

By the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources; and
Senator Brodeur

592-02039-26

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to tributaries of the St. Johns River; providing a short title; creating s. 373.464, F.S.; requiring the Department of Environmental Protection, by a specified date, to hire a project lead to oversee the implementation of the act; requiring that the project lead have certain expertise; requiring the department to develop, by a specified date, a project plan for the restoration of the Ocklawaha River; specifying requirements for the project plan; providing that the project plan is an environmental restoration or enhancement project subject to a general permit from the department and water management districts; requiring the department to complete the project plan by a specified date, subject to the provision of funds; creating the Northeast Florida River and Springs Recreation and Economic Development Advisory Council; assigning the council to the Department of Environmental Protection; providing that the project lead is the chair of the council; providing for council membership, meetings, and duties; requiring the council to submit an advisory report to the Governor, the Legislature, and the department by a specified date; specifying requirements for the advisory report; providing for future repeal; requiring the department to develop an outdoor recreation plan, in collaboration with certain commissions, councils, and local governments of river communities; specifying requirements for the outdoor

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recreation plan; requiring the department to implement the plan by a specified date; requiring the department to complete projects on state-owned lands in the outdoor recreation plan by a specified date, subject to certain funding; requiring the department to develop a grant program for a specified purpose; requiring that the grant program be compatible with certain plans; requiring the department to implement the grant program by a specified date; requiring the Department of Commerce to develop guidelines and processes for and implement an economic development program for Marion and Putnam Counties for a specified purpose by a specified date; requiring that the economic development plan be compatible with certain plans and programs; requiring the Department of Commerce to implement the economic development program by a specified date; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. This act may be cited as the "Northeast Florida Rivers, Springs, and Community Investment Act."

Section 2. Section 373.464, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

373.464 Ocklawaha River restoration, recreation, and economic development.—

(1) PROJECT LEAD.—The department shall, no later than August 31, 2026, hire a full-time equivalent contractor or employee, whose position title will be project lead, to oversee

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the implementation of this act. The project lead must have
subject matter expertise in conservation and recreation
planning.

(2) PROJECT PLAN.—

(a) By July 1, 2027, the department shall develop a project
plan for the restoration of the Ocklawaha River. The project
plan must provide for restoration and increased resiliency and
recreation benefits of the Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers and
Silver Springs. The project plan must be consistent with the
partial restoration plan described in the 2001 Final
Environmental Impact Statement prepared by the United States
Department of Agriculture Forest Service for the department's
Ocklawaha River Restoration Project, as described in the
department's Joint Application for Environmental Resource Permit
and Federal Dredge and Fill Permit, dated November 24, 1997. The
project plan must include engineering and design updates,
including topographic and bathymetric surveys, and precise
estimates of material to be dredged or excavated. In addition,
the project plan must provide recommendations for road and
bridge construction that is compatible with the partial
restoration plan and ensures continued access for the
communities west of the project. The project plan must include
estimates by fiscal year of the cost of implementing the project
plan and potential sources of funding for such costs.

(b) Notwithstanding any law or rule, the project plan for
the restoration of the Ocklawaha River is an environmental
restoration or enhancement project subject to a general permit
from the department and water management districts for
environmental restoration or enhancement pursuant to rule 62-

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330.405, Florida Administrative Code, and rule 62-330.485,
Florida Administrative Code.

(c) Subject to the provision of state, federal, or other
funds, the department shall complete the restoration project by
December 31, 2032.

(3) NORTHEAST FLORIDA RIVER AND SPRINGS RECREATION AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL.—

(a) Establishment of the council.—

1. The Northeast Florida River and Springs Recreation and
Economic Development Advisory Council, an advisory council as
defined in s. 20.03(7), is established and assigned to the
department. The council shall be administratively housed within
the department. The project lead shall serve as the council
chair, and the members shall meet at the call of the project
lead. Members shall serve without compensation but are entitled
to reimbursement for per diem and travel expenses pursuant to s.
112.061. Council members shall serve 4-year terms, except that
the initial terms shall be staggered.

2. The council shall be composed of the following 16
members:

a. Nine members of the council shall be appointed by and
serve at the pleasure of the Governor and shall include:

(I) Two representatives of river recreation-related
businesses local to Marion or Putnam County.

(II) Two representatives of outdoor recreation user groups,
one of whom represents fishing interests local to Marion or
Putnam County.

(III) One representative of the department's Office of
Greenways and Trails.

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117 (IV) One representative of the Florida Fish and Wildlife
118 Conservation Commission's Division of Freshwater Fisheries
119 Management.

120 (V) One representative of the Florida Fish and Wildlife
121 Conservation Commission's Imperiled Species Management Section.

122 (VI) One representative of the Department of Commerce.

123 (VII) One representative of an environmental community
124 support organization who has subject matter expertise on springs
125 or rivers.

126 b. Six members of the council shall be appointed by the
127 boards of county commissioners for the following counties:

128 (I) Putnam County shall appoint two members, one of whom
129 oversees parks and recreation for the county.

130 (II) Marion County shall appoint two members, one of whom
131 oversees parks and recreation for the county.

132 (III) Clay County shall appoint one member.

133 (IV) St. Johns County shall appoint one member.

134 c. One member shall be the commanding officer of Naval Air
135 Station Jacksonville or his or her designee.

136 (b) Report.—The council shall submit an advisory report to
137 the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the
138 House of Representatives, and the department by February 1,
139 2027. The report must include all of the following:

140 1. Recommendations for projects to be included in the
141 outdoor recreation plan created in subsection (4), including
142 priorities for state-funded land projects.

143 2. Recommendations to the department for the creation of
144 guidelines to govern the grant program created in subsection
145 (5).

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146 3. Recommendations to the Department of Commerce for the
147 creation of guidelines to administer the economic development
148 program created in subsection (6).

149 4. Recommendations for measures to minimize the impact of
150 the restoration plan on property owners or businesses directly
151 affected by the restoration project.

152 (c) Repeal.—In accordance with s. 20.052(8), this
153 subsection is repealed October 2, 2029, unless reviewed and
154 saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

155 (4) OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN.—

156 (a) The department, in collaboration with the Fish and
157 Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Northeast Florida River
158 and Springs Recreation and Economic Development Advisory
159 Council, and the local governments of river communities in Clay,
160 Marion, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties, shall develop an outdoor
161 recreation plan.

162 (b) The outdoor recreation plan must identify and implement
163 projects for enhanced and expanded river and springs access for
164 recreational activities, such as fishing, hunting, swimming,
165 wildlife viewing, paddling, and hiking. Such projects must be
166 compatible with the project plan and applicable statutes. The
167 outdoor recreation plan must be made available for public
168 comment before its implementation.

169 (c) The department shall implement the outdoor recreation
170 plan by January 1, 2028.

171 (d) Subject to the provision of state, federal, or other
172 funds, the department shall complete projects on state-owned
173 lands identified in the outdoor recreation plan by December 31,
174 2035.

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175 (5) GRANT PROGRAM.—

176 (a) By January 1, 2028, the department shall develop a
177 grant program for river communities in Clay, Marion, Putnam, and
178 St. Johns Counties to implement the outdoor recreation plan.

179 (b) The grant program must be compatible with the project
180 plan and outdoor recreation plan.

181 (c) The department shall implement the grant program by
182 January 1, 2028.

183 (6) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.—

184 (a) The Department of Commerce shall develop guidelines and
185 processes for an economic development program for Marion and
186 Putnam Counties. The economic development program must support
187 projects that encourage job creation, capital investment, and
188 strengthening and diversification of each county's economy.

189 (b) The economic development program must be compatible
190 with the project plan, the outdoor recreation plan, and the
191 grant program.

192 (c) The Department of Commerce shall implement the economic
193 development program by January 1, 2028.

194 Section 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.