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DATE: March 21, 2001

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
ANALYSIS**

BILL #: HB 729
RELATING TO: Environmental Control
SPONSOR(S): Committee on Natural Resources & Environmental Protection; and Representative(s)
Argenziano

TIED BILL(S):

ORIGINATING COMMITTEE(S)/COUNCIL(S)/COMMITTEE(S) OF REFERENCE:

- (1) NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION YEAS 13 NAYS 0 (CRI)
- (2) GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS (FRC)
- (3) COUNCIL FOR READY INFRASTRUCTURE
- (4)
- (5)

I. SUMMARY:

CS/HB 729 exempts from regulation the removal by riparian owners of organic detrital material from freshwater lakes and rivers. Such removal is allowed along the length of the riparian owner's shoreline, and may occur to the rocky substrate. Property owners shall also be permitted to leave a channel to open water for boating and swimming purposes. All material removed must be deposited in an upland site to prevent its reintroduction into waters of the state and replanting of native aquatic vegetation shall also be required.

The bill also creates an exemption for existing permitted docks to utilize floating vessel platforms provided they do not exceed the docks current slip or certain other parameters if no slip exists.

CS/HB 729 has an indeterminate, but likely insignificant, fiscal impact to public agencies but would provide a savings to individual property owners.

The bill provides that the act shall take effect July 1, 2001.

SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS:

A. DOES THE BILL SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

1. Less Government Yes No N/A
2. Lower Taxes Yes No N/A

Persons who currently need an environmental resource permit to remove organic material from water bodies adjacent to their property would no longer be required to obtain a permit or pay the associated permit fees.

3. Individual Freedom Yes No N/A

Persons would have an additional exemption from environmental resource permit requirements for dredging activities. However, an unintended consequence of the bill may be conflicts between waterfront property owners who want to exercise their right to the exemption, and their neighbors who feel their property rights have been violated (see "Effect of Proposed Changes" section).

4. Personal Responsibility Yes No N/A
5. Family Empowerment Yes No N/A

For any principle that received a "no" above, please explain:

B. PRESENT SITUATION:

Many wetland and surface water dredging and filling activities require environmental resource permits (ERPs) that are issued by either the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) or the water management districts. These permits describe the conditions under which the activities will be allowed. In addition to state permits, many of these activities also require a federal Clean Water Act-Section 404 permit that is issued by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Currently, multiple activities are exempt from ERP requirements. These exempted activities are listed in section 403.813, F.S. and include:

- ❖ The installation of overhead transmission lines, and the installation, replacement, or repair of subaqueous transmission and distribution lines;
- ❖ The installation and repair of certain mooring pilings, and the replacement and repair of certain existing docks, piers, and boat ramps;
- ❖ The restoration and construction of particular seawalls, and the construction of some private docks;
- ❖ Maintenance dredging of existing manmade canals, channels, intake, and discharge structures;
- ❖ The maintenance and restoration of existing insect control structures;

- ❖ The construction, operation, or maintenance of stormwater management facilities, and the repair or replacement of existing stormwater conveyance structures;
- ❖ The construction and maintenance of swales;
- ❖ The installation of aids to navigation;
- ❖ The repair or replacement of certain existing bridges;
- ❖ The removal of aquatic plants, tussocks and associated removal of organic matter when such activities are authorized through either an aquatic plant management permit or exemption granted under s. 369.20, F.S., or s. 369.25, F.S.

The exemption for organic matter removal was adopted by the Legislature in 1996, and amended in 1997. It was designed to streamline the permitting process for property owners and governmental entities wanting to remove nuisance aquatic plants and associated detrital matter from lakes. This ERP exemption is available to those with an aquatic plant control permit or to those operating under an exemption to such a permit under s. 369.20, F.S. or s. 369.25, F.S. The ERP exemption is allowable under the following conditions: organic material that exists on the surface of the natural mineral soils may be removed to a depth of 3 feet or only to the soils, whichever is less; all organic material removed must be deposited on an upland site in a manner to prevent its reintroduction into waters of the state (with an exception for agencies who are permitted to create wildlife islands from the spoil as part of restoration and enhancement projects); and the activities must be performed in a manner consistent with state water quality standards.

The 1997 legislation (Chapter 97-22, Laws of Florida) also created an aquatic plant control permit exemption under s. 369.20, F.S. Under this exemption, a riparian property owner is able to physically or mechanically remove herbaceous and semi-woody herbaceous aquatic plants in an area equal to either 50 percent of his frontage or 50 feet, whichever is less, and a sufficient distance waterward and perpendicular to the property owner's shoreline, to create a corridor to open water in certain freshwater water bodies. The permit exemption is not available to property owners living along aquatic preserves, Outstanding Florida Waters, or saltwater bodies. Nor does it apply to property owners who want to use herbicides to kill the aquatic plants, or who need an ERP for other regulated dredging activities.

While the 1997 legislation was intended to streamline the state permitting process for lakefront property owners wanting to remove nuisance aquatic plants and associated detritus, it did not remove the requirement for lakefront property owners to obtain a Section 404 permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers for these projects. Depending on the amount of detritus to be dredged, the project could qualify for different types of Corps permits. For example, a project could qualify for inclusion under the Corps "nationwide permit" (NWP #19-Minor Dredging) that automatically allows the excavation of 25 cubic yards of submerged material below the line of ordinary high water, provided no more than 1/10 acre of wetlands will be lost, and the District Engineer of the Corps is notified for any dredging involving more than 10 cubic yards. Projects requiring more dredging and filling of wetlands or submerged lands than is authorized by the above NWP would have to go through an individual Section 404 permitting process.

Docks are currently permitted and regulated under chapters 253, 373, or 403 Florida Statutes. Section 253.12, F.S., contains requirements and procedures for the use and lease of submerged lands on which docks are located. Provisions of chapter 373, F.S., deal with the conveyance of lands to the water management districts and allowable uses of such lands. Thus many individuals with docks may fall under the purview of the districts. Finally, provisions of section 403, part V,

F.S., outline general permitting procedures concerning activities involving the waters of the state. In addition this section of law also deals with permits issued by district offices. Recently developments in boat storage have introduced a new product that is used in boat slips to lift boats out of the water thus helping in preserving their condition and reducing expenditures concerning maintenance. Regulatory authorities in addressing these floating vessel platforms have chosen to treat this technology as a modification to existing dock permits. Because this technology has been determined to be a modification permit holders are required to seek changes and have their existing permits reviewed.

C. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

CS/HB 729 provides two new exemptions to current permitting requirements. The first deals with the removal of organic detrital material or "muck" as it is commonly referred and the second addresses the use of floating vessel platforms used at current docks to lift boats out of the water.

Removal of Organic Detrital Material

CS/HB 729 creates paragraph (s) of subsection (2), section 403.813, F.S. new statutory language which will provide an exemption from current permitting requirements concerning the removal of this material in freshwater lakes and streams. Specific requirements of the exemption are:

- No filling or peat mining shall be allowed.
- No removal of native wetland trees shall be allowed.
- No removal of underlying mineral soils or rocky substrate may be performed.
- All removed material shall be placed in an upland site so as not to cause water quality violations.
- Sufficient turbidity controls shall be utilized.
- Replanting of native aquatic plants shall occur in a minimum of 25% of the effected area.
- Allowing for an access corridor that shall not exceed 50 feet or 50% of an owners frontage property, whichever is less.
- Replanting shall occur in an area in which water depth does not exceed 3 feet or is beyond 5 feet from the ordinary high water line.
- No muck removal may occur waterward of 100 feet beyond the ordinary high water line.

Additional requirements contained in the bill address notification procedures for the property owner and rights of the Department of Environmental Protection concerning evaluation and review of the removal project.

Floating Vessel Platforms

The bill amends sections 253.12 and 403.817, F.S., to clarify that no additional governmental approvals shall be necessary for existing dock permits that seek to utilize this technology for their boats. For docks with a defined boat slip the platform shall be contained entirely within the slip for docks with no defined boat slip the platform shall be limited to an area not to exceed 135% of the length of the boat it supports.

The bill provides that the act shall take effect July 1, 2001.

D. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS:

Section 1:

Section 4: Provides that this act shall take effect July 1, 2001.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT:

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

CS/HB 729 would result in an indeterminate, but likely minimal, loss of revenue from ERP fees to the FDEP and the water management districts for activities related to the removal of muck.

2. Expenditures:

N/A

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

N/A

2. Expenditures:

A likely insignificant savings would result for local governments that are waterfront property owners and wanted to take advantage of the exemption, as they would not have to pay ERP fees.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

Eligible riparian property owners would benefit from not having to bear the costs associated with obtaining ERPs to remove unconsolidated organic detrital matter from adjacent water bodies. However, it is difficult to estimate the amount of the savings as the potential number of participating property owners is uncertain.

The use of floating vessel platforms is anticipated to result in a savings to boat owners thru less maintenance requirements.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

It is difficult to estimate the exact amount of the fiscal impact resulting from the muck removal exemption, since ERPs cannot currently be tracked based on the specific authority they authorize.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF ARTICLE VII, SECTION 18 OF THE FLORIDA CONSTITUTION:

A. APPLICABILITY OF THE MANDATES PROVISION:

This bill does not require counties or municipalities to expend funds or to take an action requiring the expenditure of funds.

B. REDUCTION OF REVENUE RAISING AUTHORITY:

This bill does not reduce the authority that municipalities or counties have to raise revenues in the aggregate.

C. REDUCTION OF STATE TAX SHARED WITH COUNTIES AND MUNICIPALITIES:

This bill does not reduce the percentage of state tax shared with counties and municipalities.

IV. COMMENTS:

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

N/A

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

N/A

C. OTHER COMMENTS:

N/A

V. AMENDMENTS OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

On March 14, 2001, the Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Protection heard the bill and adopted a strike amendment and an amendment to the strike amendment. The strike amendment kept the original intent of the bill to create an exemption for the removal of organic detrital material it simply brought together into one area of law the procedures and processes needed for the exemption. The amendment to the amendment creates an exemption for existing permitted docks to utilize floating vessel platforms without the need to obtain additional approvals. The bill was then passed as a committee substitute.

VI. SIGNATURES:

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION:

Prepared by:

Staff Director:

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