



The Florida Senate

Local Funding Initiative Request

Fiscal Year 2024-2025

LFIR # 2103

1. Project Title

2. Senate Sponsor

3. Date of Request

4. Project/Program Description

Since 2017, the Lower St. Johns River (LSJR) lost 99% of all submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV); 90% of plants lost were native tape grass. Since the storms of 2017, recovery of the grass beds in the LSJR has been slower than in previous years. The 2022 State of the River Report for the LSJR Basin records a significant decrease in manatees from 2016-2021 due to lack of forage. Phase 1 of this project will restore 80 acres of SAV coverage, namely native tape grass, off of Wateroak Point at Bayard Wildlife Management Area 1. Phase 2 will restore an additional 60 acres of tape grass just south of Phase 1. These areas have been strategically selected based on documented SAV losses and ideal water depths. The tape grass used for this project will be a combination of genetically verified ecotypes that are best suited to thrive in conditions similar to the LSJR, such as higher-than-normal salinities and limited light availability.

5. State Agency to receive requested funds

State Agency contacted? No

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

Type of Funding	Amount
Operations	4,000,000
Fixed Capital Outlay	0
Total State Funds Requested	4,000,000

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)	4,000,000	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	4,000,000	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? Yes

a. If yes, indicate nonrecurring amount per year.

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

Funding will come from local and philanthropic sources if state funding is not available.

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



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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	Administration and contracting.	188,880
Other Salary and Benefits	Field staff and administrative assistant.	129,120
Expense/Equipment/Travel/Supplies/Other	Hotels, fuel/mileage, Per Diem for site visits, outreach/education events, production of educational materials.	76,000
Consultants/Contracted Services/Study	Grant assistant manager, accountant (payroll, tax prep), and public outreach.	40,000
Operational Costs: Other		
Salary and Benefits	NA	0
Expense/Equipment/Travel/Supplies/Other	NA	0
Consultants/Contracted Services/Study	Permitting, Nursery Grown SAV Production and Installation, Herbivory Exclusion Device Installation and Maintenance, Maintenance of SAV, Environmental Monitoring and Reporting.	3,566,000
Fixed Capital Construction/Major Renovation:		
Construction/Renovation/Land/Planning Engineering		0
Total State Funds Requested (must equal total from question #6)		4,000,000

14. Program Performance

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



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The goal of this project is to return some of the ecosystem services that have been missing in the LSJR by restoring tape grass, a native SAV species, to the LSJR in areas that have documented SAV losses. Ph 1 will restore 80 acres south of Shands Bridge; Ph 2 will restore an additional 60 acres south of Ph1. The sites were selected because they are now deemed suitable for restoration based on various parameters such as water depth, water quality, wave action, and sediment type. The tape grass used for this project will be a combination of genetically verified ecotypes that are best suited to thrive in conditions similar to the LSJR. These include ecotypes with higher-than-normal salt tolerances and low light requirements, as varying salinities and limited light availability have been shown to be obstacles that must be overcome for SAV recovery in the LSJR. Seed and plant fragments will lead to widespread establishment of plants far outside the planted area.

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

Planting units will be fabricated with native tape grass (*Vallisneria* spp), a freshwater SAV species that can tolerate salinities ranging from 0–12 ppt, and can form dense canopies that provide shelter and forage for fish & wildlife. The tape grass used for this project will be a combination of genetically verified ecotypes that are best suited for conditions similar to the LSJR. Herbivory exclusion devices will protect planting units until their roots become well established to prevent herbivores from uprooting the plants. Devices will be maintained to ensure they are free of bio-fouling/drift algae. Regular monitoring events will take place for t3 years post-installation; various parameters will be measured during each monitoring event to quantify project success including percent coverage, species composition, SAV canopy height, epiphyte coverage, and shoot density. Data gathered will be used to guide future SAV restoration efforts in the LSJR and lead to transformational changes.

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

SAV 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. SAV 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. SAV beds will provide nursery for fishes and thermal refuge/forage for the threatened West Indian manatee. Enhancing SAV meadows will increase the river's carrying capacity for manatees which is vital since their observed sightings in the LSJR have dwindled since 2017. Public outreach will convey project benefits to the community.

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

This project will have direct positive impacts on the regional and state economy. In 2017, the regional population of Jacksonville and LSJR watersheds was approximately 2.012M residents (NFWF, 2019) with the entire SJR Basin encompassing about 23% of the state's population (nap.nationalacademies.org/read/13314/chapter/3). Project benefits will be realized in numerous sectors of the economy. The University of FL completed a study in 2015 to quantify the value of the LSJR to local residents (www.sjrwmd.com/static/waterways/St._Johns_River_Economic_Study). The results demonstrated that real estate values increased significantly for properties along the riverfront, with an estimated annual input to the economy of \$944M; properties with tributary frontage contribute an additional estimated \$117M to the economy. The study also found that river was associated with an estimated economic value of \$89M-\$108M and \$45M per annum for recreation and ecotourism, respectively.

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

Expected benefits of this project include: stimulating the local, regional, and state-wide economy through increased recreational opportunities, which supports the industries that depend on them; improving real estate values in the area; reducing HABs, and their associated health consequences, as SAV cycles out excess nutrients from the water column; improving habitat for fish and wildlife; and providing source of forage for manatees. The project will be monitored for changes in water quality, fisheries production, and plant expansion. Similar projects have documented logarithmic benefits to areas as seed and plant fragments lead to natural expansion outside of planted areas. Monitoring campaigns will occur biannually at the beginning (May) and at the end (September) of the typical SAV growing season. Annual monitoring reports will be generated for three years documenting the success of the goals of this project.

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?

If deliverables are not achieved, then funds should be withheld for nonperformance.



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15. Requester Contact Information

a. First Name Last Name

b. Organization

c. E-mail Address

d. Phone Number Ext.

16. Recipient Contact Information

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

Please complete the questions below for Water Projects only.

18. Have you applied for alternative state funding?

- Waste Water Revolving Loan
- Drinking Water Revolving Loan
- Small Community Wastewater Treatment Grant
- Other (please specify)



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N/A

19. What is the population economic status?

- Financially Disadvantaged Community (ch. 62-552, F.A.C)
- Financially Disadvantaged Municipality (ch. 62-552, F.A.C)
- Rural Area of Economic Concern
- Rural Area of Opportunity (s. 288.0656, Florida Statutes)
- N/A

20. What is the status of construction?

Not ready

21. What percentage of the construction has been completed?

0%

22. What is the estimated completion date of construction?

12/31/2025