

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to tributaries of the St. Johns River;
3 providing a short title; creating s. 373.464, F.S.;
4 requiring the Department of Environmental Protection,
5 by a specified date, to hire a project lead to oversee
6 the implementation of the act; requiring that the
7 project lead have certain expertise; requiring the
8 department to develop, by a specified date, a project
9 plan for the restoration of the Ocklawaha River;
10 specifying requirements for the project plan;
11 providing that the project plan is an environmental
12 restoration or enhancement project subject to a
13 general permit from the department and water
14 management districts; requiring the department to
15 complete the project plan by a specified date, subject
16 to the provision of funds; creating the Northeast
17 Florida River and Springs Recreation and Economic
18 Development Advisory Council; assigning the council to
19 the Department of Environmental Protection; providing
20 that the project lead is the chair of the council;
21 providing for council membership, meetings, and
22 duties; requiring the council to submit an advisory
23 report to the Governor, the Legislature, and the
24 department by a specified date; specifying
25 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 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 grant program for a specified purpose; requiring that the grant program be compatible with certain plans; requiring the department to implement the plan 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 cited as the "Northeast Florida

51 Rivers, Springs, and Community Investment Act."

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

54 373.464 Ocklawaha River restoration, recreation, and
55 economic development.—

56 (1) PROJECT LEAD.—The department shall, no later than
57 August 31, 2026, hire a full-time equivalent contractor or
58 employee, whose position title will be project lead, to oversee
59 the implementation of this act. The project lead must have
60 subject matter expertise in conservation and recreation
61 planning.

62 (2) PROJECT PLAN.—

63 (a) By July 1, 2027, the department shall develop a
64 project plan for the restoration of the Ocklawaha River. The
65 project plan must provide for restoration and increased
66 resiliency and recreation benefits of the Ocklawaha and St.
67 Johns Rivers and Silver Springs. The project plan must be
68 consistent with the partial restoration plan described in the
69 2001 Final Environmental Impact Statement prepared by the United
70 States Department of Agriculture Forest Service for the
71 department's Ocklawaha River Restoration Project, as described
72 in the department's Joint Application for Environmental Resource
73 Permit and Federal Dredge and Fill Permit, dated November 24,
74 1997. The project plan must include engineering and design
75 updates, including topographic and bathymetric surveys, and

76 precise estimates of material to be dredged or excavated. In
77 addition, the project plan must provide recommendations for road
78 and bridge construction that is compatible with the partial
79 restoration plan and ensures continued access for the
80 communities west of the project. The project plan must include
81 estimates by fiscal year of the cost of implementing the project
82 plan and potential sources of funding for such costs.

83 (b) Notwithstanding any law or rule, the project plan for
84 the restoration of the Ocklawaha River is an environmental
85 restoration or enhancement project subject to a general permit
86 from the department and water management districts for
87 environmental restoration or enhancement pursuant to rule 62-
88 330.405, F.A.C., and rule 62-330.485, F.A.C.

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

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

94 (a) Establishment of the council.—

95 1. The Northeast Florida River and Springs Recreation and
96 Economic Development Advisory Council, an advisory council as
97 defined in s. 20.03(7), is established and assigned to the
98 department. The council shall be administratively housed within
99 the department. The project lead shall serve as the council
100 chair, and the members shall meet at the call of the project

101 lead. Members shall serve without compensation but are entitled
102 to reimbursement for per diem and travel expenses pursuant to s.
103 112.061. Council members shall serve 4-year terms, except that
104 the initial terms shall be staggered.

105 2. The council shall be composed of the following 15
106 members:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

125 b. Six members of the council shall be appointed by the

boards of county commissioners for the following counties:

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

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

(III) Clay County shall appoint one member.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(c) Repeal.—In accordance with s. 20.052(8), this subsection is repealed October 2, 2029, unless reviewed and

151 saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

152 (4) OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN.—

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

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

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

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

172 (5) GRANT PROGRAM.—

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

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

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

180 (6) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.—

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

186 (b) The economic development program must be compatible
187 with the project plan, the outdoor recreation plan, and the
188 grant program.

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

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