

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee

BILL: CS/SB 148

INTRODUCER: Committee on Environmental Preservation & Conservation and Senator Aronberg

SUBJECT: Mangrove Protection

DATE: March 3, 2009 **REVISED:** _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Uchino	Kiger	EP	Fav/CS
2.			CA	
3.			GA	
4.				
5.				
6.				

Please see Section VIII. for Additional Information:

A. COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE..... Statement of Substantial Changes

B. AMENDMENTS..... Technical amendments were recommended

Amendments were recommended

Significant amendments were recommended

I. Summary:

This Committee Substitute (CS) provides that the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) shall assess a penalty against any person who violates the provisions of the Mangrove Trimming and Protection Act. Provides for an expansion of those against whom penalties may be assessed for violations of the Mangrove Trimming and Protection Act. Provides for additional penalties for major violations or second or subsequent violations. Provides that the trimming of mangroves to obtain a “right of view” must be conducted in conformance with the provisions of the Mangrove Trimming and Protection Act. Allows the DEP to provide for exemptions and general permits for trimming activities that have minimal adverse impacts on the water resources of the state. Allows the DEP to revoke the Professional Mangrove Trimmer status for persons who become repeat violators. Clarifies the applicability of the Mangrove Trimming and Protection Act to certain public and private lands and allows the Act to be enforceable on such lands.

The CS provides that the bill becomes effective July 1, 2009.

The CS substantially amends ss. 403.121, 403.9323, 403.9324, and 403.9331, F.S.

II. Present Situation:

In 1995, the Legislature created the Mangrove Trimming and Preservation Act. The 1995 act substantially revised the regulation of mangroves by providing for:

- Delegation of mangrove regulation to local governments;
- Exemptions from permitting requirements for certain trimming activities;
- General permits for trimming in extended mangrove fringe areas;
- Mitigation and restoration policies; and
- Regulation of professional mangrove trimmers.

In 1996, the act was amended to strengthen the requirements for trimming mangroves and to correct some weaknesses in the 1995 law. No mangroves may be cut lower than 6 feet under either an exemption or general permit. Mangroves over 16 feet must be cut in stages, removing no more than 25 percent annually.

The 1996 changes provided for additional specificity as to the lengths of shoreline that were statutorily exempted from requiring a trimming permit. The clarified exemption for mangrove trimming without a permit applies to property with a shoreline of 150 feet or less. Property owners with a shoreline of more than 150 feet may not trim, under an exemption, more than 65 percent along the shoreline. Additionally, for trimming activities occurring on property developed for multi-family residential use, the 65 percent shoreline trimming limitation must be equitably distributed so that each owner's riparian view is similarly impacted.

The 1996 changes also provided for an expansion of the list of those who qualify as professional mangrove trimmers; however, landscape architects could not trim mangroves until standards were set by the Board of Landscape Architecture. Mitigation and enforcement provisions were also revised and provided that efforts for violations have five years to achieve a canopy equivalent to the area destroyed. Violations can be resolved by purchasing credits from a mitigation bank at a 2-to-1 ratio.

Section 403.121, F.S., provides for judicial and administrative remedies for violations of ch. 403, F.S. paragraph (d) of s. 403.121(3), F.S., provides that for mangrove trimming or alteration violations, the DEP shall assess a penalty of \$5,000 per violation against the contractor or agent of the owner or tenant that conducts mangrove trimming or alteration without a permit¹. The preparation or signing of a permit application by a person currently licensed under ch. 471, F.S., to practice as a professional engineer does not make that person an agent of the owner or tenant.

Currently, there appear to be some inconsistencies within the Mangrove Trimming and Preservation Act regarding where and how trimming is allowed. The only trimming method in the act is "top trimming", which is the least desirable for mangrove productivity.

¹ In practice, the DEP adopted rules that allow first-time violators to enter into consent agreements between the Department and themselves to avoid the \$5,000 per violation penalty or from having to go to circuit court. Thus, the DEP currently assesses penalties on a sliding scale based on severity of the violation and willingness of the violator to work with the DEP to make the environment whole.

Certain persons are authorized by the act to automatically be considered as Professional Mangrove Trimmers. Those persons are:

- Certified arborists, certified by the International Society of Arboriculture;
- Professional wetland scientists, certified by the Society of Wetland Scientists;
- Certified environmental professionals, certified by the Academy of Board Certified Environmental Professionals;
- Certified ecologists, certified by the Ecological Society of America;
- Landscape Architects currently licensed in Florida under part II of ch. 481, F.S.;
- Persons who have conducted mangrove trimming as part of their business and are able to demonstrate a sufficient level of competence to either the DEP or a delegated local government; and
- Persons who have been qualified by a delegated local government through a mangrove-trimming qualification program as provided in s. 403.9329(7)(a), F.S.

The automatic Professional Mangrove Trimmers provided for in section 403.9329(1)(a)-(e), F.S. are not required to have prior mangrove trimming expertise. The DEP has no ability to revoke the Professional Mangrove Trimmer status from those professionals who repeatedly violate the Mangrove Trimming and Preservation Act.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 amends s. 403.121, F.S., to expand whom may be penalized for violations of the ss. 403.9321-403.9333, F.S., by providing that the DEP shall assess a penalty against any person who violates the provisions of the Mangrove Trimming and Protection Act. This section provides for the following penalty schedule for mangrove trimming and alteration violations:

- A fine of up to \$5,000 for major violations of ss. 403.9321-403.9333, F.S., and up to \$1,000 for first time violations that would have qualified for a general permit under s. 403.9327, F.S., or that have insignificant impacts on the mangrove resources of the state;
- For professional mangrove trimmers, an additional penalty of \$250 per trimmed or altered mangrove for major violations or second or subsequent violations, not to exceed a total of \$10,000 in additional penalties;
- For all others, an additional penalty of \$100 per trimmed mangrove and \$250 per altered mangrove for major violations or second or subsequent violations, not to exceed a total of \$10,000 in additional penalties; and
- A clarification that the signing of a permit by a currently licensed professional engineer as defined by Chapter 471, F.S., does not constitute a violation.

Section 2 amends s. 403.9323, F.S., to clarify the legislative intent regarding mangrove trimming to achieve waterfront property owners' riparian rights of view and other rights of riparian ownership as recognized by s. 253.141, F.S., or law. The clarification provides that the trimming of mangroves under the riparian owner's rights must be conducted in conformance with the provisions of the Mangrove Trimming and Protection Act.

Section 3 amends s. 403.9324, F.S., to allow the DEP to adopt rules providing for exemptions and general permits authorizing trimming activities that have, singularly or cumulatively, a minimal adverse effect on the water resources of the state.

Section 4 amends s. 403.9329, F.S., to allow the DEP to revoke the Professional Mangrove Trimmer status for persons who statutorily claim the automatic Professional Mangrove Trimmer status under the Mangrove Trimming and Protection Act but who become repeat violators.

Section 5 amends s. 403.9331, F.S., to provide that the provisions of the Mangrove Trimming and Protection Act do not allow the trimming of mangroves on uninhabited islands that are publicly owned, or on lands that are set aside for conservation and preservation or mitigation, except where necessary to protect the public health, safety, and welfare or to enhance public use of, or access to, conservation areas in accordance with approved management plans. This language is identical to that found in s. 403.9323(2), F.S., relating to legislative intent for the trimming of mangroves but clarifies that this is an enforceable provision.

Section 6 provides for an effective date of July 1, 2009.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The CS will allow certain persons to obtain either an exemption or a general permit for certain activities relating to the trimming of mangroves and may provide for less regulation in some instances. Owners' riparian rights of view and other riparian rights of ownership that involve the trimming of mangroves, may be conducted without prior government approval, which will reduce permitting costs. It is likely that the penalties assessed to first-time offenders will be similar to those assessed under present law given the DEP's current penalty structure. However, for major or repeat offenders, the penalties assessed may be up to \$15,000 per incident.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The specific fiscal impact to the DEP to implement the new provisions of the CS is likely to be minimal as its current penalty structure is similar to the one proposed in the CS. Because of the creation of an administrative penalty against any person who violates ss. 403.9321-403.9333, F.S., the DEP may reduce its litigation costs by having the option to assess an administrative penalty rather than suing a violator in circuit court. The ability to revoke the status of automatic Profession Mangrove Trimmers who violate the statutory provisions of ss. 403.9321-403.9333, F.S., or any other adopted mangrove rules. This new administrative authority may result in reduced enforcement costs due to the revocation of serial violators' licenses; however, the specific fiscal impact is indeterminate at this time. The CS also increases the total assessed penalty allowed from \$5,000 to up to \$15,000 for serious violations, but the impact of recovering increased fines is indeterminate compared to the costs for mangrove restoration and mitigation that the DEP expends.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Additional Information:

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

CS by Environmental Preservation & Conservation on March 3, 2009:

The CS makes the following substantial changes:

- Provides for graduated fines of up to \$5,000 for major violations of ss. 403.9321-403.9333, F.S., and up to \$1,000 for first time violations that would have qualified for a general permit under s. 403.9327, F.S., or that have insignificant impacts on the mangrove resources of the state;
- For professional mangrove trimmers, creates additional penalties of \$250 per trimmed or altered mangrove for major violations or second or subsequent violations, not to exceed a total of \$10,000 in additional penalties;
- For all others, creates additional penalties of \$100 per trimmed mangrove and \$250 per altered mangrove for major violations or second or subsequent violations, not to exceed a total of \$10,000 in additional penalties; and
- Clarifies that the signing of a permit by a currently licensed professional engineer as defined by Chapter 471, F.S., does not constitute a violation.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
