model stream gauges to be greater than or
 144 equal to 0.3.

145 These goals are consistent with other recent model calibration guidance. For example, one
 146 source of model calibration criteria is the Wastewater Planning Users Group Code of Practice for the
 147 Hydraulic Modeling of Sewer Systems [11]. This guidance document suggests matching water mass
 148 budgets at +/- 10% for dry periods and -10% to +20% for wet periods. Other researchers suggest the
 149 appropriate range of NSE coefficients for planning purposes and preliminary design to be at least
 150 0.30 to 0.39 [8]. Values greater than 0.5 are considered “excellent” for calibration purposes
 151 permitting even final design use of the model. The St. Johns River Water Supply Impact Study [12]
 152 completed by the Saint Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) used the NSE to “rank”
 153 the calibration performance for their hydraulic model. Following their methodology, the NSE values
 154 can be divided into intervals which explain the model performance rating. The intervals are as
 155 follows: $0.75 < \text{NSE} < 1$ is a “very good” performance rating, $0.65 < \text{NSE} < 0.75$ is a “good” performance
 156 rating, and $0.50 < \text{NSE} < 0.65$ is a “satisfactory” performance rating. NSE values that are negative
 157 are unacceptable.

158 Finally, once the actual field data was analyzed and hydrologic model calibrated, they were used
 159 to develop preliminary designs for stormwater treatment areas designed to remove TP and TN from
 160 Fisheating Creek for the purposes of reducing the total nutrient load into Lake Okeechobee.
 161 Ultimately four alternatives were assessed and compared.

162 3. Results

163 3.1. Inventory and analysis of real field data

164 The stream flow data from the four stream gauges used in the watershed were analyzed using
 165 a frequency analysis to determine the portion of the POR where mean daily flow were:

- 166 • Less than 0.708 cubic meters per second (cms);
- 167 • Less than 2.83 cms; and,
- 168 • Greater 28.32 cms.

169 Table 2 shows the results of the frequency analysis.

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171

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Table 2. Frequency analysis of 4 stream gauges in Fisheating Creek.

Gauge Name	% Time stream discharge was less than 0.71 cms	% Time stream discharge was less than 2.83 cms	% Time stream discharge greater than 28.32 cms
0255600	71.27	84.59	0.02
FishV_O ¹	47.71	75.04	3.26
FishP	44.23	62.77	6.44
FishCR	21.10	50.76	11.72

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¹ Gauge no longer operational.

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It is clear from Table 2 data that any diversions of flow from Fisheating Creek must be managed carefully due to the generally low to moderate flow available during most periods. The potential adverse effects of any project on dry season conditions is of particular importance as a design constraint. For the Blue Head Ranch, gauges 0255600 and FishV_O bracket the property and represent available water for storage and/or treatment. In reviewing the frequency of high flows at gauge 0255600, which is just upstream of the northern boundary of Blue Head Ranch, the data indicate that in any given year one could expect flows of greater than 2.83 cms to occur for only about 56 days. Of course in dry years, it would likely be less than 56 days. Similarly, flow data at FishV_O indicate flows greater than 2.83 cms occur only about 91 days per year. Since the Blue Head Ranch southern boundary is about mid-way between these two gauges, it is estimated that flows greater than 2.83 cms occur about 74 days per year at that location or an average of the durations calculated at each gauge.

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187

In addition to the frequency analysis, the overall mean and median flows were calculated at each stream gauge. Table 3 depicts the results at each gauge location.

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Table 3. Flow statistics for each stream gauge.

Gauge Name	POR Available	Median Daily Flow (cms)	Mean Daily Flow (cms)
0255600	2003 to 2016	0.125	1.50
FishV_O ¹	1955 to 1966	0.48	3.75
FishP	1931 to 2016	1.11	7.21
FishCR	1997 to 2016	2.69	10.51

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¹ Gauge no longer operational.

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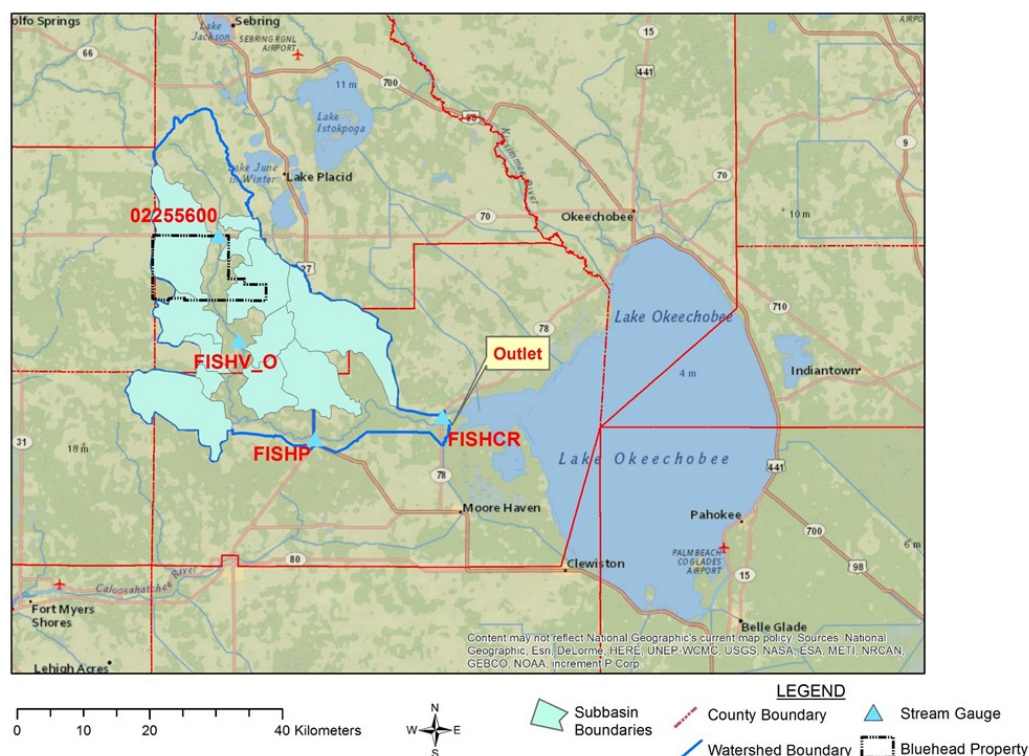
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Table 3 clearly demonstrates that the stream flow datasets are highly non-normal and that median values probably represent the most reliable flow statistic for central-tendency comparison purposes. Also, it is evident from Table 3 that the overall flows within Fisheating Creek are low to moderate. The location of the Bluehead Ranch property is between stream gauge 0255600 and gauge FishV_O meaning that a median flow of 0.48 cms or less would be expected under normal conditions. Further, in reviewing the location of various sub-basins within the Fisheating Creek, it is clear that any engineered nutrient removal projects located on the Bluehead Ranch property would be constrained by the availability of water from certain sub-basins or portions of the main stem Fisheating Creek. Figure 3 depicts the location of the key sub-basins important to the Bluehead Ranch property. The figure shows that the Bluehead Ranch can only really exert a positive effect on 6 sub-basins within the Fisheating Creek watershed including portions of the main creek stem.

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Base map Source: ESRI

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205 **Figure 3.** Location of various watershed sub-basins near the Bluehead Ranch property boundary.206 *3.2. Water and nutrient mass budget development*

207 Another important consideration in the Fisheating Creek watershed is the overall water budget
 208 in the area. The water budget delineates where precipitation that falls on the watershed ends up.
 209 Precipitation may be infiltrated or percolated into the surficial aquifer system (SAS), evaporated or
 210 transpired into the atmosphere, used consumptively for water supply or irrigation, and/or runoff into
 211 area streams and rivers. The overall water budget provides important information when
 212 considering alternative water storage projects in the watershed and constrains simulation models
 213 built to assess the potential projects. The Southwest Florida Water Management District
 214 (SWFWMD) has summarized precipitation for all counties in its service area
 215 (https://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/data/hydrologic/rainfall_data_summaries/) including Highlands
 216 County which covers a large portion of the Fisheating Creek watershed. For Highlands County the
 217 mean annual precipitation is about 132.44 cm. This is the precipitation (P) assumed for the general
 218 watershed water budget input for this study. Evaporation from open water and transpiration by
 219 vegetation account for the largest flow output in the overall water budget. The combined term,
 220 called evapotranspiration (ET), can be as high as 182.88 cm per year as a maximum potential.
 221 However, usually ET does not attain its maximum due to variations in solar radiation, wind, shade,
 222 groundwater depth, and type of vegetation. The research team reviewed and summarized ET data
 223 in the study area and from published reports from nearby watersheds. Abteu et al. provides a
 224 general estimate of actual ET in South Florida [13]. Mao et al. provides an estimate of actual ET in
 225 the Upper St. Johns River watershed which is similar in many ways to the Fisheating Creek watershed
 226 [14]. The Loinaz data was determined from model calibration in the Fisheating Creek for late 1990s
 227 data [2]. The Metcalf & Eddy/AECOM data probably represents the maximum ET possible in the
 228 Fisheating Creek watershed [1]. For this study, and based upon the published ET values, it is
 229 assumed that the actual ET within Fisheating Creek ranges from 73.66 cm per year 134.62 per year
 230 with 73.66 cm per year assumed for the initial water budget. During HEC-HMS model calibration,

231 the ET value was varied in order to determine the best match to observed flows at each of the 4 stream
232 gauges.

233 Estimates for annual average runoff (RO) for the watershed are also available within the
234 watershed. Rumenik estimates about 25.4 to 30.48 cm per year of annual runoff in Fisheating Creek
235 watershed [15]. Additional runoff estimates completed for this study using the four stream gauges
236 mentioned previously reveal estimates ranging from 22.86 to 30.48 cm per year. For the sake of the
237 water budget analysis, it is assumed that runoff is 27.94 cm per year on average. The remaining
238 terms in the overall water budget for the watershed include infiltration (INF), consumptive water use
239 (WD), and change in basin storage (DS). These values are not known apriori and must be estimated
240 using the HEC-HMS model. Change in basin storage can be assumed to be zero over a long-term
241 average (e.g. at steady-state conditions) but will vary year to year in the short term. Therefore, the
242 following basic water budget can be developed as equation (2):

$$243 \quad P - ET - RO - INF - WD = DS \quad (2)$$

244 Or

$$245 \quad 132.44 \text{ cm (P)} - 73.66 \text{ cm (ET)} - 27.94 \text{ cm (RO)} = INF + WD + DS = 30.84 \text{ cm}$$

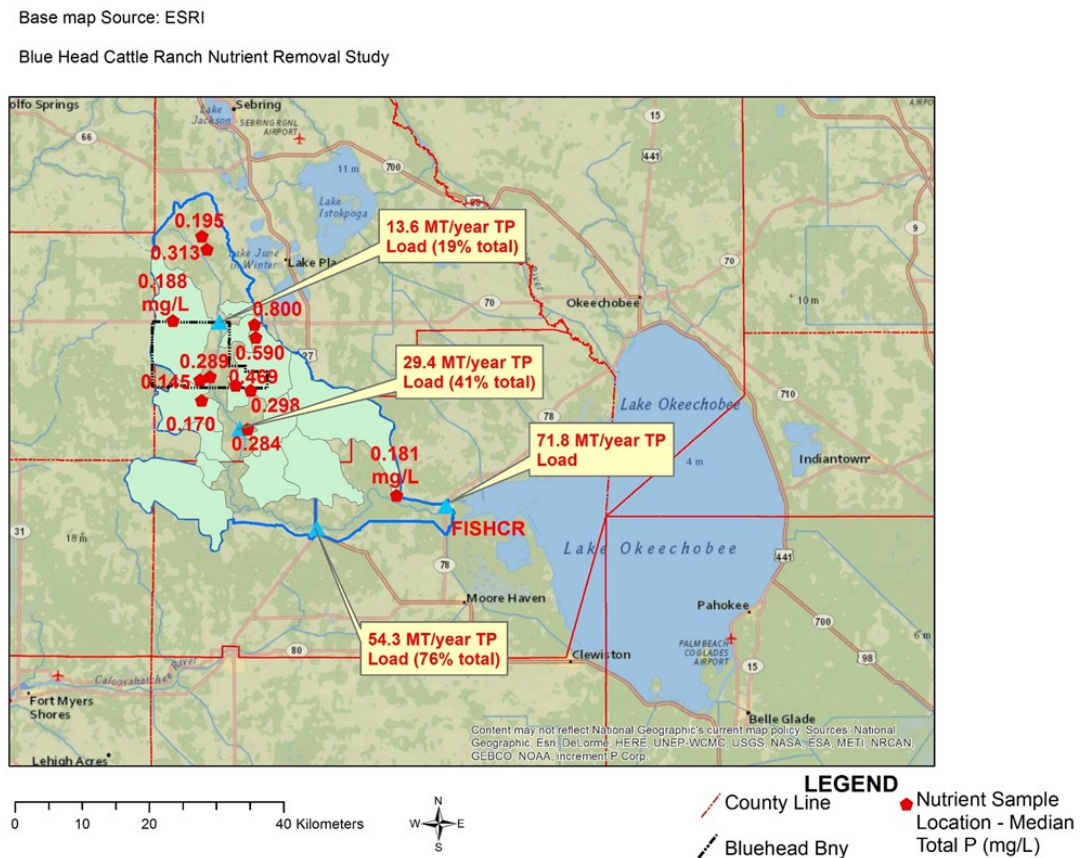
246 So, it appears that average annual combined infiltration, consumptive use, and change in
247 watershed storage is about 30.84 cm across the watershed. This equates to a daily flow equivalent
248 of 10.97 cms. The Loinaz study looked at opportunities for environmental restoration within the
249 Fisheating Creek watershed through model simulations and determined that turning off drainage
250 canals in order to raise the natural water table would provide about 3.12 cms of additional average
251 daily flow back to Fisheating Creek [2]. Another way to interpret this model result is to assume that
252 the 3.12 cms is currently being withdrawn for consumptive use purposes in the basin.

253 Taking that value into account (which can be normalized across the basin as about 8.76 cm per
254 year), the water budget assessment points to 22.08 cm per year of infiltration and change in storage
255 on average or about 17% of the mean annual precipitation. Therefore, in drier years there may be
256 less infiltration generating less flow in the Fisheating Creek. This would tend to lead to limit
257 available "base flow" from the surficial aquifer back to Fisheating Creek during drier years and the
258 observed stream gauge hydrographs bear this out showing very low flow or even zero flow for
259 months at a time within Fisheating Creek during the dry season from October to May each year or
260 longer during drought years. This is an especially important finding from this study and means that
261 for any reservoir or nutrient removal project, water withdrawals will be limited by availability of
262 suitable higher flows in the creek.

263 Water quality data collected within Fisheating Creek, primarily focused upon nutrients, was also
264 compiled and assessed for this study. FDEP estimated a mean TP concentration of 0.162 mg/L from
265 351 historic water quality samples in the watershed [4]. FDEP also estimated a mean total nitrogen
266 (TN) concentration of 1.62 mg/L from 331 historic samples [4]. A study by Graves showed that mean
267 concentration of TP in C-44 basin (east of Lake Okeechobee) to be 0.137 to 0.210 mg/L using different
268 environmental databases [16]. Graves et al. estimated the median values of TP and TN for various
269 landuse in the C-44 basin [17]. Median values of TP in stormwater runoff from citrus lands (also
270 important in Fisheating Creek watershed) were estimated at 0.160 mg/L while a value of 1.23 mg/L
271 was determined for TN [17].

272 As part of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project and the Lake Okeechobee Watershed
273 Assessment (LOWA) study [1], SFWMD has been collecting water quality data since about 2004 at
274 stations all around the Fisheating Creek watershed. Figure 4 shows a summary of the data with the
275 sampling station locations shown as well as the median total phosphorus (TP) concentration

276 calculated at each water quality station. The figure also depicts the estimated TP annual load
 277 calculated at each stream gauge along with the percentage of the total annual TP load entering Lake
 278 Okeechobee.



279

280 **Figure 4.** Location of water quality stations in the study area.

281

282 TP median concentrations range from 0.145 mg/L to 0.80 mg/L. Two stations along the main
 283 stem of Fisheating Creek reveal a long-term median concentration of about 0.287 mg/L TP.
 284 Combining these data with the flow data discussed previously, the research team developed the
 285 annual TP nutrient mass load estimates shown on Figure 4. These annual TP load estimates are
 286 higher than previous estimates and probably represent a maximum nutrient load. Published TP
 287 load estimates entering Lake Okeechobee from Fisheating Creek watershed vary from about 41
 288 MT/year [1] to 66.1 MT/year [5]. In carefully reviewing the estimate contributed by Metcalf &
 289 Eddy/AECOM, the research team noted that the mean flow used was considerably less than
 290 determined for this study using a longer POR. If the Metcalf & Eddy/AECOM TP estimate is
 291 adjusted to account for higher average annual flows calculated from the current research, the TP load
 292 would be approximately 54 MT/year instead of 41 MT/year. Therefore, the current total TP annual
 293 load estimate (e.g. 71.8 MT/year) derived in this study is 8.6% greater than the Goforth estimate and
 294 about 33% greater than the adjusted Metcalf & Eddy/AECOM estimate. In light of these differences,
 295 the current estimate probably represents a maximum TP load while the average load probably varies
 296 in a range from 54 MT/year to 71.8 MT/year. Total annual nitrogen mass load estimates from
 297 Fisheating Creek basin to Lake Okeechobee probably range from about 432 to 718 MT/year assuming
 298 at TN/TP ratio ranging from 8 to 10 which would be consistent with data from past studies [4].

299

300 3.3. HEC-HMS model development, calibration, and validation

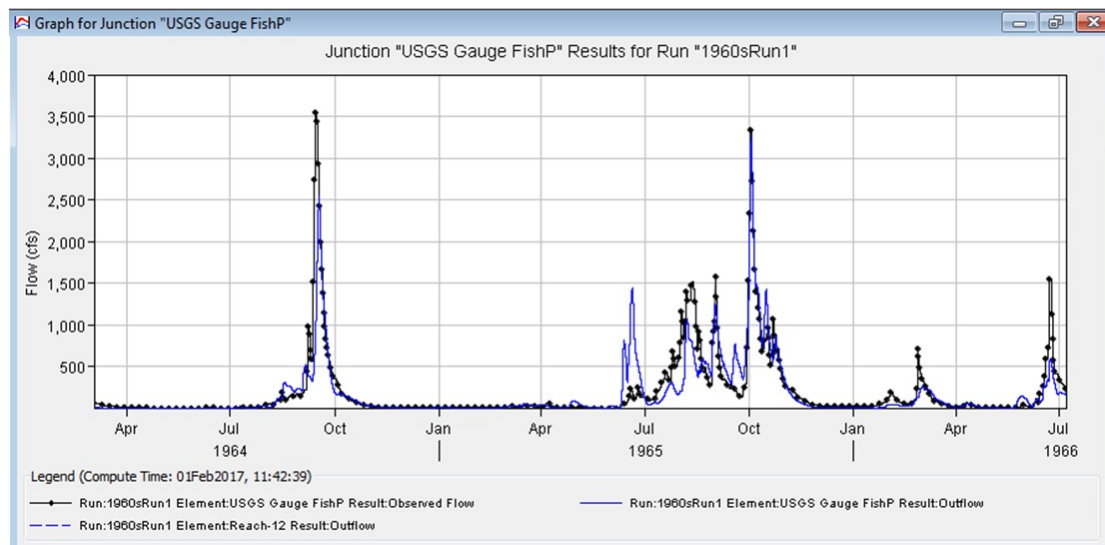
301 Several weeks were expended developing the model and then working through model
 302 calibration and validation. Table 4 displays the final calibration and validation goodness-of-fit
 303 statistics.
 304

Table 4. Model goodness-of-fit statistics for each stream gauge.

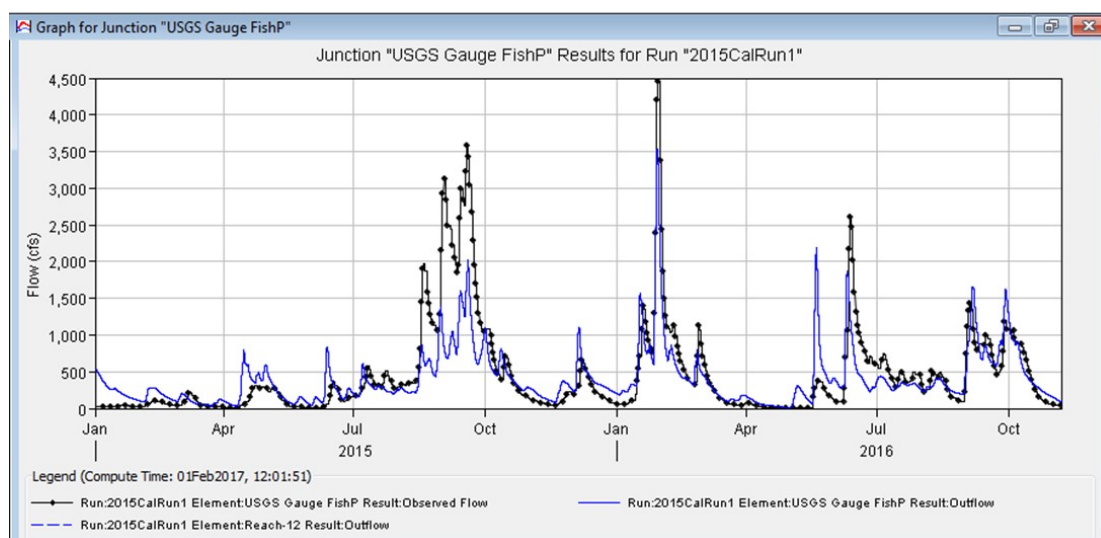
Gauge Name	NSE Calibration Period	NSE Validation Period	Mass Balance Difference Calibration Period	Mass Balance Difference Validation Period
0255600	N/A ¹	0.51	N/A	8.27%
FishV_O	0.30	N/A	13.86%	N/A
FishP	0.73	0.59	9.40%	10.67%
FishCR	N/A	0.45	N/A	1.90%

305 ¹ N/A indicates that gauge was not used due to data deficiencies or missing data.

306 As demonstrated in the table, the model meets all of the calibration goals and therefore can be
 307 used for planning and preliminary design purposes. Figures 5 and 6 show model hydrographs from
 308 the calibration and validation periods comparing simulated flows in blue and observed (actual) flows
 309 in black. Note that the graphs were taken from a published report for the client and the units are in
 310 cubic feet per second (cfs) per the client request.
 311



312 **Figure 5.** Comparison of model simulation results and observed results at gauge FishP for the
 313 calibration period.
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316
317 **Figure 6.** Comparison of model simulation results and observed results at gauge FishP for the
318 validation period.
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320 *3.4. Development and evaluation of nutrient removal alternatives*

321 The research team developed and evaluated four nutrient removal alternatives as part of the
322 study. The alternatives ranged in size from about 51 hectares to 294 hectares. Each was designed
323 to include an initial equalization cell followed by parallel stormwater treatment trains using a
324 combination of submerged and/or floating plants. In addition, the alternatives were stipulated to
325 include variable speed discharge pump stations in order to cover inflow rates ranging from 0.02 to
326 1.5 cms. Also, water outlet control structures were envisioned to have the ability to pond a
327 minimum depth of water in each treatment cell to ensure efficacy of the wetland plant-based
328 treatment design. Each alternative was assessed for its overall nutrient removal efficiency based upon
329 the work of Wetland Solutions Inc. [18] and observed STA performance characteristics documented
330 by Hazen & Sawyer [19]. Table 5 lists the expected range of nutrient removal performance of each
331 alternative along with alternative size, estimated total first cost, and annual operating cost.
332
333

Table 5. Expected nutrient removal performance of 4 alternatives.

Alternative Name	Alternative Size (ha)	Low TP Removal Estimate (MT/Year)	High TP Removal Estimate (MT/Year)	Estimated First Cost (2016 \$)	Estimated Annual Operating Cost (\$)
Alternative 1	91.13 ha	1.01	2.02	3,299,301	169,000
Alternative 2	50.63 ha	0.53	1.06	1,778,000	75,000
Alternative 3	293.63 ha	2.08	4.16	9,446,525	525,000
Alternative 4	182.25 ha	1.54	3.08	5,077,031	244,000

334
335 The alternatives provide a range of performance characteristics as well as first costs and operating
336 costs. However, due to the unique nature of water availability within the basin, any of the
337 alternatives will need to include maximum flexibility to ensure they are sustainable.

338 **4. Discussion**

339 Overall the four alternatives that were evaluated in this report can remove 0.53 to 4.16 MT/year
340 of TP and an additional 10.56 to 17.83 MT/year of TN. The overall capital cost and O&M costs to
341 build and operate the facilities is moderate but operational costs are not optimal due to the low water
342 flow conditions which predominate in this part of the Fisheating Creek watershed. However, the

343 estimated unit removal costs are in the expected range of actual unit removal costs published for
344 active STA projects [19].

345 The overall potential benefit of the proposed STA project is substantial. If Alternative # 3 was
346 selected for implementation, as much as 6.3% of the total TP load generated in the Fisheating Creek
347 watershed would be removed from Lake Okeechobee every year. And, the 4.16 MT/year could
348 represent up to 8.6% of the LOOP required TP load reduction targeted for the Fisheating Creek
349 watershed. The unit removal cost is just one way to assess the value of the nutrient removal projects.
350 RTI, working for the Everglades Foundation, estimated the value of nutrient removal based upon
351 different possible treatment options [20]. They also calculated the true TP removal cost for the
352 Everglades Construction Project (ECP), a massive STA system south of Lake Okeechobee, at \$533,981
353 per metric tonne. Therefore for Alternative # 3, the overall value of the TP removed could be as high
354 as \$2,221,361 per year using similar reasoning. In this light, the Alternative # 3 project would pay
355 for itself in about four years. Similarly, Alternative # 4 TP removal could be valued at \$1,644,662 per
356 year and could recoup its initial costs in about three years.

357 A key constraint will likely be the availability of water within the watershed. The watershed already
358 exhibits very low or no flows during the dry season and during drought conditions. If groundwater
359 withdrawals from the watershed increase in the future, low or no flow conditions are expected to
360 worsen thus rendering STA projects possibly infeasible. Future planning of any proposed STA
361 facilities should closely examine system operation under low flow conditions.

362 **Supplementary Materials:** The following are available online at www.mdpi.com/xxx/s1, PowerPoint slides.

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364 The conceptualization of the work was performed by Dr. Chris Brown. The model simulations were prepared
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375

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