

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 by a specified date;
19 assigning the council to the Department of
20 Environmental Protection; providing that the project
21 lead is the chair of the council; providing for
22 council membership, meetings, and duties; requiring
23 the council to submit an advisory report to the
24 Governor, the Legislature, and the department by a
25 specified date; specifying requirements for the

26 | advisory report; providing for future repeal;
27 | requiring the department to develop an outdoor
28 | recreation plan, in collaboration with certain
29 | commissions, councils, and local governments of river
30 | communities; specifying requirements for the outdoor
31 | recreation plan; requiring the department to implement
32 | the plan by a specified date; requiring the department
33 | to complete projects on state-owned lands in the
34 | outdoor recreation plan by a specified date, subject
35 | to certain funding and the commencement of specified
36 | plans; requiring the department to develop a grant
37 | program for a specified purpose; requiring that the
38 | grant program be compatible with certain plans;
39 | requiring the department to implement the grant
40 | program contingent on the commencement of the project
41 | plan; requiring the Department of Commerce to develop
42 | guidelines and processes for and implement an economic
43 | development program for Marion and Putnam Counties for
44 | a specified purpose by a specified date; requiring
45 | that the economic development plan be compatible with
46 | certain plans and programs; requiring the Department
47 | of Commerce to implement the economic development
48 | program contingent on the commencement of the project
49 | plan; providing an effective date.

50

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

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

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

57 373.464 Ocklawaha River restoration, recreation, and
58 economic development.-

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

65 (2) PROJECT PLAN.-

66 (a) By July 1, 2027, the department shall develop a
67 project plan for the restoration of the Ocklawaha River with the
68 goal of restoring the river's natural flow, hydrology, and
69 floodplain function to the approximate conditions that existed
70 before the construction of the Cross Florida Barge Canal project
71 and its associated project works. The project plan must provide
72 for restoration and increased resiliency and recreation benefits
73 of the Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers and Silver Springs. The
74 project plan must incorporate the best available science and
75 include engineering and design updates, including topographic

76 and bathymetric surveys, and precise estimates of material to be
77 dredged or excavated. In addition, the project plan must provide
78 recommendations for road and bridge construction which are
79 compatible with the restoration plan and ensure continued access
80 for the communities west of the project. The project plan must
81 include estimates by fiscal year of the cost of implementing the
82 project 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, Florida Administrative Code, and rule 62-330.485,
89 Florida Administrative Code.

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

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

95 (a) *Establishment of the council.*—

96 1. By October 31, 2026, the Northeast Florida River and
97 Springs Recreation and Economic Development Advisory Council, an
98 advisory council as defined in s. 20.03(7), shall be established
99 and assigned to the department. The council shall be
100 administratively housed within the department. The project lead

101 shall serve as the council chair, and the members shall meet at
102 the call of the project lead. Members shall serve without
103 compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for per diem and
104 travel expenses pursuant to s. 112.061. Council members shall
105 serve 4-year terms, except that the initial terms shall be
106 staggered.

107 2. In addition to the project lead, the council shall be
108 composed of the following 19 members:

109 a. Six members of the council shall be appointed by and
110 serve at the pleasure of the Governor and shall include
111 representatives from the Department of Environmental Protection,
112 the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the Department of
113 Commerce.

114 b. Six members of the council shall be appointed by the
115 Legislature, with 3 members appointed by the Senate and 3
116 members appointed by the House of Representatives. The
117 appointees must include:

118 (I) A representative of river recreation-related
119 businesses local to Putnam County.

120 (II) A representative of recreation-related businesses
121 local to Marion County.

122 (III) A representative local to the Town of Welaka.

123 (IV) Two representatives local to Putnam County.

124 (V) One representative of an environmental community-
125 supporting organization who has subject matter expertise in

126 | springs or rivers.

127 | c. Six members of the council shall be appointed by the
 128 | boards of county commissioners for the following counties:

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

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

133 | (III) Clay County shall appoint one member.

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

135 | d. One member shall be the commanding officer of Naval Air
 136 | Station Jacksonville or his or her designee.

137 | (b) Report.—The council shall submit an advisory report to
 138 | the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the
 139 | House of Representatives, and the department by February 1,
 140 | 2027, and annual progress reports each February 1 thereafter.
 141 | The report must include all of the following:

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

145 | 2. Recommendations to the department for the creation of
 146 | guidelines to govern the grant program created in subsection
 147 | (5).

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

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

154 (c) Repeal.—In accordance with s. 20.052(8), this
155 subsection is repealed October 2, 2032, unless reviewed and
156 saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

157 (4) OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN.—

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

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

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

173 (d) Subject to the provision of state, federal, or other
174 funds and the commencement of the project plan developed
175 pursuant to subsection (2), the department shall complete

176 projects on state-owned lands identified in the outdoor
177 recreation plan by December 31, 2035.

178 (5) GRANT PROGRAM.—

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

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

184 (c) The department shall implement the grant program upon
185 the commencement of the project plan developed pursuant to
186 subsection (2).

187 (6) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.—

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

193 (b) The economic development program must be compatible
194 with the project plan, the outdoor recreation plan, and the
195 grant program.

196 (c) The Department of Commerce shall implement the
197 economic development program upon the commencement of the
198 project plan pursuant to subsection (2).

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