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House of Representatives
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TESTIMONY OF CONGRESSMAN DARREN SOTO
WRDA 2022
FOR THE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, thank you for allowing me to testify before the Committee about my priorities for the Water Resources Development Act of 2022.

Among the requests I made is to allow the Army Corp of Engineers to use cooperative agreements with Florida to execute work under the Removal of Aquatic Growth (RAG) program. The Cooperative Agreement adds flexibility and efficiency both fiscally and technically to project execution.

My project requests include:

- The Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project, which has a Chief's report on the way and would improve the quantity, timing and distribution of water entering Lake Okeechobee, provide for better management of Lake Okeechobee water levels, reduce large freshwater releases to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries, improve system-wide operational flexibility, and restore portions of the historic Kissimmee River Channel and floodplain.
- The North Lake Toho Restoration and Water Quality Project, which would remove legacy sediments within the north lobe of Lake Tohopekaliga to improve flood storage and reduce sediment within Mill Slough and East City Ditch.
- The Lake Runnymede Restoration Project, which would restore the lake to pre-development status and return appropriate vegetative cover within the lake to support appropriate ecological functions including essential fish habitat, wading bird foraging, and reduction of nutrient loading to East Lake Tohopekaliga due to sediment flows from Lake Runnymede.
- The Lake Tohopekaliga-Kissimmee Lakefront Restoration and Water Quality Improvement Project, which would restore parts of the north shore of Lake Tohopekaliga to allow ecosystem restoration and reduction of nutrient and sediment flow to the Upper Kissimmee Basin of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed. It would improve essential fish habitat and improve foraging and nesting habitat for the Everglades Snail Kite.

- The Lancaster Park Floodplain Improvement Project would restore and expand Shingle Creek to allow for flood storage and reduced floodway stages while retaining the historic character of the creek.

In terms of environmental infrastructure requests, I'd like to advocate for:

- Polk County's Derby Ditch Drainage Improvement Project, which would consist of the design, permitting, right-of-way/easement acquisition and construction of a drainage improvement to pipe an existing 1.36 miles of open drainage channel that conveys stormwater from a watershed that extends from Main Street in Auburndale to Lake Jessie in Winter Haven.
- Orange County's Aquifer Storage Reservoir (ASR) Chemical Addition Project which includes the design and construction of drinking water infrastructure improvements through a chemical feed system to reduce the dissolved oxygen in the potable water prior to injection into the Aquifer Storage Reservoir (ASR). The reduction in dissolved oxygen will eliminate arsenic leaching into the storage reservoir and will allow OCU to optimize the facility. The benefits include flexibility to meet peak and maximum day demands and increased water quality for customers.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Graves, 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.