

2021976er

1
2 An act relating to the protection of ecological
3 systems; creating s. 259.1055, F.S.; providing a short
4 title; providing legislative findings and a purpose
5 for the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act; defining terms;
6 requiring the Department of Environmental Protection
7 to take certain actions to support the Florida
8 wildlife corridor; providing construction; requiring
9 the St. Johns River Water Management District, in
10 consultation with the Department of Environmental
11 Protection, Seminole County, the Fish and Wildlife
12 Conservation Commission, and the Department of
13 Transportation, to issue a report that includes
14 information and updates regarding the implementation
15 of recommendations from the Little Wekiva Watershed
16 Management Plan Final Report dated November 2005 by a
17 specified date; requiring the Department of
18 Environmental Protection and the water management
19 district to review certain permits along the Little
20 Wekiva River; requiring certain enforcement actions to
21 be taken against noncompliant permittees; providing an
22 effective date.

23
24 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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26 Section 1. Section 259.1055, Florida Statutes, is created
27 to read:

28 259.1055 Florida wildlife corridor.-

29 (1) SHORT TITLE.-This section may be cited as the "Florida

2021976er

30 Wildlife Corridor Act.”

31 (2) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS.—The Legislature finds that this
32 state’s population is growing rapidly and that lands and waters
33 that provide this state’s green infrastructure and vital habitat
34 for wide-ranging wildlife, such as the Florida panther, need to
35 be preserved and protected. The Legislature further finds that
36 the Florida wildlife corridor is an existing physical,
37 geographically defined area consisting of more than 18 million
38 acres of land, 10 million of which are conservation lands.

39 (3) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this act, and of the Florida
40 wildlife corridor itself, is to create incentives for
41 conservation and sustainable development while sustaining and
42 conserving the green infrastructure that is the foundation of
43 this state’s economy and quality of life by doing all of the
44 following:

45 (a) Maintaining wildlife access to the habitats needed to
46 allow for migration of and genetic exchange amongst regional
47 wildlife populations.

48 (b) Preventing fragmentation of wildlife habitats.

49 (c) Protecting the headwaters of major watersheds,
50 including the Everglades and the St. Johns River.

51 (d) Providing ecological connectivity of the lands needed
52 for flood and sea-level rise resiliency and large-scale
53 ecosystem functions, such as water management and prescribed
54 burns essential for land management and restoration.

55 (e) Preserving and protecting land and waters that are not
56 only vital to wildlife but are critical to this state’s
57 groundwater recharge and that serve as watersheds that provide
58 drinking water to most Floridians and help maintain the health

2021976er

59 of downstream coastal estuaries.

60 (f) Providing for wildlife crossings for the protection and
61 safety of wildlife and the traveling public.

62 (g) Helping to sustain this state's working ranches, farms,
63 and forests that provide compatible wildlife habitats while
64 sustaining rural prosperity and agricultural production.

65 (4) DEFINITIONS.—As used in this section, the term:

66 (a) "Conserved lands" means federal, state, or local lands
67 owned or managed for conservation purposes, including, but not
68 limited to, federal, state, and local parks; federal and state
69 forests; wildlife management areas; wildlife refuges; military
70 bases and airports with conservation lands; properties owned by
71 land trusts and managed for conservation; and privately owned
72 land with a conservation easement, including, but not limited
73 to, ranches, forestry operations, and groves.

74 (b) "Department" means the Department of Environmental
75 Protection.

76 (c) "Florida Ecological Greenways Network" is a
77 periodically updated model developed to delineate large
78 connected areas of statewide ecological significance.

79 (d) "Florida wildlife corridor" means the conserved lands
80 and opportunity areas defined by the department as priority one,
81 two, and three categories of the Florida Ecological Greenways
82 Network.

83 (e) "Opportunity area" means those lands and waters within
84 the Florida wildlife corridor which are not conserved lands and
85 the green spaces within the Florida wildlife corridor which lack
86 conservation status, are contiguous to or between conserved
87 lands, and provide an opportunity to develop the Florida

2021976er

88 wildlife corridor into a statewide conservation network.

89 (f) "Wildlife" has the same meaning as in Article II of the
90 Wildlife Violator Compact Act, s. 379.2255.

91 (g) "Wildlife corridor" means a network of connected
92 wildlife habitats required for the long-term survival of and
93 genetic exchange amongst regional wildlife populations which
94 serves to prevent fragmentation by providing ecological
95 connectivity of the lands needed to furnish adequate habitats
96 and allow safe movement and dispersal.

97 (h) "Wildlife crossing" means a landscape design element
98 that connects two or more patches of wildlife habitat and that
99 is meant to function as a safe conduit for wildlife over or
100 beneath roads, waters, and other barriers to wildlife movement
101 and that is designed to protect Florida panther and other
102 critical wildlife habitat corridor connections and to reduce
103 motor vehicle collisions with wildlife, to reduce the likelihood
104 of injuries and mortalities to humans and wildlife from such
105 collisions, and to reduce the potential for damage to motor
106 vehicles from such collisions.

107 (5) DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT.—The department shall:

108 (a) Encourage all state, regional, and local agencies that
109 acquire lands, including, but not limited to, the Fish and
110 Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Department of
111 Transportation, to include in their land-buying efforts the
112 acquisition of sufficient legal interest in opportunity areas to
113 ensure the continued viability of the Florida wildlife corridor.

114 (b) Encourage investment in conservation easements
115 voluntarily entered into by private landowners to conserve
116 opportunity areas.

2021976er

117 (c) Encourage state land-buying agencies and state land
118 management agencies to consider the conservation of opportunity
119 areas as a multiphased project for the purpose of listing,
120 acquisition, and management.

121 (d) Consider the inclusion of private funds to supplement
122 the state's contribution in its efforts to acquire a fee or
123 less-than-fee interest in lands that contain recognized
124 opportunity areas and conserved lands in the Florida wildlife
125 corridor.

126 (e) Seek opportunities to attract new sources of federal
127 funding and to strengthen existing programs to protect and
128 conserve the Florida wildlife corridor.

129 (f) Encourage private landowners, through existing and
130 future incentives and liability protections, to continue to
131 allow their private property to be used for the preservation and
132 enhancement of the Florida wildlife corridor.

133 (g) Encourage new approaches and novel financing mechanisms
134 for long-term protection of the Florida wildlife corridor,
135 including, but not limited to, public-private partnerships;
136 payments for ecosystem services; blended financing for growth,
137 resilience, and green infrastructure; and support for the
138 sustainable growth of agriculture.

139 (h) Encourage state and local agencies with economic and
140 ecotourism development responsibilities to recognize the
141 importance of the Florida wildlife corridor in encouraging
142 public access to wildlife areas and bringing nature-based
143 tourism to local communities and to support acquisition and
144 development activities for preservation and enhancement of the
145 Florida wildlife corridor.

2021976er

146 (i) Encourage private investment in ecotourism focused on
147 the Florida wildlife corridor.

148 (j) Encourage the protection, preservation, and enhancement
149 of the natural value of the Florida wildlife corridor for
150 current and future residents of this state.

151 (6) CONSTRUCTION.—This section may not be construed to
152 authorize or affect the use of private property.

153 Section 2. (1) The St. Johns River Water Management
154 District, in consultation with the Department of Environmental
155 Protection, Seminole County, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation
156 Commission, and the Department of Transportation, shall issue a
157 report by December 31, 2021, that includes information and
158 updates regarding the implementation of recommendations from the
159 Little Wekiva Watershed Management Plan Final Report dated
160 November 2005. The report must include, but not be limited to,
161 the following information: a description of all projects or
162 recommendations included in the report that have been
163 implemented and their completion dates, an analysis of how the
164 projects or recommendations achieved the results included in the
165 report, an analysis of costs for ongoing operation and
166 maintenance of the constructed projects completed, a list of
167 permit violations which may have contributed to sediment buildup
168 north of S.R. 436, an analysis of any new projects that may
169 benefit the watershed, and recommendations and cost estimates
170 for future studies or projects that may be necessary to identify
171 new or potentially significant contributors of sediment
172 accumulation in the Little Wekiva River.

173 (2) (a) The Department of Environmental Protection and the
174 water management district shall immediately review, with the

2021976er

175 goal of identifying significant contributors of sediment
176 accumulation, any permits which the water management district
177 has determined may have contributed to sediment buildup north of
178 S.R. 436 to assess whether the permittee is in violation of any
179 permit conditions. Appropriate action to resolve compliance
180 issues shall be undertaken pursuant to chapter 373, Florida
181 Statutes, if the department or the water management district
182 discovers a violation of any permit condition.

183 (b) As part of the review, the Department of Environmental
184 Protection and the water management district shall review known
185 violations of such permits since 2018 and attempt to determine,
186 using existing information, what effects such violations may
187 have had on sediment accumulation in the Little Wekiva River.

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