

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FINAL BILL ANALYSIS**

BILL #:	CS/CS/CS/HB 705	FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:		
SUBJECT/SHORT TITLE	Pub. Rec./Water Management District Surplus Lands	114	Y's 0	N's
SPONSOR(S):	Government Accountability Committee; Oversight, Transparency & Administration Subcommittee; Natural Resources & Public Lands Subcommittee and Burgess	GOVERNOR'S ACTION:	Approved	
COMPANION BILLS:	CS/SB 808			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/CS/CS/HB 705 passed the House on February 21, 2018, and subsequently passed the Senate on March 9, 2018.

A water management district ("WMD") may acquire real property for flood control, water storage, water management, conservation and protection of water resources, aquifer recharge, water resource and water supply development, and preservation of wetlands, streams, and lakes. Unlike most state lands, these lands are held and conveyed in the name of the WMD, not the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Board of Trustees). A WMD may sell lands its governing board determines to be surplus at any time. These lands must be sold at the highest price obtainable, but not less than the appraised value of the land determined by a certified appraiser 360 days before the sale.

The bill, which is linked to the passage of HB 703, creates a public record exemption for written valuations of WMD land determined to be surplus; related documents used to form, or which pertain to, the valuation; and written offers to purchase such surplus land. The public record exemption expires two weeks before the WMD first considers the contract or agreement regarding the purchase, exchange, or disposal of the surplus land.

The bill authorizes a WMD to disclose the confidential and exempt information to potential purchasers under certain conditions.

The bill provides for repeal of the exemption on October 2, 2023, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature. The bill also provides a public necessity statement as required by the State Constitution.

The bill may have an insignificant fiscal impact on a WMD.

The bill was approved by the Governor on April 6, 2018, ch. 2018-156, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2018.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Public Records Law

Article I, s. 24(a) of the State Constitution sets forth the state's public policy regarding access to government records. The State Constitution guarantees every person a right to inspect or copy any public record of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.¹

Public policy regarding access to government records is addressed further in the Florida Statutes. Section 119.01, F.S., provides that it is the policy of the state that all state, county, and municipal records are open for personal inspection and copying by any person, and that it is the responsibility of each agency to provide access to public records.² Section 119.07(1), F.S., guarantees every person a right to inspect and copy any public record unless an exemption applies. The state's public records laws are construed liberally in favor of granting public access to public records.³

Public Records Exemptions

The Legislature may provide by general law for the exemption of records from the requirements of art. I, s. 24(a) of the State Constitution.⁴ The general law must state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption (public necessity statement) and must be no broader than necessary to accomplish its purpose.⁵

The Open Government Sunset Review Act provides that a public record exemption may be created or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose.⁶ In addition, it may be no broader than is necessary to meet one of the following purposes:

- Allows the state or its political subdivisions to effectively and efficiently administer a governmental program, which administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption;
- Protects sensitive personal information that, if released, would be defamatory or would jeopardize an individual's safety; however, only the identity of an individual may be exempted under this provision; or
- Protects trade or business secrets.⁷

The Open Government Sunset Review Act requires the automatic repeal of a newly created exemption on October second of the fifth year after creation or substantial amendment, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption.⁸

¹ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(a).

² Section 119.011(2), F.S., defines the term "agency" to mean any state, county, district, authority, or municipal officer, department, division, board, bureau, commission, or other separate unit of government created or established by law including, for the purposes of chapter 119, F.S., the Commission on Ethics, the Public Service Commission, and the Office of Public Counsel, and any other public or private agency, person, partnership, corporation, or business entity acting on behalf of any public agency; Section 119.011(12), F.S., defines the term "public records" to mean all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, data processing software, or other material, regardless of physical form, characteristics, or means of transmission, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency.

³ Nat'l Collegiate Athletic Ass'n v. Associated Press, 18 So. 3d 1201, 1206 (Fla. 1st DCA 2009).

⁴ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Section 119.15, F.S.

⁷ Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

⁸ Section 119.15(3), F.S.

Confidential versus Confidential and Exempt

When creating a public record exemption, the Legislature designates the record as “exempt” or “confidential and exempt.” There is a difference between records the Legislature has designated as exempt and those designated as confidential and exempt. A record that is designated as confidential and exempt may only be released by the records custodian to those persons or entities designated in statute.⁹ However, records designated as exempt may be disclosed under certain circumstances and does not impose a secrecy requirement that bars a custodian from displaying a public record entirely of his or her own volition.¹⁰

Surplus of Water Management District Lands

A water management district (WMD) may acquire real property for flood control, water storage, water management, conservation and protection of water resources, aquifer recharge, water resource and water supply development; and preservation of wetlands, streams, and lakes.¹¹ Unlike most state lands, these lands are held and conveyed in the name of the WMD, not the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Board of Trustees).¹²

The five WMDs own approximately 1,908,969 acres of conservation land.¹³ Approximately 1,481,129 acres are held in fee simple, while 427,840 acres are held in conservation easements.¹⁴ In addition to the purposes described above, the WMDs manage their lands for recreation, camping, trail use, hunting, and revenue generation.¹⁵

A WMD may sell lands its governing board determines to be surplus at any time.¹⁶ If a WMD decides to sell its real property, or interest therein, it must follow the procedures in ss. 373.056 and 373.089, F.S.¹⁷ These lands must be sold at the highest price obtainable, but not less than the appraised value of the land determined by a certified appraiser 360 days before the sale.¹⁸

Public Record Exemptions for Written Valuations of Land and Written Offers

Currently, there is no public record exemption for written valuations of WMD land determined to be surplus; related documents used to form, or which pertain to, the valuation; or written offers to purchase such surplus land.

A public record exemption exists for written valuations of land owned by the Board of Trustees determined to be surplus and related documents used to form the valuation or that pertain to the valuation.¹⁹ The exemption expires two weeks before the Board of Trustees first considers for approval the contract or agreement regarding the purchase, exchange, or disposal of the surplus land.²⁰ The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), acting on the behalf of the Board of Trustees, may disclose the confidential and exempt appraisals, valuations, or valuation information regarding surplus land before the exemption expires:

⁹ WFTV, Inc. v. School Board of Seminole County, 874 So. 2d 48, 53 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004), *review denied*, 892 So. 2d 1015 (Fla. 2004).

¹⁰ See Williams v. City of Minneola, 575 So. 2d 683, 687 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991), *review denied*, 589 So. 2d 289 (Fla. 1991).

¹¹ Section 373.139(2), F.S.

¹² Section 373.099, F.S.

¹³ Florida Natural Areas Inventory, *Summary of Florida Conservation Lands February 2017*, available at:

http://www.fnai.org/PDF/Maacres_201702_FCL_plus_LTF.pdf (last visited Dec. 13, 2017).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ FLORIDA HIKES!, *Recreation on Florida's Water Management District lands*, <http://floridahikes.com/category/public-lands/water-management-districts> (last visited Dec. 14, 2017).

¹⁶ Section 373.089(1), F.S.

¹⁷ Section 373.139(6), F.S.

¹⁸ Section 373.089(1), F.S.

¹⁹ Section 253.0341(8), F.S.

²⁰ *Id.*

- During negotiations for the sale or exchange of the land;
- During the marketing effort or bidding process associated with the sale, disposal, or exchange of the land to facilitate closure of such effort or process;
- When the passage of time has made the conclusions of value invalid; or
- When negotiations or marketing efforts concerning the land are concluded.²¹

All appraisals and other reports relating to value, offers, and counteroffers are exempt when an agency of the executive branch of state government seeks to acquire real property by purchase or through the exercise of the power of eminent domain.²² This exemption expires upon execution of a valid option contract or the agency conditionally accepts a written offer to sell.²³ If parties do not execute a valid option contract, or the agency does not conditionally accept a written offer to sell, then the exemption expires at the conclusion of the condemnation litigation of the subject property.²⁴

Lastly, appraisal reports, offers, and counteroffers for lands a WMD is seeking to purchase are confidential and exempt until an option contract is executed or, if no option contract is executed, until 30 days before a contract or agreement for purchase is considered for approval by the governing board.²⁵ A WMD may, at its discretion, disclose appraisal reports to private landowners during negotiations for acquisitions using alternatives to fee simple techniques, if the WMD determines that disclosure of such reports will bring the proposed acquisition to closure.²⁶ If negotiation is terminated by the WMD, the appraisal report, offers, and counteroffers shall become available.²⁷ A WMD and DEP may share and disclose appraisal reports, appraisal information, offers, and counteroffers when joint acquisition of property is contemplated.²⁸ A WMD and DEP must maintain the confidentiality of such appraisal reports, appraisal information, offers, and counteroffers, except in those cases where a WMD and DEP have exercised discretion to disclose such information.²⁹ A WMD may disclose appraisal information, offers, and counteroffers to a third party who has entered into a contractual agreement with the WMD to work with or on the behalf of or to assist the district in connection with land acquisitions.³⁰ The third party must maintain the confidentiality of such information in conformance with this section.³¹ In addition, a WMD may use, as its own, appraisals obtained by a third party provided the appraiser is selected from the WMD's list of approved appraisers and the appraisal is reviewed and approved by the district.³²

HB 703 (2018)

HB 703 changes several of the surplus procedures for WMDs to create efficiencies in the process by:

- Requiring a WMD to publish notice of its intent to sell surplus property on its website in addition to a newspaper and to publish notice of its intent to sell surplus property at least 30 days, but not more than 360 days, before the WMD approves the sale. Current law does not specify a date from which the 30 or 360 days must be counted;
- Authorizing a WMD to sell land valued at \$25,000 or less to the adjacent property owner rather than giving such property owners the opportunity to purchase the property before the rest of the general public;

²¹ *Id.*

²² Section 119.0711, F.S.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ Section 373.139(3)(a), F.S.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

- Requiring a WMD to publish the notice of intention to offer to sell land valued at \$25,000 or less to adjacent property owners in the newspaper in the county where the land is located only one time;
- Defining “adjacent property owners;” and
- Removing the requirement that a WMD accept sealed bids and sell the property to the highest bidder or reject all offers 30 days after publication of notice, if the WMD does not sell the land to the adjacent property owner. Instead, the bill authorizes a WMD to sell the parcel valued at \$25,000 or less at any time to the general public for the highest price obtainable, if the WMD does not sell the parcel to the adjacent property owner.³³

Effect of the Bill

The bill, which is linked to the passage of HB 703, creates a public record exemption for written valuations of WMD land determined to be surplus; related documents used to form, or which pertain to, the valuation; and written offers to purchase such surplus land.³⁴ The bill provides that such documents are confidential and exempt from public record requirements.³⁵ The bill provides that the public record exemption will expire two weeks before the WMD first considers the contract or agreement regarding the purchase, exchange, or disposal of the surplus land.

The bill authorizes a WMD to disclose confidential and exempt valuations, valuation information related to surplus land, or written offers to purchase such surplus land to potential purchasers before the expiration of the exemption to facilitate successful or expedited closure of the sale of surplus land:

- During negotiations for the sale or exchange of the land;
- During the marketing effort or bidding process associated with the sale, disposal, or exchange of the land;
- When the passage of time has made the conclusions of value invalid; or
- When negotiations or marketing efforts concerning the land are concluded.

The bill provides for repeal of the exemption on October 2, 2023, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

The bill provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution. Specifically, the bill finds that the public availability of such valuations, related documents, and written offers can negatively impact the ability of a WMD to negotiate with potential purchasers and potentially places a WMD at a disadvantage in attempting to maximize the return on the sale of surplus land.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

See Fiscal Comments.

³³ Florida House of Representatives, Analysis of 2018 House Bill 703, p. 1 (Dec. 6, 2017).

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ The public record exemption created in the bill for WMDs is similar to the exemption for written valuations of land owned by the Board of Trustees determined to be surplus and related documents used to form the valuation or that pertain to the valuation in s. 253.0341(8)(a), F.S. However, it adds written offers to purchase such surplus lands.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

The bill may negatively affect potential surplus land purchasers who use public record requests to gain a competitive advantage when making offers for surplus WMD parcels.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The bill may have a minimal fiscal impact on a WMD because staff responsible for complying with public record requests could require training related to the new public record exemption. In addition, a WMD may incur costs associated with redacting the exempt financial information prior to releasing a record. However, these costs can be absorbed as they are part of the day-to-day responsibilities of a WMD.