

FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/HB 663

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:
118 Y's 0 N's

SPONSOR: Rep. Steube

GOVERNOR'S ACTION: Approved

COMPANION BILLS: SB 850

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/HB 663 passed the House on April 28, 2011, and subsequently passed the Senate on May 3, 2011. The bill was approved by the Governor on June 2, 2011, chapter 2011-116, Laws of Florida, and becomes effective July 1, 2011. The bill creates special hunt areas within state forests for certain wounded members of the military.

The Division of Forestry (division) within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services manages and administers all state forests in the interests of the public. The division is authorized to direct multiple-use management of forest lands owned by the state.

The bill directs the division to designate areas of state forests as "Wounded Warrior Special Hunt Areas" to honor wounded veterans and service members, and provide outdoor recreational opportunities for eligible veterans and service members. Admittance to these designated areas is limited to any person who:

- Is an active duty member of any branch of the United States Armed Forces and has a combat-related injury; or
- Is a veteran who served during a period of wartime service or peacetime service and has a service-connected disability or was discharged from military service because of a disability acquired or aggravated while serving on active duty.

However, the bill also provides that the division can grant admittance to the designated areas to a person who is not eligible for the purpose of accompanying an eligible veteran or service member who requires their assistance to use the designated area.

The bill specifies that the required funding for specialized accommodations in "Wounded Warrior Special Hunt Areas" shall be provided through the Friends of Florida State Forests Program.

The division is granted general rulemaking authority to administer this subsection.

The bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on state or local governments.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Present Situation

The Division of Forestry (division) of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) manages and administers all state forests in the interests of the public.¹ The division is authorized to direct multiple-use management of forest lands owned by the state. Such use includes, but is not limited to, water-resource protection, forest-ecosystems protection, natural-resource-based low-impact recreation, and sustainable timber management for forest products.² Furthermore, the division cooperates with federal, state, and local government agencies, non-profit organizations, and other persons to apply for, solicit, and receive grants and funds from those agencies, organizations, firms and individuals.³

There are 35 state forests in Florida, totaling more than 1,052,000 acres.⁴ Under the direction of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, many state forests are open to regulated hunting and fishing.⁵ Hunting requires a license and permit and is allowed only in designated Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) during specific seasons.⁶ Fishing also requires a valid license.⁷

Non-profit organizations such as Wounded Warrior Outdoors, Inc.⁸ and Wounded Warriors In Action⁹ provide wounded servicemen and servicewomen with opportunities for outdoor recreational activities. In the past, such activities have included hunting and fishing excursions in various parts of the country. The organizations assert that such activities are therapeutic and an important part of physical and mental recovery.

Currently, the division provides a hunting area in Lake Wales Ridge State Forest for a nearby “Wounded Warrior” organization. The hunts typically last for a weekend or several days and include special accommodations as needed by the wounded warriors, such as turkey blinds with space for operation of a motorized wheelchair.

Effects of Bill

The bill amends s. 589.19, F.S., to directs the division to designate areas of state forests as “Wounded Warrior Special Hunt Areas” to honor wounded veterans and service members, and provide outdoor recreational opportunities for eligible veterans and service members. Admittance to these designated areas is limited to any person who:

- Is an active duty member of any branch of the United States Armed Forces and has a combat-related injury; or

¹ Section 589.21, F.S.

² Section 589.04(4), F.S.

³ Section 589.04(1)(B), F.S.

⁴ *State Forests in Florida*, DIVISION OF FORESTRY, http://www.fl-dof.com/state_forests/#history (last visited Feb. 25, 2011).

⁵ *State Forest Recreation*, DIVISION OF FORESTRY, http://www.fl-dof.com/forest_recreation/index.html (last visited Feb. 25, 2011).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id..*

⁸ ABOUT WWO INC., <http://www.woundedwarrioroutdoors.com/about.html> (last visited April 1, 2011).

⁹ ABOUT WWIA, <http://www.woundedwarriorsinaction.org/about.html> (last visited April 1, 2011).

- Is a veteran who served during a period of wartime service or peacetime service and has a service-connected disability or was discharged from military service because of a disability acquired or aggravated while serving on active duty.

However, the bill also provides that the division may grant admittance to the designated areas to a person who is not eligible for the purpose of accompanying an eligible veteran or service member who requires their assistance to use the designated area.

The bill specifies that the required funding for specialized accommodations in “Wounded Warrior Special Hunt Areas” shall be provided through the Friends of Florida State Forests Program. The division is granted general rulemaking authority to administer the bill’s provisions.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None. The division presently charges different recreational use fees in state forest lands. According to the division, the areas contemplated for this designation currently are closed to public use and therefore produce no recreational use fee revenue.

2. Expenditures:

None.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

This bill does not change any of the permitting or licensing requirements for hunting or fishing. As such, all associated fees would be paid as currently required.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.