

**By** the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources; and  
Senators Garcia and Jones

592-02472-26

20261422c1

A bill to be entitled  
An act relating to coral reefs; amending s. 403.93345,  
F.S.; revising legislative findings; providing a  
legislative designation; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. Present subsections (5) through (12) of section  
403.93345, Florida Statutes, are redesignated as subsections (6)  
through (13), respectively, a new subsection (5) is added to  
that section, and subsection (4) and present subsections (7) and  
(8) of that section are amended, to read:

403.93345 Coral reef protection.—

(4) (a) The Legislature finds that coral reefs are valuable  
natural resources that contribute ecologically, aesthetically,  
and economically to the state. Therefore, the Legislature  
declares it is in the best interest of the state to clarify the  
department's powers and authority to protect coral reefs through  
timely and efficient recovery of monetary damages resulting from  
vessel groundings and anchoring-related injuries.

(b) The Legislature further finds that coral reefs can help  
mitigate the risks and related loss and damage from floods,  
climate change, and natural disasters. The Legislature  
recognizes that studies have shown that healthy coral reefs can  
protect coastal properties from climate change-related risks and  
disaster events, including storms, high wave events, sea level  
rise, and flooding. The Federal Emergency Management Agency  
(FEMA) is responsible for responding to natural disasters and  
providing technical and financial hazard mitigation support,

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30 primarily distributed as grant funding through FEMA's hazard  
31 mitigation assistance programs. Coral reef restoration for risk  
32 reduction, known as CR4, is an active restoration strategy with  
33 the aim of increasing the structural integrity and complexity of  
34 coral reef ecosystems to attenuate wave energy and reduce  
35 coastal flooding. Legislative recognition of coral reefs as  
36 critical natural infrastructure and a nature-based solution  
37 demonstrates political support for nature-based solutions.

38 (c) It is the intent of the Legislature that the department  
39 be recognized as the state's lead trustee for coral reef  
40 resources located within waters of the state or on sovereignty  
41 submerged lands unless preempted by federal law. This section  
42 does not divest other state agencies and political subdivisions  
43 of the state of their interests in protecting coral reefs.

44 (5) The Legislature designates coral reefs as critical  
45 natural infrastructure and as a nature-based solution that helps  
46 mitigate climate change-related risks and disaster events,  
47 including storms, high wave events, sea level rise, and  
48 flooding. As such, the Legislature further designates the  
49 protection of corals, coral reefs, and coral reef-associated  
50 hardbottom in Broward, Martin, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm  
51 Beach Counties as being in the public interest.

52 (8)~~(7)~~ The department may use habitat equivalency analysis  
53 as the method by which the compensation described in subsection  
54 (7) ~~(5)~~ is calculated. The parameters for calculation by this  
55 method may be prescribed by rule adopted by the department.

56 (9)~~(8)~~ In addition to the compensation described in  
57 subsection (7) ~~(5)~~, the department may assess, per occurrence,  
58 civil penalties according to the following schedule:

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59 (a) For any anchoring of a vessel on a coral reef or for  
60 any other damage to a coral reef totaling less than or equal to  
61 an area of 1 square meter, \$225, provided that a responsible  
62 party who has anchored a recreational vessel as defined in s.  
63 327.02 which is lawfully registered or exempt from registration  
64 pursuant to chapter 328 is issued, at least once, a warning  
65 letter in lieu of penalty; with aggravating circumstances, an  
66 additional \$225; occurring within a state park or aquatic  
67 preserve, an additional \$225.

68 (b) For damage totaling more than an area of 1 square meter  
69 but less than or equal to an area of 10 square meters, \$450 per  
70 square meter; with aggravating circumstances, an additional \$450  
71 per square meter; occurring within a state park or aquatic  
72 preserve, an additional \$450 per square meter.

73 (c) For damage exceeding an area of 10 square meters,  
74 \$1,500 per square meter; with aggravating circumstances, an  
75 additional \$1,500 per square meter; occurring within a state  
76 park or aquatic preserve, an additional \$1,500 per square meter.

77 (d) For a second violation, the total penalty may be  
78 doubled.

79 (e) For a third violation, the total penalty may be  
80 tripled.

81 (f) For any violation after a third violation, the total  
82 penalty may be quadrupled.

83 (g) The total of penalties levied may not exceed \$375,000  
84 per occurrence.

85 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.