

1                                   A bill to be entitled  
 2           An act relating to wildlife corridors; creating s.  
 3           259.20, F.S.; providing a short title; providing  
 4           definitions; providing legislative intent; requiring  
 5           the Department of Environmental Protection to  
 6           encourage certain activities in support of the Florida  
 7           Wildlife Corridor and take specified actions;  
 8           requiring the St. Johns River Water Management  
 9           District, in consultation with Seminole County, the  
 10          Department of Environmental Protection, the Fish and  
 11          Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the Department  
 12          of Transportation, to issue a report by a specified  
 13          date that includes information and updates regarding  
 14          the implementation of specified management plan  
 15          recommendations; requiring certain enforcement actions  
 16          to be taken for violations of permit conditions;  
 17          providing an effective date.

18  
 19 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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 21           Section 1. Section 259.20, Florida Statutes, is created to  
 22 read:

23           259.20 Florida Wildlife Corridor.—

24           (1) SHORT TITLE.—This section may be cited as the "Florida  
 25 Wildlife Corridor Act."

26        (2) DEFINITIONS.—As used in this section, the term:

27        (a) "Conserved lands" means federal, state, or local lands  
28 owned or managed for conservation purposes. Such lands include,  
29 but are not limited to, federal, state, and local parks; federal  
30 and state forests; wildlife management areas; wildlife refuges;  
31 military bases and airports with conservation lands; and  
32 privately owned land with a conservation easement, which  
33 includes, but is not limited to, ranches, forestry operations,  
34 and groves.

35        (b) "Florida Ecological Greenways Network" means the model  
36 developed to delineate large connected areas of ecological  
37 significance statewide, which is periodically updated.

38        (c) "Florida Wildlife Corridor" means those conserved  
39 lands and opportunity areas defined by the department as  
40 Priority Level One, Two, or Three in the Florida Ecological  
41 Greenways Network.

42        (d) "Opportunity area" means those lands and waters within  
43 the Florida Wildlife Corridor that are not conserved lands, but  
44 are green spaces lacking conservation status that are contiguous  
45 to or between conserved lands and that provide the opportunity  
46 to develop the Florida Wildlife Corridor into a statewide  
47 conservation network.

48        (e) "Wildlife" has the same meaning as provided in s.  
49 379.2255(15).

50        (f) "Wildlife corridor" means the network of connected

51 wildlife habitats required for long-term survival and genetic  
52 exchange amongst regional wildlife populations, serving to  
53 prevent fragmentation by providing ecological connectivity of  
54 the lands needed to furnish adequate habitat and allow safe  
55 movement and dispersal.

56 (g) "Wildlife crossing" means a landscape design element  
57 that connects two or more patches of wildlife habitat meant to  
58 function as a safe conduit for wildlife over or beneath roads,  
59 waters, and other barriers to wildlife movement. The term  
60 includes design elements used to protect panther and other  
61 critical wildlife habitat corridor connections and reduce motor  
62 vehicle collisions with wildlife, consequently reducing the  
63 likelihood of injuries and mortalities to humans and wildlife,  
64 as well as reducing the potential for damage to motor vehicles.

65 (3) LEGISLATIVE INTENT.—

66 (a) The Legislature recognizes that the state population  
67 is growing rapidly and that lands and waters that provide  
68 Florida's green infrastructure and vital habitat for wide-  
69 ranging wildlife, such as the Florida panther, need to be  
70 preserved and protected.

71 (b) The Legislature recognizes that the Florida Wildlife  
72 Corridor is an existing physical, geographically defined area  
73 comprised of over 18 million acres, of which 10 million acres  
74 are conservation lands.

75 (c) The Legislature declares that the Florida Wildlife

76 Corridor has no regulatory powers or duties and that the purpose  
77 of the Florida Wildlife Corridor is to create incentives for  
78 conservation and sustainable development while sustaining and  
79 conserving the green infrastructure that is the foundation for  
80 Florida's economy and quality of life. Objectives of the Florida  
81 Wildlife Corridor include:

82 1. Maintaining wildlife access to the habitats needed to  
83 allow for migration and genetic exchange amongst regional  
84 wildlife populations.

85 2. Preventing fragmentation of wildlife habitats.

86 3. Protecting the headwaters of major watersheds,  
87 including the Everglades and the St. Johns River.

88 4. Providing ecological connectivity of the lands needed  
89 for large-scale ecosystem functions, such as water and  
90 prescribed burns that are essential for land management and  
91 restoration.

92 5. Preserving and protecting land and waters that are not  
93 only vital to wildlife, but are critical to the state's  
94 groundwater recharge and serve as watersheds that provide  
95 drinking water to most Floridians as well as help maintain the  
96 health of downstream coastal estuaries.

97 6. Providing wildlife crossings for the protection and  
98 safety of wildlife and the traveling public.

99 7. Helping to sustain Florida's working ranches, farms,  
100 and forests that provide compatible wildlife habitat while

101 sustaining rural prosperity and agricultural production.

102 (4) DEPARTMENT DUTIES.—In support of the Florida Wildlife  
103 Corridor, the department shall:

104 (a) Encourage all state, regional, and local agencies,  
105 including, but not limited to, the Fish and Wildlife  
106 Conservation Commission and the Department of Transportation,  
107 that acquire lands to include in their land-buying efforts the  
108 acquisition of sufficient legal interest in the lands that are  
109 opportunity areas within the Florida Wildlife Corridor to ensure  
110 its continued viability.

111 (b) Encourage investment in voluntary conservation  
112 easements with private landowners to achieve conservation of  
113 Florida Wildlife Corridor opportunity areas.

114 (c) Encourage state land-buying and land-management  
115 agencies to consider the opportunity areas within the Florida  
116 Wildlife Corridor a multi-phased project for the purpose of  
117 listing, acquisition, and management.

118 (d) Consider the inclusion of private funds to supplement  
119 the state's contribution in its efforts to acquire fee or less-  
120 than-fee interests in lands that contain recognized conserved  
121 lands and opportunity areas in the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

122 (e) Seek opportunities to attract new federal funding and  
123 strengthen existing federal funding programs to protect and  
124 conserve the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

125 (f) Encourage private landowners to continue to allow the

126 use of private property for Florida Wildlife Corridor  
 127 preservation and enhancement through existing and future  
 128 incentives and liability protection.

129 (g) Encourage new approaches and novel financing  
 130 mechanisms for long-term protection of the Florida Wildlife  
 131 Corridor; payments for ecosystem services; blended financing for  
 132 growth, resilience, and green infrastructure; support for  
 133 sustainable intensification of agriculture; and other innovative  
 134 approaches.

135 (h) Encourage state and local agencies with economic and  
 136 ecotourism development responsibilities to recognize the  
 137 importance of the Florida Wildlife Corridor in encouraging  
 138 public access and bringing nature-based tourism to local  
 139 communities and to support acquisition and development  
 140 activities for preservation and enhancement of the corridor.

141 (i) Encourage the protection, preservation, and  
 142 enhancement of the natural value of the Florida Wildlife  
 143 Corridor for the citizens of the state, both present and future.

144 Section 2. The St. Johns River Water Management District,  
 145 in consultation with Seminole County, the Department of  
 146 Environmental Protection, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
 147 Commission, and the Department of Transportation, shall issue a  
 148 report by December 31, 2021, that includes information and  
 149 updates regarding the implementation of recommendations from the  
 150 Little Wekiva River Watershed Management Plan Final Report dated

151 November 2005. The report shall include, but not be limited to,  
152 the following information: a description of all projects or  
153 recommendations included in the report that have been  
154 implemented and the completion dates, an analysis of how the  
155 projects or recommendations achieved the results included in the  
156 report, an analysis of costs for ongoing operation and  
157 maintenance of completed construction projects, an analysis of  
158 any new projects that may benefit the watershed, and  
159 recommendations and cost estimates for future studies or  
160 projects that may be necessary to identify new or potentially  
161 significant contributors of sediment accumulation in the Little  
162 Wekiva River. Appropriate action to resolve compliance issues  
163 shall be taken pursuant to chapter 373, Florida Statutes, if the  
164 Department of Environmental Protection or the water management  
165 district discovers a violation of any permit condition.

166 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2021.