

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING H.R. 3961, A BILL TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE SEGMENTS OF THE KISSIMMEE RIVER AND ITS TRIBUTARIES IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA FOR STUDY FOR POTENTIAL ADDITION TO THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

December 12, 2018

Chairman Daines, Ranking Member King, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 3961, a bill to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate segments of the Kissimmee River and its tributaries in the State of Florida for study for potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and for other purposes.

The Department recommends that the Committee defer action on H.R. 3961 until the Kissimmee River Restoration Project has been completed. In addition, funding for studies is not a priority as the Department is focusing resources on addressing the National Park Service's \$11.6 billion deferred maintenance backlog and other critical national park needs.

H.R. 3961 would designate the entire Kissimmee River for study under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The study would evaluate the candidate river's eligibility, classification and suitability. The bill directs the Secretary to report the results of the study to the appropriate committees of Congress within three years of funds being made available for the study.

Stretching over 100 miles from Lake Kissimmee to Lake Okeechobee in Central Florida, 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.

Following widespread flooding and property damage in the 1940s, public outcry prompted Congress to direct the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to channelize the waterway. 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. In 1992, citing changing public views and biological changes to the region, Congress approved efforts to restore the original flow of the Kissimmee River.

At a cost of more than \$1 billion, the Kissimmee River Restoration Project, which is being managed by the Corps and the South Florida Water Management District, is expected to be completed in 2025. At that point, the project is expected to have reestablished historic conditions in 44 miles of the river and restored nearly 63,000 acres of wetlands. Delaying a decision about whether to authorize a study for potential addition to the Wild and Scenic River System until after

the project is completed would provide an opportunity for supporters of the study to consult with local landowners, federal and state land management agencies, local governments, river authorities, and other groups that have interests related to the river, to gauge their support for this course of action at that time.

If the Committee decides to take action on this bill, the Department would like to work with the Committee on amendments to address the scope and clarify the timing of the study.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.