

By Senator Montford

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1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to a Florida Lionfish Education and
3 Research Consortium; creating s. 1004.491, F.S.;
4 providing a short title; establishing the Florida
5 Lionfish Education and Research Consortium; specifying
6 the entities comprising the consortium; specifying the
7 duties of the consortium, subject to appropriation;
8 requiring the consortium to submit an annual report to
9 the Governor and Legislature by a certain date;
10 providing an effective date.

11
12 WHEREAS, invasive lionfish are impacting the state's
13 ecology, economy, and recreation, and

14 WHEREAS, if the invasion is not resolved, the large
15 population of lionfish already in the waters of the state could
16 result in a serious decline in the state's seafood industry and
17 its related economies of recreational and commercial fishing,
18 and

19 WHEREAS, this invasive species is damaging marine
20 ecosystems on a broad scale, and such damage could have a
21 serious impact on the marine environment and on the tourism
22 experiences of visitors who come to enjoy this state, and

23 WHEREAS, lionfish can consume tens of thousands of prey
24 fish every year, spawn 15,000 to 30,000 eggs as often as every
25 four days, and can survive miles into the state's coastal
26 estuaries, and

27 WHEREAS, small snapper and grouper fisheries and food
28 sources are being depleted, as are many other populations of
29 fish, crabs, and shrimp, and

30 WHEREAS, studies show that these fish, crab, and shrimp
31 species that are so essential to the state's economy and marine
32 habitat are being consumed by lionfish, which removes these

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33 beneficial species from the marine ecosystem and the state's
34 dinner tables, and

35 WHEREAS, without mitigation, the delicate balance of the
36 state's marine environment could be severely damaged, resulting
37 in significantly negative economic and ecological consequences,
38 and

39 WHEREAS, efforts to address and solve the lionfish problem
40 will require a concerted collaboration of researchers, divers,
41 state agencies, and the affected coastal communities, and

42 WHEREAS, in addition to resolving an ecological disaster,
43 there is an opportunity to establish a new seafood fishery for
44 lionfish in the state, NOW, THEREFORE,

45
46 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

47
48 Section 1. Section 1004.491, Florida Statutes, is created
49 to read:

50 1004.491 Florida Lionfish Education and Research
51 Consortium.-

52 (1) This section may be cited as the "Florida Lionfish
53 Education and Research Act."

54 (2) The Florida Lionfish Education and Research Consortium
55 is established to assist in the elimination of or control of
56 invasive lionfish species.

57 (3) The consortium shall consist of the Reef Environmental
58 Education Foundation, or REEF; the University of North Florida;
59 the University of South Florida; Nova Southeastern University;
60 and the Diving Equipment and Marketing Association, or DEMA.

61 (4) Subject to appropriation by the Legislature, the

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62 consortium shall:

63 (a) Implement the following lionfish control initiatives
64 to:

65 1. Sponsor lionfish derbies or other focused lionfish
66 removal events;

67 2. Support and encourage ongoing lionfish removal efforts
68 by individual divers;

69 3. Develop a commercial harvest model for lionfish;

70 4. Train divers, snorkelers, and fishermen in safe and
71 effective lionfish removal; and

72 5. Identify and create partnerships with other countries in
73 the region to help reduce lionfish population distribution
74 resulting from ocean currents.

75 (b) Engage in research and studies to:

76 1. Quantify the economic and ecological impacts of invasive
77 lionfish on the state's coastal communities.

78 2. Develop methodologies and tools to eliminate or control
79 invasive lionfish species.

80 3. Determine priorities for directed lionfish removals,
81 including the locations, timing, and frequency of such removal
82 efforts.

83 4. Determine the effectiveness of removal efforts and
84 direct such efforts to high priority areas.

85 5. Assess the risk of other potential marine invasive
86 species impacting the waters of the state.

87 (c) Implement the following market development initiatives
88 to:

89 1. Promote lionfish as a viable seafood product;

90 2. Develop nontraditional uses for lionfish products;

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91 3. Identify regulatory restrictions that discourage the
92 sale of harvested lionfish and proposing changes to such
93 restrictions as necessary to encourage a viable market for
94 lionfish; and

95 4. Work with food service establishments and professionals
96 in the food service industry to familiarize them with the
97 handling and preparation of lionfish.

98 (d) Implement the following public awareness and education
99 initiatives to:

100 1. Develop and manage public education, outreach, and data
101 gathering projects regarding invasive lionfish;

102 2. Facilitate media coverage of issues related to invasive
103 lionfish;

104 3. Develop messaging and materials to raise public
105 awareness about invasive lionfish and issues relating to them;

106 4. Promote best practices to prevent other nonnative
107 species invasions;

108 5. Organize conferences and workshops to bring together key
109 stakeholders to share current lionfish research and control
110 information; and

111 6. Demonstrate the correlation between science, technology,
112 engineering, and mathematics, or STEM, careers and marine
113 biology.

114 (5) By September 1, 2017, and each year thereafter, the
115 consortium shall submit a report to the Governor, the President
116 of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives
117 detailing expenditures of the funds received to implement this
118 section during the preceding fiscal year. In addition, the
119 report must include a list of all actions taken by the

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120 consortium relating to this section, including a narrative
121 description of inter-institutional collaboration among
122 participating partners, the results obtained through efforts of
123 the consortium, a list of all research conducted consistent with
124 the purposes of this section, and a list of all future efforts
125 the consortium deems necessary.

126 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2016.