

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Governing Board Members

FROM: Zach Welch, Ph.D., and Rory Feeney, Field Operations Division

DATE: June 11, 2026

SUBJECT: Kissimmee River Restoration and Management Area Update and Ten-Year General Management Plan, 2025-2035

Agenda Item Background:

The Kissimmee River Management Area covers 42,750 acres in Polk, Osceola, Highlands, Okeechobee, and Glades Counties (Management Area). The Management Area stretches from Lake Kissimmee to Lake Okeechobee and encompasses lands within the Kissimmee River's 100-year floodplain, featuring a vast wetland ecosystem interspersed with oxbows and upland communities. These lands were acquired as part of the Kissimmee River Restoration Project authorized by Congress in 1992.

The Kissimmee River Restoration construction began in 1999 and was completed in 2021. The project backfilled 22 miles of the C-38 Canal, re-established flow to 44 miles of the river's historic path, and partially rehydrated more than 40 square miles of floodplain. The construction work involved removal or modification of water control structures to reconnect the system while maintaining flood control and water supply for the region. Comprehensive monitoring of the reconstructed river system is revealing improvements in the river and its floodplain and is documenting steady accrual of benefits over time. A healthy invertebrate community and native vegetation have returned to the river channel, and improved hydrology has reestablished wetland plants over most of the floodplain and increased wading bird use by 360 percent.

To date, the property has been managed in accordance with the Governing Board-approved Kissimmee River Management Area Ten-Year General Management Plan (2014-2024). The District is directed to develop General Management Plans for lands titled to the District to ensure the conservation, preservation, and recreation of those lands, pursuant to Sections 373.1391 and 373.591, Florida Statutes, and subsection 140-25(6)(b) of the South Florida Water Management District Policies Code. A General Management Plan describes the historical, physical, and ecological aspects of the property, existing public recreational opportunities, and the various land management functions necessary to properly manage the area. The purpose of a General Management Plan is to provide guidance to District land managers for the implementation of appropriate and consistent land management practices, to identify goals and objectives for the property's management, and to present the findings of the land management review team.

In 2025, this plan was reviewed by stakeholders and the land management review team to ensure the property's management remains consistent with the purpose of its acquisition and the District's land management objectives. Based on this review, District staff has updated the Kissimmee River Management Area Ten-Year General Management Plan (2025-2035).

Additional Item Background:**Core Mission and Strategic Priorities:**

This Governing Board item supports the District's core mission and strategic goals by allowing for public recreation consistent with Section 373.1391, Florida Statutes. The Land Resources Bureau within the Field Operations Division is responsible for implementing this item and administering public recreation on District lands.

Funding Source:

This item does not require the expenditure of additional District funds. Funding for the implementation of the General Management Plan is provided through the District's standard budgetary process.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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ATTACHMENTS:

[Resolution No. 2026-0608](#)

[Exhibit A](#)