



The Florida Senate

Local Funding Initiative Request

Fiscal Year 2024-2025

LFIR # 3201

1. **Project Title**

2. **Senate Sponsor**

3. **Date of Request**

4. Project/Program Description

This project will build on current restoration efforts in Weeki Wachee River by restoring 8.79 acres of vital submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) habitat, namely native eelgrass. Current restoration activities include dredging the riverbed of excess sedimentation, which can smother SAV and limit light needed for its growth. Dredging will prepare the site for planting eelgrass. Robust eelgrass meadows will filter excess nutrients; stabilize bottom sediments; provide critical habitat for fish and forage for herbivores; and build resilience against climate change. Where feasible, planting units will be temporarily protected from grazers until their roots become established using GrowSAV™ Herbivory Exclusion Devices. The plants will be protected and maintained for one year and the success of the project will be documented for a period of three years through a maintenance and monitoring program.

5. **State Agency to receive requested funds**

State Agency contacted? Yes

6. Amount of the Nonrecurring Request for Fiscal Year 2024-2025

Type of Funding	Amount
Operations	480,000
Fixed Capital Outlay	0
Total State Funds Requested	480,000

7. Total Project Cost for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 (including matching funds available for this project)

Type of Funding	Amount	Percentage
Total State Funds Requested (from question #6)	480,000	100%
Matching Funds		
Federal	0	0%
State (excluding the amount of this request)	0	0%
Local	0	0%
Other	0	0%
Total Project Costs for Fiscal Year 2024-2025	480,000	100%

8. **Has this project previously received state funding?** No

Fiscal Year (yyyy-yy)	Amount		Specific Appropriation #	Vetoed
	Recurring	Nonrecurring		

9. **Is future funding likely to be requested?** No

a. **If yes, indicate nonrecurring amount per year.**

b. **Describe the source of funding that can be used in lieu of state funding.**



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10. Has the entity requesting this project received any federal assistance related to the COVID-19 pandemic?

If yes, indicate the amount of funds received and what the funds were used for.

Complete questions 11 and 12 for Fixed Capital Outlay Projects

11. Status of Construction

a. What is the current phase of the project?

- Planning
 Design
 Construction
 N/A

b. Is the project "shovel ready" (i.e permitted)?

c. What is the estimated start date of construction?

d. What is the estimated completion date of construction?

12. List the owners of the facility to receive, directly or indirectly, any fixed capital outlay funding. Include the relationship between the owners of the facility and the entity.

13. Details on how the requested state funds will be expended

Spending Category	Description	Amount
Administrative Costs:		
Executive Director/Project Head Salary and Benefits	Administrative duties, outreach, community education, contracting	28,800
Other Salary and Benefits	Project oversight by finance and administrative staff	19,200
Expense/Equipment/Travel/Supplies/Other	NA	0
Consultants/Contracted Services/Study	NA	0
Operational Costs: Other		
Salary and Benefits	NA	0
Expense/Equipment/Travel/Supplies/Other	NA	0
Consultants/Contracted Services/Study	Environmental monitoring, permitting, engineering, cultivating and planting nursery grown eelgrass, protection and maintenance of eelgrass for one year, and monitoring and reporting for three years.	432,000
Fixed Capital Construction/Major Renovation:		
Construction/Renovation/Land/Planning Engineering		0
Total State Funds Requested (must equal total from question #6)		480,000

14. Program Performance

a. What specific purpose or goal will be achieved by the funds requested?



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This project will build on current restoration efforts in Weeki Wachee River by planting 8.79 acres of native eelgrass. Current dredging of excess sediment will prepare the riverbed for plantings. Planted eelgrass will filter nutrients, stabilize bottom sediments, provide critical habitat for fish and forage for herbivores. In 2017, the Southwest Florida Management District approved the inclusion of the Weeki Wachee River as a Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) plan priority. The SWIM plan supports projects that improve water quality and habitat improvements in the river with a goal of achieving coverage of desirable SAV of >40%. And, in 07/23, the first Springs Protection Zone in the state was approved throughout a stretch of the river by FWC in order to protect SAV and prevent shoreline erosion (that would lead to additional sedimentation). This project supports the goals of the District and FWC.

b. What activities and services will be provided to meet the intended purpose of these funds?

According to the SWIM plan for Weeki Wachee, loss of native SAV is likely due to invasive species competition, recreational uses, and sedimentation. Excess sedimentation can smother SAV and limit available light needed for its growth. Sedimentation also promotes growth of mat-forming algae, which further limits SAV cover. Following the environmental dredging that is currently underway, the site will be ideally prepped for plantings. This project includes permitting, engineering, cultivating and planting nursery grown eelgrass, protection and maintenance of eelgrass for one year, and monitoring and reporting for three years to ensure project success.

c. What direct services will be provided to citizens by the appropriation project?

Eelgrass filters and sequesters nutrients that would otherwise contribute to harmful algae blooms (HABs). HABs have the potential to cause deleterious health consequences to humans and wildlife. Eelgrass also stabilizes sediment, improving water clarity and quality, which will lead to safer and more enjoyable recreational activities. Sportfishing, boating, and other water-based recreational activities will be enhanced with improvements in water quality and habitat. Numerous studies have shown that being in nature can improve mental wellbeing. As opportunities for outdoor recreational activities are improved, mental health will improve. Weeki Wachee River flows from the first magnitude Weeki Wachee Springs and is one of FL's most iconic destinations, providing numerous recreational opportunities ranging from kayaking to boating to fishing. By improving the health of the aquatic ecosystem, these cultural experiences will be safeguarded.

d. Who is the target population served by this project? How many individuals are expected to be served?

Weeki Wachee River flows from the first magnitude Weeki Wachee Springs and winds 7.5 miles through scenic views, providing numerous recreational opportunities ranging from kayaking to fishing. This project will serve the local and regional residents alike. According to the US Census Bureau, roughly 207k people lived in Hernando County during 2022. In addition to residents and tourists, the enhanced habitat will provide thermal refuge and forage for the threatened West Indian manatee and habitat for other fish and wildlife.

e. What is the expected benefit or outcome of this project? What is the methodology by which this outcome will be measured?

Enhancing the health of the ecosystem will lead to increased tourism opportunities around Weeki Wachee River which will increase economic input, tourism, and jobs supported by the river. Increases in tourism will be quantified through habitat production and increases of important wildlife species. New environmental and water-based job opportunities created by this project can be tabulated to document increase in jobs as project improves water quality and habitat.

f. What are the suggested penalties that the contracting agency may consider in addition to its standard penalties for failing to meet deliverables or performance measures provided for the contract?

Failure to utilize the funds in the specified manner shall result in funds being returned to the State.

15. Requester Contact Information

a. First Name **Last Name**

b. Organization

c. E-mail Address

d. Phone Number **Ext.**

16. Recipient Contact Information



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a. Organization

b. Municipality and County

c. Organization Type

- For Profit Entity
- Non Profit 501(c)(3)
- Non Profit 501(c)(4)
- Local Entity
- University or College
- Other (please specify)

d. First Name Last Name

e. E-mail Address

f. Phone Number

17. Lobbyist Contact Information

a. Name

b. Firm Name

c. E-mail Address

d. Phone Number