

THE FLORIDA SENATE
2020 SUMMARY OF LEGISLATION PASSED
Committee on Community Affairs

CS/CS/SB 712 — Environmental Resource Management

by Appropriations Committee; Community Affairs Committee; and Senators Mayfield, Harrell, Albritton, and Bradley

The “Clean Waterways Act” addresses a number of environmental issues including several provisions specifically related to water quality improvement.

Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems (Septic Systems)

The bill transfers the Onsite Sewage Program from the Department of Health (DOH) to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) starting in 2021. The bill creates a temporary septic technical advisory committee within DEP.

The bill requires local governments to create septic remediation plans for certain basin management action plans (BMAPs). The bill also requires DEP to implement a fast track-approval process for NSF/ANSI 245 nutrient reducing septic systems and revises provisions relating to septic system setback rules.

Wastewater Treatment

The bill requires local governments to create wastewater treatment plans for certain BMAPs but authorizes different cost options for projects that meet pollution reduction requirements.

The bill creates a wastewater grant program that allows DEP to provide grants for projects within BMAPs, alternative restoration plans, or rural areas of opportunity that will reduce excess nutrient pollution. The bill prioritizes funding for certain wastewater projects in the grant program, the State Revolving Loan Fund Program, and the Small Community Sewer Construction Assistance Program.

The bill prohibits, beginning July 1, 2025, wastewater treatment facilities from discharging into the Indian River Lagoon without providing advanced waste treatment. The bill imposes new requirements on wastewater facilities and DEP to prevent sanitary sewer overflows and underground pipe leaks.

Stormwater

The bill requires DEP to: update its stormwater design and operation rules and Environmental Resource Permit Applicant’s Handbook; make revisions to its local pollution control staff training; evaluate the self-certification process for the construction, alteration, and maintenance of a stormwater management system; and revise the model stormwater management program.

Agriculture

The bill requires the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) to perform onsite inspections at least every 2 years of agricultural producers enrolled in best management practices (BMPs). DACS must prioritize inspections for producers in the BMAPs for Lake Okeechobee, the Indian River Lagoon, the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary, and Silver Springs.

The bill creates a cooperative agricultural regional water quality improvement element as part of a BMAP in areas where agriculture is a significant source of pollution. Projects under the element could include conservation easements and dispersed water management. The bill authorizes legislative budget requests to fund these projects and requires DEP to allocate at least 20 percent of the funds it receives for projects in areas with the highest nutrient concentrations.

The bill requires DACS, in coordination with the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) and other academic institutions, to annually develop research plans and legislative budget requests to address agricultural runoff.

Biosolids

The bill requires enrollment in DACS's BMP program and prohibits the application of Class A or Class B biosolids within 6 inches of the seasonal high water table, unless a nutrient management plan and water quality monitoring plan provide reasonable assurances that the application will not cause or contribute to water quality violations. Permits will have to comply with the statute within two years and with DEP's biosolids rule within two years of it becoming effective. The bill allows local governments to keep existing biosolids ordinances.

Fines and Penalties

The bill doubles the fines for wastewater violations and increases the cap on total administrative penalties that may be assessed by DEP from \$10,000 to \$50,000 and the cap per violator from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Water Quality Monitoring

The bill requires DEP to establish a real-time water quality monitoring program, subject to appropriation.

Bottled Water

The bill requires DEP to conduct a study on the bottled water industry in the state.

Rights of Nature

The bill prohibits local governments from providing legal rights to any plant, animal, body of water, or other part of the natural environment unless otherwise specifically authorized by state law or the State Constitution.

Golf Courses

The bill requires DEP to work with UF/IFAS and regulated entities to consider the adoption by rule of BMPs for nutrient impacts from golf courses.

The bill requires DEP to complete rulemaking to implement several provisions and imposes numerous reporting requirements.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect, except as otherwise expressly provided, July 1, 2020.

Vote: Senate 39-0; House 118-0