

## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

**BILL #:** HB 6025 Harris Chain of Lakes  
**SPONSOR(S):** Sabatini  
**TIED BILLS:**           **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 384

---

**FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:** 110 Y's      4 N's      **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Approved

---

### SUMMARY ANALYSIS

HB 6025 passed the House on March 11, 2020, as SB 384.

The Harris Chain of Lakes is located predominantly in Lake County and the northwestern portion of Orange County. It includes tens of thousands of acres of lakes and wetlands and is the headwaters of the Ocklawaha River. The Lake County waterways were plagued by toxic algae sedimentation and excessive growth of aquatic plants, which degraded water quality and recreational value. In an effort to address these issues, in 2001, the Legislature created the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council (council) and the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Program (program). The program requires the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), in conjunction with the council, the Department of Environmental Protection, and pertinent local governments, to review existing restoration proposals to determine which proposals are the most environmentally sound and economically feasible methods of improving the fish and wildlife habitat and natural systems of the Harris Chain of Lakes.

The Legislature specifically directed the council to review audits and all data related to lake restoration techniques and sport fish population recovery strategies, evaluate whether additional studies are needed, explore all possible sources of funding to conduct restoration activities, and report to the Legislature each year on the progress of the program.

The bill repeals the council and makes conforming changes.

The bill may have an insignificant positive fiscal impact on state agencies and SJRWMD.

The bill was approved by the Governor on June 20, 2020, ch. 2020-52, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2020.

## I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

### A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

#### Background

The Harris Chain of Lakes is located predominantly in Lake County and the northwestern portion of Orange County.<sup>1</sup> It includes tens of thousands of acres of lakes and wetlands and is the headwaters of the Ocklawaha River.<sup>2</sup> The Lake County waterways, which serve as a major economic opportunity for the area and provide wildlife habitat for fish, birds, and game, were plagued by toxic algae sedimentation and excessive growth of aquatic plants, which degraded water quality and recreational value. In an effort to mitigate the damage, the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and the Lake County Water Authority,<sup>3</sup> along with other state, regional, and local entities, developed proposals to restore portions of the Harris Chain of Lakes.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of these proposals, in 2001, the Legislature created the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Program (program) and the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council (council).<sup>5</sup> The program requires FWC and SJRWMD, in conjunction with the council, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and pertinent local governments, to review existing restoration proposals to determine which proposals are the most environmentally sound and economically feasible methods of improving the fish and wildlife habitat and natural systems of the Harris Chain of Lakes.<sup>6</sup>

The Legislature specifically directed the council to:

- Review audits and all data related to lake restoration techniques and sport fish population recovery strategies;
- Evaluate whether additional studies are needed;
- Explore all possible sources of funding to conduct restoration activities; and
- Report annually to the Legislature on the progress of the program and provide any recommendations for the next fiscal year.<sup>7</sup>

The council is appointed by the Lake County legislative delegation and must consist of the following nine voting members:

- A representative of waterfront property owners;
- A representative of the sport fishing industry;
- A person with experience in environmental science or regulation;
- An engineer;
- A person with training in biology or another scientific discipline;
- An attorney;
- A physician; and
- Two residents of Lake County who are not required to meet any additional qualifications for membership.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council, *Where is the Harris Chain of Lakes and what does the Restoration Council do?*, available at <http://harrischainoflakescouncil.com> (last visited Oct. 24, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> The Lake County Water Authority was formerly known as the Ocklawaha Basin Recreation and Water Conservation and Control Authority and was created in 1953 by the Legislature; *see* ch. 2005-314, Laws of Fla.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 2001-246, Laws of Fla.

<sup>6</sup> Section 373.468(1), F.S.

<sup>7</sup> Section 373.467(4), F.S.

<sup>8</sup> Section 373.467(1)(a), F.S.

Section 373.467, F.S., establishes an advisory group to the council that consists of one representative each from SJRWMD, DEP, the Department of Transportation, FWC, the Lake County Water Authority, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and the University of Florida. The advisory group serves the council by providing scientific information along with both technical data and guidance in the council's review of various technologies and issues.<sup>9</sup>

Currently, DEP and SJRWMD provide staff support to assist in carrying out the council's duties and to present in council meetings on subjects related to restoration activities as well as basic agency updates. Staff has also provided feedback and support for the council's annual report.<sup>10</sup>

### **Effect of the Bill**

The bill repeals the council and makes conforming changes.

## **II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT**

### **A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:**

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

The bill may have a positive fiscal impact on state agency expenditures because state agencies and SJRWMD will no longer be required to expend resources or provide staff support to the council. According to DEP, not having to provide staff to support the council may result in fiscal savings of approximately \$50,000 per year to SJRWMD.<sup>11</sup>

### **B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:**

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

### **C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:**

None.

### **D. FISCAL COMMENTS:**

None.

---

<sup>9</sup> Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council, *The council: Technical Advisory Group*, available at <https://harrischainoflakescouncil.com/council.html> (last visited Oct. 28, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> DEP, Agency Analysis of 2020 House Bill 6025, p. 4 (Oct. 8, 2019) (on file with the Agriculture & Natural Resources Subcommittee).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*