



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

WASHINGTON OFFICE  
2353 RAYBURN HOB  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-9889

KISSIMMEE OFFICE  
804 BRYAN ST  
KISSIMMEE, FL 34741  
(407) 452-1171

ORLANDO OFFICE  
5800 S SEMORAN BLVD, SUITE B  
ORLANDO, FL 32822  
(407) 204-3370

May 14, 2025

**TESTIMONY OF CONGRESSMAN DARREN SOTO**  
**MEMBER DAY**  
**FOR THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, thank you for allowing me to testify before the Committee about my priorities for Member Day. As a proud Floridian and the first Congressional Member from Florida of Puerto Rican ancestry it is my responsibility to highlight the issues that are impacting my state, my district, and my constituents.

My priorities in this Congress are H.R. 2580, *Kissimmee Wild and Scenic River Study Act*; H.R. 900, *Sinkhole Mapping Act of 2025*; and H.R. 704, *Manatee Stamp Act*.

**H.R. 2580 Kissimmee Wild and Scenic River Study Act -**

H.R. 2580, *Kissimmee Wild and Scenic River Study Act*, would direct the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and designate a restored segment of the Kissimmee River as a Recreational River.

The Kissimmee River was a naturally winding waterway, but after hurricanes caused widespread flooding in the region in the 1940s, Congress authorized the Army Corps of Engineers to straighten and shorten the river to control its flow, practically reducing it to a drainage ditch. This historically misguided project, carried out in the 1960s, dried out tens of thousands of acres of wetlands, and decimated habitat for birds and other wildlife. It also sped up the flow of the river, sharply diminishing its natural capacity to absorb nitrogen and phosphorus nutrient pollution before it emptied into Lake Okeechobee and the Florida Everglades.

In 1968, Congress created the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to "preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations." If passed, the Kissimmee River Wild and Scenic River Act will ensure that restored segments of the river are preserved for future generations to enjoy.

The Kissimmee River Restoration Project was a partnership between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District to help wildlife species return to the river after efforts to prevent flooding destroyed habitats. The project was completed in 2021 and restored more than 40 square miles of the river floodplain ecosystem, 20,000 acres of wetlands, and 44 miles of the historic river channel. It was the largest river restoration in the world and cost nearly \$1 billion to complete.



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

WASHINGTON OFFICE  
2353 RAYBURN HOB  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-9889

KISSIMMEE OFFICE  
804 BRYAN ST  
KISSIMMEE, FL 34741  
(407) 452-1171

ORLANDO OFFICE  
5800 S SEMORAN BLVD, SUITE B  
ORLANDO, FL 32822  
(407) 204-3370

During the 117th Congress, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (page #1141) included parts of the Kissimmee River Wild and Scenic River Act to direct the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to complete a study of the Kissimmee River within three years to make it part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This legislation will keep up the pressure to ensure timely designation.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important legislation. I look forward to working with you as H.R. 2580 moves forward in the committee process.

**H.R. 900 Sinkhole Mapping Act -**

H.R. 900, *Sinkhole Mapping Act of 2025*, would improve our understanding of sinkholes.

Sinkholes are caused by erosion, and they appear suddenly and have devastating consequences. The dangers of sinkholes are real and they occur in every state and territory. The cost of sinkhole damage to property over the last 15 years cost, on average, at least \$300 million per year. While rare, sinkholes can be deadly. Around 11pm on the evening of February 28, 2013, Jeff Bush, a man from central Florida, was asleep in his bedroom when a large sinkhole opened directly under his house, swallowing him and his entire bedroom.

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) currently studies sinkholes, and the Sinkhole Mapping Act of 2018 would build on existing research activities that are making advances in understanding the geologic and hydrologic controls in sinkhole-prone landscapes, known as karsts. To better inform and support rapid response to sinkhole formation and effective mitigation measures, the bill would direct the USGS to focus on the short- and long-term mechanisms that trigger sinkholes, including extreme storm events, prolonged droughts leading to shifts in water management practices, as well as ongoing aquifer depletion, and other major changes in water use. The bill would also direct the Director of the USGS to establish and maintain a public website that displays maps that depict zones that are at greater risk of sinkhole formation and other relevant information critical for use by community planners and emergency managers.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important legislation. I look forward to seeing H.R. 900 on the Floor as a suspension.

**H.R. 704 Manatee Stamp Act –**

H.R. 704, *Manatee Stamp Act*, would improve our protection efforts for manatees.



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

WASHINGTON OFFICE  
2353 RAYBURN HOB  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-9889

KISSIMMEE OFFICE  
804 BRYAN ST  
KISSIMMEE, FL 34741  
(407) 452-1171

ORLANDO OFFICE  
5800 S SEMORAN BLVD, SUITE B  
ORLANDO, FL 32822  
(407) 204-3370

Last year, over 550 manatees died in Florida. This is alarming and should prompt us to take action to protect them from experiencing further tragedies. We must do everything in our power to protect these precious mammals.

The bill would require the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to issue a manatee semipostal stamp that will generate proceeds for the FWS to continue their efforts to protect manatees and manatee habitats. With unusual mortality events in the last five years—which caused us to lose thousands of manatees in Florida—it is critical to take every possible approach to help these mammals thrive and survive. We were thrilled to see the USPS launch the ‘Save Manatees’ stamp in 2024, which helped save the cost of design, but our bill is still necessary to help proceeds go towards conservation efforts.

Let’s protect these precious mammals. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important legislation. I look forward to working with you as H.R. 704 moves forward in the committee process.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Huffman, I look forward to working with you to advance my priorities in this bill and I welcome any questions you may have. Thank you and I yield back.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Darren Soto".

Darren Soto  
Member of Congress