

Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

CS/CS/SB 724 — Seagrass Restoration Technology Development Initiative

by Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment, and General Government;
Environment and Natural Resources Committee; and Senators Boyd, Stewart, Garcia, and Avila

The bill establishes the Seagrass Restoration Technical Development Initiative within the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), in partnership with Mote Marine Laboratory, the University of Florida, and DEP's Aquatic Preserve Program, to develop innovative, cost-efficient, and environmentally sustainable technologies needed to restore coastal seagrass ecosystems.

The bill directs DEP to award funds specifically appropriated by the Legislature to Mote Marine Laboratory, which will function as the initiative's lead administrative component. Mote Marine Laboratory may use a portion of the funds to facilitate additional engagement with other pertinent marine science and technology development organizations to pursue applied research and technology for the successful restoration of seagrass ecosystems. Mote Marine Laboratory may not use more than five percent of the funds for direct annual initiative administration and coordination costs. The initiative must leverage state-appropriated funds with additional funds from private and federal sources.

Mote Marine Laboratory and the University of Florida are required to create a 10-year Florida Seagrass Restoration Plan to implement tools and technologies developed under the initiative.

The bill requires the initiative to submit an annual report with an overview of its accomplishments to date and priorities for subsequent years to the Governor, the Legislature, the Secretary of Environmental Protection, and the executive director of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The bill also establishes the Initiative Technology Advisory Council (TAC) as part of the initiative and specifies the membership of the council. The TAC must meet at least twice a year. The bill appropriates \$2 million from the General Revenue Fund to DEP beginning in the 2023-2024 fiscal year and for each fiscal year through 2027-2028 to implement the seagrass initiative and the technology advisory council. In addition, the bill requires DEP to implement seagrass restoration projects that are procured on a payment-for-performance basis.

The section of law created in the bill expires on June 30, 2028.

If approved by the Governor, or allowed to become law without the Governor's signature, these provisions take effect July 1, 2023.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 119-0