

By Senator Dean

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1                                   A bill to be entitled  
2       An act relating to oyster fishery and resource  
3       management; creating s. 379.2445, F.S.; providing  
4       legislative intent; establishing the Nature Coast  
5       Oyster Alliance within the Fish and Wildlife  
6       Conservation Commission; requiring the alliance to  
7       meet a certain number of times per year; providing  
8       that the purpose of the alliance is to coordinate the  
9       development of a comprehensive oyster resource  
10      recovery and management plan; requiring the alliance  
11      to establish an Oyster Resource Recovery and  
12      Management Working Group; assigning certain  
13      responsibilities to the working group; providing an  
14      effective date.

15  
16 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

17  
18       Section 1. Section 379.2445, Florida Statutes, is created  
19      to read:

20       379.2445 Nature Coast Oyster Alliance.-

21       (1) LEGISLATIVE INTENT.-The Legislature finds that there is  
22      a need to develop a comprehensive strategy to guide the recovery  
23      and management of the oyster fishery in this state and  
24      particularly in the Apalachicola Bay and Suwannee Sound. It also  
25      finds that it is in the state's economic interest to manage its  
26      oyster resources to promote the highest level of environmental,  
27      ecological, and economic benefit. Thus, the Nature Coast Oyster  
28      Alliance is hereby created to make recommendations regarding the  
29      management of the oyster fishery and oyster resources.

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30       (2) CREATION.—The Nature Coast Oyster Alliance is an  
31 advisory council created pursuant to chapter 20 and created  
32 within the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The  
33 alliance is composed of 17 members, appointed for 4-year terms,  
34 as follows:

35       (a) Eleven members to be appointed by the executive  
36 director of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission,  
37 consisting of:

38       1. Two members from the Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
39 Commission representing marine fisheries management and law  
40 enforcement;

41       2. Two members from the oyster harvesting industry  
42 representing the Nature Coast Oyster Alliance group;

43       3. Two members from the oyster harvesting industry  
44 representing the Cedar Key Oystermen's Association, Inc., and  
45 the Suwannee Oyster Association, Inc., respectively;

46       4. Two members from the oyster processing and sales  
47 industry representing seafood processing businesses;

48       5. One member from the aquaculture industry to be  
49 recommended by the Aquaculture Review Council;

50       6. One member from a private nonprofit organization  
51 involved in oyster resource development and management; and

52       7. One member from the seafood community at large  
53 representing other seafood producing, processing, and marketing  
54 sectors.

55       (b) One member from the University of Florida Oyster  
56 Recovery Team to be appointed by the University of Florida.

57       (c) One member from the Governor's office to be appointed  
58 by the Governor.

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59           (d) One member from the Department of Agriculture and  
60 Consumer Services to be appointed by the Commissioner of  
61 Agriculture.

62           (e) One member from the Department of Environmental  
63 Protection to be appointed by the Secretary of Environmental  
64 Protection.

65           (f) One member from the Suwannee River Water Management  
66 District to be appointed by the executive director of the  
67 Suwannee River Water Management District.

68           (g) One member from the Levy or Dixie County Board of  
69 County Commissioners.

70           (3) MEETINGS.—The Nature Coast Oyster Alliance shall meet  
71 at least four times each year and elect, by a quorum, a chair  
72 and vice chair.

73           (a) The chair of the alliance shall preside at all meetings  
74 and call meetings as often as necessary to carry out the  
75 purposes and responsibilities of the alliance.

76           (b) The alliance shall keep a complete record of the  
77 proceedings of each meeting, including the names of the members  
78 present and the actions taken at each meeting.

79           (c) A quorum consists of a majority of members.

80           (d) Members are eligible to receive per diem and  
81 reimbursement for travel expenses pursuant to s. 112.061.

82           (4) PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITIES.—The purpose of the Nature  
83 Coast Oyster Alliance is to coordinate the development of a  
84 comprehensive oyster resource recovery and management plan for  
85 the purpose of recommending the best approaches for the  
86 restoration, rehabilitation, and sustainability of oyster  
87 resources and the oyster fishery in the Nature Coast region.

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88 (5) OYSTER RESOURCE RECOVERY AND MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP.-

89 The Nature Coast Oyster Alliance shall establish an Oyster  
90 Resource Recovery and Management Working Group, whose members  
91 shall be determined by the alliance, to develop an Oyster  
92 Fishery Recovery and Management Plan. The Oyster Resource  
93 Recovery and Management Working Group shall have all of the  
94 following responsibilities:

95 (a) Establish an oyster resource recovery plan in response  
96 to the oyster fishery failure which fosters the restoration and  
97 rehabilitation of oyster resources in the Nature Coast region.

98 (b) Establish an oyster resource management plan that  
99 provides recommendations to guide the long-term management and  
100 sustainability of the oyster fishery in the Nature Coast region,  
101 including the Shire River Basin, Suwannee Sound, Waccasassa Bay,  
102 and Withlacoochee Bay. The management plan shall have the long-  
103 term objectives of maintaining and protecting natural oyster  
104 stocks; increasing oyster production to ensure the long-term  
105 stability and sustainability of the oyster fishery; supporting  
106 the development of fishery-related infrastructure to create jobs  
107 in the processing, distribution, marketing, and sales sectors of  
108 the industry; and providing long-term economic benefits for the  
109 fishery-dependent community.

110 (c) Provide recommendations for the regulatory policies for  
111 the commercial and recreational oyster fishery.

112 (d) Provide recommendations for adaptive management  
113 strategies and practices used to restore, maintain, and protect  
114 oyster resources and the oyster fishery, including: reshelling  
115 and reseeded depleted oyster reefs and establishing priorities  
116 for restoring reefs.

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117 (e) Establish priorities and provide recommendations to  
118 guide the appropriation, allocation, and use of funds directed  
119 toward restoring, maintaining, and protecting the oyster  
120 resources of Suwannee Sound.

121 (f) Establish guidelines and recommendations for seeking  
122 federal assistance and using funds for related oyster fishery  
123 projects, socioeconomic programs, job training, and economic  
124 opportunity improvements.

125 (g) Establish priorities for research needed to support  
126 restoring, maintaining, protecting, and sustaining oyster  
127 resources and the oyster fishery.

128 (h) Establish monitoring strategies for mapping, assessing,  
129 measuring, and evaluating oyster production parameters to  
130 determine the success of oyster resource management.

131 (i) Establish a decisionmaking matrix to ensure that oyster  
132 resource management is based on the best available science and  
133 economic information.

134 (j) Provide recommendations to adopt regulations and  
135 establish enforcement policies to ensure continued production  
136 and protection of oyster resources in the state.

137 (k) Provide recommendations to implement adaptive  
138 management strategies that may be required to respond to  
139 variations in fishery production resulting from adverse  
140 conditions associated with catastrophic events, such as  
141 droughts, floods, tropical storms, and hurricanes.

142 (l) Provide recommendations to support the development of  
143 aquaculture as an alternative method to increase oyster  
144 production and decrease dependence upon the natural oyster  
145 stocks.

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146       (m) Provide recommendations and assistance to support  
147 statewide initiatives to protect freshwater sources,  
148 particularly the Suwannee River, which are critical to  
149 successful oyster resource management.

150       (n) Seek advice and expertise from representatives of  
151 various related oyster fishery sectors, including community and  
152 business leaders, universities, state and federal agencies,  
153 nonprofit organizations, and other specialists that can provide  
154 valuable information to the working group.

155       Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2015.