



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-0917

August 22, 2025

The Honorable Bruce Westerman  
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman  
Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Huffman:

The recreational and aesthetic values of our Nation's free-flowing rivers have helped showcase the United States as an international stage of natural treasures for decades. Southwest Florida hosts several unique waterways that reflect this natural beauty, including the exceptional Myakka River. Protecting our water quality and wildlife has been one of my priorities since entering Congress. To do so, I introduced H.R. 642, the *Myakka Wild and Scenic River Act of 2025*, to add the 34-mile segment of the Myakka River in Sarasota County, Florida, to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. On July 14, 2025, Sen. Rick Scott introduced identical legislation, S. 2270, to make this same designation. In its Fiscal Year 2026 bill report, the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies signaled its interest in actions taken to attain designation.<sup>1</sup> This letter asks that the Committee on Natural Resources consider H.R. 642, under regular order, and provide members of the committee the opportunity to review its merits and support. I am confident that designating the 34-mile segment of the Myakka River fits within the Committee's priorities to enhance natural resource policy on both federal and nonfederal lands.

Congress strengthened its commitment to preserving our river corridors for future generations in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA; P.L. 90-542).<sup>2</sup> In 1968, this Act was conceived with a focus on western rivers that traverse primarily federal lands. Nonetheless, the Act was written with specific property rights protections: existing private property development, river access, fishing, hunting, and water rights are unaffected.<sup>3</sup> The traditionally western river system reached a level of acclaim that eastern river administrators expressed an interest in adopting. These eastern river additions, however, traveled through largely state, local, and private lands where local governments and councils demonstrated successful management models equipped to collaborate with the Secretary of the Interior. This state-and-local dynamic led to what are known as 'Partnership' Wild and Scenic Rivers (PWSRs).<sup>4</sup>

In these partnerships, local government and community entities employ cooperative agreements with the National Park Service as an overlay of administrative resources and technical assistance. Wild and Scenic designation "neither gives nor implies government control of private lands within the river corridor," whether designation is made as a partnership or traditional river.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Section 4 of H.R. 642 enumerates nonfederal land management and ownership protections so that the Committee should not have to consider subsequent land offsets.<sup>6</sup> These written protections preclude the Myakka River from being considered a unit of the National Park System. The *Myakka Wild and Scenic River Act of 2025* specifies the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council (the "Council") as the administering partner. The Council seats state and local agencies, private property owners, and nonprofit organizations.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the following letters of support have been offered from this broad cross section of interests:

<sup>1</sup> House Appropriations Committee, "Department Of The Interior, Environment, And Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2026." <https://www.scribbr.com/chicago-style/website-citations/>

<sup>2</sup> National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, "Wild and Scenic Rivers Act." [https://www.rivers.gov/rivers/rivers/about?utm\\_source](https://www.rivers.gov/rivers/rivers/about?utm_source)

<sup>3</sup> National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, "Questions and Answers." <https://www.rivers.gov/carp/questions-and-answers?page=0>

<sup>4</sup> National Park Service, "Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers." <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1912/partnership-wild-and-scenic-rivers.htm>

<sup>5</sup> National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, "Private landowners within the river corridor." <https://www.rivers.gov/apps/question/what-are-effects-wild-and-scenic-river-designation-private-landowners-within-river#:~:text=Under%20the%20Wild%20&%20Scenic%20Rivers%20Act%20C.restrictions%20would%20apply%20only%20to%20federal%20lands.>

<sup>6</sup> H.R. 642, "Myakka Wild and Scenic River Act of 2025." <https://www.congress.gov/119/bills/hr642/BILLS-119hr642ih.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> MRMCC, "Appendix O." <https://myakkarivermanagement.org/Files/MWSRMS%20Final/Appendix%20O.pdf>

- Myakka River Management Coordinating Council<sup>8</sup>
- Sarasota County Board of County Commissioners<sup>9</sup>
- Coastal & Heartland Estuary Partnership<sup>10</sup>
- Big Waters Land Trust<sup>11</sup>
- American Rivers<sup>12</sup>
- League of Women Voters of Sarasota County<sup>13</sup>

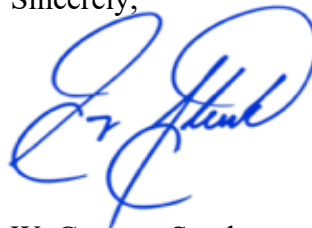
Additionally, H.R. 642 has received the endorsement of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

Congress first recognized the Myakka River by authorizing a segment for study in S. 791, the *National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978* (P.L. 95-625).<sup>14</sup> Then, the Florida Legislature echoed its support in 1985 through the Myakka River Wild and Scenic Designation and Preservation Act (Section 258.501, Florida Statutes).<sup>15</sup> This Act established the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council that has worked to meet and exceed the intent of the state legislature and federal criteria for designation. For instance, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires the Interior to prepare a “comprehensive management plan” to detail management practices within three years of designation (16 U.S.C. § 1274(d)).<sup>16</sup> Remarkably, the Council already has such plan that “appears entirely compatible with federal designation,” according to a National Park Service Peer Review issued on May 28, 2025, by Jamie Fosburgh, Region 1 PWSR Branch Chief.<sup>17</sup> Following an NPS update study of the Myakka River in 2025, this peer review noted that it “agree[s] with the conclusions and findings of this Evaluation regarding both eligibility and suitability [for designation]” of the 34-segment in Sarasota County.

Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers are platforms for state and local agencies to accelerate proven concepts, not start-ups, in river administration. The Myakka River Management Coordinating Council undoubtedly fits this description. The Council has advised ongoing restoration projects, like light pollution mitigation, that align with existing priorities in the National Park Service’s technical assistance portfolio.<sup>18</sup> While state designation empowered the Council with a guiding policy framework, the voluntary decision-making of Sarasota County made these statutory provisions enforceable. County ordinance No. 2008-02, for example, adopted and enforced the 220-foot buffer zone (Myakka River Protection Zone) that was suggested by state statute.<sup>19</sup> H.R. 642 would designate the identical 34-mile segment that the Florida Legislature recognized in 1985 and that local government, agencies, community partners, and the Council have worked to protect ever since. The Council is well-equipped to advance this united local and state effort to preserve and enhance the Myakka River for generations to come.

For these reasons, H.R. 642, the *Myakka Wild and Scenic River Act of 2025* is essential to preserve this waterway for local wildlife and residents of Southwest Florida and I urge its expedient consideration as we approach the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Sincerely,



W. Gregory Steube  
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Tom Tiffany, Chairman, Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
The Honorable Joe Neguse, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Federal Lands

<sup>8</sup> MRMCC, “Letter of Support.” <https://steube.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Myakka-River-Management-Coordinating-Council-PWSR-Letter-of-Support.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Sarasota County BCC, “Letter of Support.” <https://steube.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Sarasota-BCC.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> CHNEP, “Letter of Support.” <https://steube.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/CHNEP-2.7.25-Support-Letter-for-Partnership-Wild-and-Scenic-Federal-Designation-of-the-Myakka-River.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Big Waters Land Trust, “Letter of Support.” <https://steube.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/BWLT-Natural-Resources-Letter-of-Support.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> American Rivers, “Letter of Support.” <https://steube.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/AR-Myakka-LoS.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> League of Women Voters of Sarasota County, “Letter of Support.” <https://steube.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/League-of-Women-Voters-of-Sarasota-County-Myakka-PWSR-Letter-of-Support.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Rivers.gov, “Public Law 95-625.” <https://www.rivers.gov/sites/rivers/files/2022-10/Public%20Law%2095-625.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> The 2024 Florida Statutes, “Myakka River; wild and scenic segment.” [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&URL=0200-0299/0258/Sections/0258.501.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0200-0299/0258/Sections/0258.501.html)

<sup>16</sup> US Code, “Chapter 28-Wild and Scenic Rivers.” <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title16/chapter28&edition=prelim>

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, “Peer Review of Myakka Partnership.” <https://steube.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/FINAL-Fosburgh-Myakka-Eval-Peer-Review-1.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> National Park Service, “Light Pollution.” <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nightskies/lightpollution.htm>

<sup>19</sup> MRMCC, “Appendix J.” <https://myakkarivermanagement.org/Files/MRWSMP/Appendix%20J%20-%202008-002.pdf>