

# FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BILL ANALYSIS

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**BILL #:** [CS/HB 209](#)

**TITLE:** State Land Management

**SPONSOR(S):** Snyder and Gossett-Seidman

**COMPANION BILL:** [CS/SB 80](#) (Harrell)

**LINKED BILLS:** None

**RELATED BILLS:** None

## Committee References

[Natural Resources & Disasters](#)

18 Y, 0 N, As CS



[State Affairs](#)

## SUMMARY

### **Effect of the Bill:**

The bill creates the State Park Preservation Act, which requires state parks to be managed for conservation-based recreational uses and in a manner that provides the greatest combination of benefits to the public and the land's natural resources. The bill authorizes the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of Recreation and Parks to acquire, install, or permit the installation of camping cabins in state parks within certain guidelines. The bill also requires DEP to provide a report to the Governor and Legislature regarding the status and operation of state parks. Additionally, the bill revises notice requirements for public meetings related to land management plans.

### **Fiscal or Economic Impact:**

The bill may have an insignificant negative fiscal impact on DEP associated with creating the state parks report.

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## ANALYSIS

### **EFFECT OF THE BILL:**

The bill creates the State Park Preservation Act. (Section [1](#))

### **Florida State Parks**

The bill requires state parks or preserves to be managed in a manner that provides the greatest combination of benefits to the public and the land's natural resources. Additionally, the bill requires state parks or preserves to be managed for conservation-based recreational uses; public access and related amenities, including roads, parking areas, walkways, and visitor centers; and scientific research, including archeology. Such uses must be managed in a manner that is compatible with and that ensures the conservation of the state's natural resources by minimizing impacts to undisturbed habitat and using disturbed upland regions to the maximum extent practical. (Section [3](#))

To ensure the protection of state park resources, the bill prohibits sporting facilities that cause substantial harm to the natural resources, native habitats, or archeological or historical sites within state parks, including, but not limited to, golf courses, tennis courts, pickleball courts, ball fields, or other similar facilities from being constructed in state parks. (Section [3](#))

The bill defines "conservation-based recreational uses" to mean public outdoor recreational activities that do not significantly invade, degrade, or displace the natural resources, native habitats, or archeological or historical sites that are preserved within state parks. These activities include, but are not limited to, fishing, camping, bicycling, hiking, nature study, swimming, boating, canoeing, horseback riding, diving, birding, sailing, and jogging. (Section [3](#))

The bill authorizes the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) to acquire, install, or permit the installation or operation of camping cabins that have a maximum capacity of six guests in state parks. The installation and operation of the cabins must be compatible with the state park's land

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management plan and must be approved through the land management plan approval process. Additionally, camping cabins must, to the maximum extent practicable, be sited to avoid impacts to the state park's critical habitat and natural historical resources. (Section [4](#))

The bill prohibits DRP from authorizing uses or construction activities, including the building or alteration of structures, within a state park that may cause significant harm to the park's resources. Any use or construction activity must, to the maximum extent practicable, be conducted in a manner that avoids impacts to a state park's critical habitat and natural and historical resources. The bill prohibits DRP from installing, or permitting the installation at state parks of any lodging establishment. (Section [4](#))

By December 1, 2025, the bill requires DEP to submit a report to the Governor and Legislature that includes the following information:

- The number of state parks with amenities or areas that have limited use or are temporarily closed due to needed repairs or inadequate infrastructure necessary to support conservation-based recreational use;
- The state park system's estimated budget allocation expenditures for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, broken down by salaries and benefits, equipment costs, and contracting costs for the categories of operations, maintenance and repair, park improvement, and administrative overhead; and
- The estimated costs associated with the facility maintenance backlog of each state park, including a plan to reduce or eliminate the backlog by July 1, 2035, to ensure access to and the safe enjoyment of the parks for the residents and visitors of Florida. (Section [6](#))

### **Conservation Land Management**

The bill specifies that in addition to the current requirement for a land management agency to hold a public hearing when developing a new land management plan, the agency must also hold a public hearing when updating an existing plan. The bill requires DEP's Division of State Lands (DSL) to make electronic copies of [land management plans](#) for parcels over 160 acres or parcels within state parks publicly available at least 30 days before a public hearing on such plans. (Section [2](#))

The bill requires individual management plans, and any updates to such plans, for parcels of land within state parks to be developed with input from an [advisory group](#). A public hearing conducted by an advisory group on an individual management plan must be noticed at least 30 days before the public hearing. (Section [5](#))

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2025. (Section [7](#))

### **FISCAL OR ECONOMIC IMPACT:**

STATE GOVERNMENT:

The bill may have an insignificant negative fiscal impact on DEP associated with creating the state parks report.

### **RELEVANT INFORMATION**

#### **SUBJECT OVERVIEW:**

#### **Florida State Parks**

The DRP within DEP is responsible for overseeing Florida's 175 state parks, spanning more than 800,000 acres and 100 miles of coastline.<sup>1</sup> For regulatory purposes, the state is divided into five park regions.<sup>2</sup> As part of overseeing the state parks, DRP is responsible for preserving, managing, and protecting all parks and recreational areas held by the state.<sup>3</sup> This includes studying the recreational needs of the state and disseminating information about recreation opportunities.<sup>4</sup> Popular recreational activities in state parks include hiking, bicycling, camping, kayaking, canoeing, swimming, fishing, and birding.<sup>5</sup> DRP also has the authority to acquire property in the name of

<sup>1</sup> DEP, *Division of Recreation and Parks*, <https://floridadep.gov/parks> (last visited Jan. 28, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Section [258.001, F.S.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Section [258.004\(2\), F.S.](#)

<sup>4</sup> Section [258.004\(3\), F.S.](#)

<sup>5</sup> DEP, *Division of Recreation and Parks*, <https://floridadep.gov/parks> (last visited Jan. 28, 2025).

the state to fulfill conservation and recreational goals.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, DRP works with the Division of Historical Resources of the Department of State to select and designate sites of historic interest within state parks.<sup>7</sup>

### **Conservation Land Management**

The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Board) is charged with the management, control, supervision, conservation, and protection of all lands owned or vested to the state or any of its agencies, departments, boards, or commissions.<sup>8</sup> The Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) is a 10-member body that makes recommendations on the acquisition, management, and disposal of state-owned lands to the Board.<sup>9</sup> DEP provides primary staff to support ARC.

State lands acquired as part of land conservation programs are required to be managed to ensure the conservation of the state's plant and animal species and to ensure the accessibility of state lands for the benefit and enjoyment of all people of the state, both present and future.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, all such lands are required to be managed in a manner that provides the greatest combination of benefits to the public and to the natural resources, that provides opportunities for public outdoor recreation that are compatible with the conservation and protection of public lands, and that aligns with the purposes for which the lands were acquired.<sup>11</sup> The Board may lease conservation lands to land management entities, such as state agencies, to ensure conservation lands are being managed appropriately.

### **Land Management Plans**

Land management plans are a mechanism the state uses to ensure conservation lands that have been leased to land managers are being properly managed in accordance with conservation and recreation goals. Land managers must submit a land management plan at least every 10 years to DSL for review.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the land management plan must be updated when the land manager proposes new facilities, makes substantive land use or management changes that were not addressed in the approved plan, or within one year after the addition of significant new lands.<sup>13</sup> When developing land management plans, at least one public hearing must be held in any one impacted county.<sup>14</sup> DSL must make electronic copies publicly available of each land management plan for parcels that exceed 160 acres in size.<sup>15</sup>

### **Advisory Group**

Individual land management plans for parcels over 160 acres in size must be developed with input from an advisory group.<sup>16</sup> The advisory group must include representatives from the lead land management agency, co-managing entities, local private property owners, the appropriate soil and water conservation district, a local conservation organization, and a local elected official.<sup>17</sup> The advisory group must hold one publicly noticed hearing within the county where the parcel or project is located.<sup>18</sup> If the parcel or project extends beyond one county, an areawide meeting must be held within the county where the core parcels are located.<sup>19</sup> In the case of an areawide meeting, the lead land management agency must invite a local elected official from each county.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Section [258.007\(1\), F.S.](#)

<sup>7</sup> Section [258.007\(5\), F.S.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Section [253.03\(1\), F.S.](#)

<sup>9</sup> Section [259.035\(3\), F.S.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Section [253.034\(1\), F.S.](#)

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

<sup>12</sup> Section [253.034\(5\), F.S.](#)

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Section [253.034\(5\)\(f\), F.S.](#)

<sup>15</sup> Section [253.034\(5\)\(g\), F.S.](#)

<sup>16</sup> Section [259.032\(8\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

### **Land Management Plan Review**

DSL reviews land management plans for consistency with short-term and long-term management goals. The plans must, at a minimum, contain the following information:

- A physical description of the land.
- A quantitative data description of the land that includes an inventory of forest and other natural resources; exotic and invasive plants; hydrological features; infrastructure; and other significant land, cultural, or historical features.
- A detailed description of each short-term and long-term management goal, associated measurable objectives, and the related activities that will be performed to meet the land management objectives.
- A schedule of land management activities and a summary of the budget for such activities.

Once completed, the land management plan is sent to ARC for review. ARC has 90 days to review the plan and make recommendations to the Board. Once approved by the Board, a land management plan is effective. If a land management entity fails to comply with the requirements of a land management plan, the state may revoke a state lands lease.<sup>21</sup>

### **The 2024-2025 Great Outdoors Initiative**

On August 19, 2024, DEP announced the 2024-2025 Great Outdoors Initiative to Increase Public Access, Recreation, and Lodging at Florida State Parks.<sup>22</sup> DEP intended to “expand public access, increase outdoor activities, and provide new lodging options across Florida’s state parks” by increasing the number of campsites, cabins, and lodges on park property, as well as adding amenities like pickleball courts and golf courses.<sup>23</sup> The announcement noted that these plans will “reinforce the state’s dedication to conservation, the outdoor recreation economy, and a high quality of life for Floridians.”<sup>24</sup>

On August 20, DEP noticed public meetings to be held on August 27 to review and update the land management plans of nine state parks, which included Anastasia, Camp Helen, Dr. Von. D Mizell Eula Johnson, Grayton Beach, Hillsborough River, Honeymoon, Jonathan Dickinson, Oleta River, and Topsail Hill Preserve State Parks. The proposed changes to the land management plans were published on August 20th and included proposals to build an 18-hole golf course,<sup>25</sup> 350-room capacity lodges,<sup>26</sup> pickleball courts,<sup>27</sup> and disc golf courses.<sup>28</sup> Following strong bipartisan opposition, the proposed plans were withdrawn.

### **OTHER RESOURCES:**

[Inventory of Outdoor Recreational Opportunities](#)

[Current DRP Land Management Plans](#)

[Withdrawn Great Outdoors Initiative Land Management Plans](#)

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<sup>21</sup> DEP, *Land Stewardship*, <https://floridadep.gov/lands/environmental-services/content/land-stewardship> (last visited Jan. 29, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> DEP, *DEP Announces 2024-25 Great Outdoors Initiative to Increase Public Access, Recreation and Lodging at Florida State Parks*, <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/FLDEP/bulletins/3afd277> (last visited Feb. 24, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> DEP, *Jonathan Dickinson State Park Unit Management Plan Amendment*, available at [https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/Jonathan%20Dickinson%20UMP%20Amendment%202024\\_0.pdf](https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/Jonathan%20Dickinson%20UMP%20Amendment%202024_0.pdf) (last visited Jan. 28, 2025).

<sup>26</sup> DEP, *Anastasia State Park Unit Management Plan*, available at <https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/Anastasia%20UMP%20Amendment%202024%20%281%29.pdf> (last visited Jan. 28, 2025).

<sup>27</sup> DEP, *Honeymoon Island State Park Unit Management Plan*, available at [https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/Honeymoon%20Island%20UMP%20Amendment%202024\\_0.pdf](https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/Honeymoon%20Island%20UMP%20Amendment%202024_0.pdf) (last visited Jan. 28, 2025).

<sup>28</sup> DEP, *Grayton Beach State Park Unit Management Plan*, available at [https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/Grayton%20Beach%20UMP%20Amendment%202024\\_0.pdf](https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/Grayton%20Beach%20UMP%20Amendment%202024_0.pdf) (last visited Jan. 28, 2025).

## BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
<a href="#">Natural Resources &amp; Disasters Subcommittee</a>	18 Y, 0 N, As CS	3/4/2025	Moore	Gawin
THE CHANGES ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Defined the term “conservation-based recreational uses.”</li><li>• Prohibited DRP from building sports facilities that cause substantial harm to resources within state parks.</li><li>• Removed the prohibition on DRP from acquiring or operating a lodging establishment within a state park.</li><li>• Required updates to state land management plans for state parks to be developed with input from an advisory board.</li></ul>			
<a href="#">State Affairs Committee</a>				

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**THIS BILL ANALYSIS HAS BEEN UPDATED TO INCORPORATE ALL OF THE CHANGES DESCRIBED ABOVE.**  
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