

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 Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security Committee

BILL: SB 850

INTRODUCER: Senator Hays

SUBJECT: State Forests

DATE: March 23, 2011

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Fleming	Carter	MS	Favorable
2.	_____	_____	EP	_____
3.	_____	_____	BC	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

This bill requires the Division of Forestry of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to designate “Wounded Warrior special hunt areas” on state forest lands to provide hunt areas for disabled veterans.

This bill substantially amends section 589.19 of the Florida Statutes.

This bill has an effective date of July 1, 2011.

II. 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

¹ Section 589.21, F.S.

² Section 589.04(4), F.S.

³ Section 589.04(1)(B), F.S.

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.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill amends s. 589.19, F.S., to require the division to designate “Wounded Warrior special hunt areas” on state forest lands to provide hunt areas for disabled veterans. A person is eligible to hunt in a Wounded Warrior special hunt area if he or she is a veteran as defined in s. 1.01, F.S., or has eligible peacetime service, as defined in s. 296.02, F.S., and has a service-connected disability as determined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs or has been discharged or released from military service because of a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty. In addition, persons required to assist the veteran because of his or her disability are authorized to use such areas.

This bill provides that the funding required for specialized accommodations shall be provided through Friends of Florida State Forests (FFSF) created in s. 589.012, F.S. FFSF is a charitable not-for-profit corporation that supports programs within Florida's state forests and is governed by a board of directors representing all areas of the state.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

⁴ *State Forests in Florida*, DIVISION OF FORESTRY, http://www.fl-dof.com/state_forests/#history (last visited March 21, 2011).

⁵ *State Forest Recreation*, DIVISION OF FORESTRY, http://www.fl-dof.com/forest_recreation/index.html (last visited March 21, 2011).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ ABOUT WWO INC., <http://www.woundedwarrioroutdoors.com/about.html> (last visited March 21, 2011).

⁹ ABOUT WWIA, <http://www.woundedwarriorsinaction.org/about.html> (last visited March 21, 2011).

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:

Friends of Florida State Forests would fund specialized accommodations needed in the Wounded Warrior special hunt areas.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

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.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.