

June 2, 2026

Dear Orange County Commissioners,

I urge you to oppose the proposed widening of McCulloch Road from N. Orion Boulevard to N. Tanner Road. Although presented as a transportation improvement, this project would lay the groundwork for a future bridge across the Econlockhatchee River and increase development pressure on the rural lands east of the river in both Orange and Seminole Counties.

This is not simply a 1.1-mile road project. It is a decision with long-term consequences for an Outstanding Florida Waterway and for communities that have worked for years to protect the rural character of this area. More intense development east of the Econ would increase stormwater runoff, septic impacts, and nutrient pollution that threaten the river's water quality and surrounding habitat.

Widening McCulloch Road would also strengthen future arguments for a river crossing. Once roadway capacity is expanded on the west side, pressure will grow to complete the connection across the river in the name of mobility, safety, or evacuation. In today's policy environment, local governments face increasing limits on their ability to manage growth and protect environmentally sensitive lands, which makes it especially important to avoid taking the first step toward a much larger regional impact.

Even where conservation lands exist, they do not guarantee that a future crossing could never be pursued. Land ownership, easements, and changing policy priorities can shift over time. That uncertainty should weigh heavily against widening a corridor that could later be used to justify infrastructure through or adjacent to protected lands.

The project's cost also demands closer scrutiny. Spending more than \$21 million to widen just 1.1 miles, along with an estimated \$6.39 million for 6.3 acres of right-of-way, is a substantial public investment. Before committing those funds, the County should fully evaluate whether lower-cost, lower-impact alternatives could address the corridor's traffic issues more effectively.

The fact that this roadway has remained in long-range plans for decades should not, by itself, justify moving it forward now. Conditions, priorities, and public concerns change over time, and projects should be reevaluated based on current community values, environmental constraints, and fiscal responsibility.

There are credible alternatives short of widening that could improve traffic operations. Delays on two-lane roads are often driven by intersection performance, not mid-block capacity. Additional turn lanes, signal improvements, roundabouts where appropriate, and multimodal enhancements could improve safety and traffic flow while preserving the corridor's primarily two-lane character.

The Central Florida Sierra Club Conservation Committee opposes this project, and many of the concerns raised during public review reflect the same conclusion: this proposal is costly, environmentally risky, and not the only way to address traffic. As a retired transportation planner, I believe a serious analysis of intersection and operational improvements could support a practical alternative to widening.

If this section is widened, it could later be cited as support for a new bridge on the grounds of emergency access or hurricane evacuation. That possibility should not be dismissed. Once this corridor is expanded, the rationale for extending it across the river becomes much easier to advance.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask you to oppose the proposed widening and direct staff to evaluate lower-impact alternatives that focus on intersection and operational improvements. I also urge Orange County to coordinate with Seminole County on updated strategies to protect the rural east side of the Econ from avoidable development pressure, floodplain impacts, and increased pollution.

Thank you for your vigilance and interest,

Fred Milch

Fred Milch
Central Florida Sierra Club Conservation Committee