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**Osceola
County**

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August 2, 2021

The Honorable Darren Soto
2353 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Soto:

On behalf of the Osceola County Board of County Commissioners, I write in support of your bill, H.R. 4404, to include the Kissimmee River into the National Wild and Scenic River System.

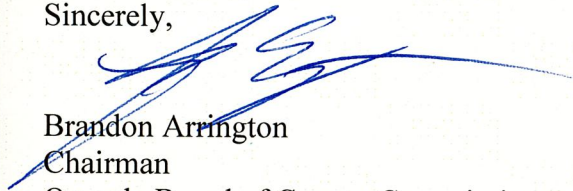
Stretching over 100 miles from Lake Kissimmee to Lake Okeechobee, the Kissimmee River is a naturally winding river that serves as both the headwaters for the Everglades and the main drainage route for the expansive Kissimmee River Basin. The River was historically characterized by an extensive floodplain, reaching up to three miles wide in certain areas, which is seasonally inundated by heavy rains.

As you know, following widespread flooding and property damage in the 1940s, Congress directed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to channelize the Kissimmee River. This led to the Central and South Florida Project, which resulted in engineering changes to deepen and straighten the Kissimmee River, draining much of the surrounding floodplain. While the project delivered on the promise of flood protection, it also destroyed much of the floodplain-dependent ecosystem that nurtured threatened and endangered species, as well as hundreds of other native fish and wetland-dependent animals.

In 1992, Congress approved efforts to restore the original flow of the Kissimmee River. After extensive planning, construction for environmental restoration began in 1999. The Kissimmee River Restoration Project is expected to be complete next month and will return flow to 44 miles of the river's historic channel and restore about 40 square miles of ecosystem.

After spending nearly \$1 billion to restore the river, we support your efforts to protect this investment by including the Kissimmee River into the National Wild and Scenic River System. This designation will balance future development and recreational uses with ecological preservation. It is imperative we do not squander this opportunity and safeguard this investment for present and future generations to come. Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,


Brandon Arrington
Chairman
Osceola Board of County Commissioners

cc: Don Fisher, County Manager
Mike Nichola, Government Affairs Director
Vianed Aldebol, Government Affairs Coordinator
Iris Soto, Executive Administrative Assistant