

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based only on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Date: February 12, 1998 Revised: _____

Subject: Wildlife.

	<u>Analyst</u>	<u>Staff Director</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Action</u>
1.	<u>Green</u>	<u>Voigt</u>	<u>NR</u>	<u>Favorable</u>
2.	_____	_____	<u>WM</u>	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

This bill establishes a separate wildlife management area program which charges a fee, designed to meet the private landowner's economic needs, for hunting and other outdoor recreation activities.

This bill amends subsection (4) of s. 372.57, F.S.

II. Present Situation:

Section 372.57, F.S., lists licensing, permit, and authorization requirements for hunting and fishing activities in Florida. Subsection (4) of s. 372.57, F.S., provides for a Florida Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission program (Type I Wildlife Management Area Program) that pays annual lease payments to private landowners for public outdoor recreational opportunities. Payments are based on man-days of public use and the acreage owned. Currently, this program for leasing privately-owned property affords the public access to lands that otherwise would be unavailable and ensures a better statewide distribution of public hunting opportunities. In addition, landowners benefit from financial incentives in the form of annual payments and are shielded from liability associated with public use. Currently, the commission's wildlife management program pays \$900,000 to 11 different landowners for the use of 20 tracts of privately-owned land encompassing 850,000 acres. The average lease payment is \$1.05 per acre.

This leasing program, however, faces threats from a changing economic climate. Many landowners are turning over their leases to private hunt clubs that are willing to pay higher prices. The practice of transferring these leases to private hunt clubs, along with a reduction in annual landowner appropriations, has increased the number of corporate participant withdrawals. Continued involvement by private landowners in this leasing program will likely require an

increase in annual lease payments. Under present budgetary constraints, a significant increase in state funds for increasing annual lease payments is unlikely.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill establishes a separate wildlife management area program. The bill requires a recreational user permit for each privately-owned wildlife management area. The fee would be set to meet the private landowner's economic needs. A fixed number of permits would be available annually for each area. The Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission would sell the permits and remit all revenue derived from permit sales, less the \$25 administrative fee, to the respective landowners. The spouse and dependent children of a permittee are exempt from the permit fee when engaged in outdoor recreation activities other than hunting in the company of the permittee. Landowners would be encouraged to assist in marketing and advertising to facilitate the sale of all available permits.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

People who voluntarily visit this new category of wildlife management area for hunting would be required to pay a higher fee than historically paid for such areas which was \$25.

B. Private Sector Impact:

While visits to some wildlife areas would be more costly, these extra costs would help assure these areas are not lost to the general public because private hunting clubs are willing to pay higher lease fees. The cost of the program would be shifted away from all Florida license buyers which currently help pay the \$900,000 appropriation for the Type I Wildlife Management Area Program to actual area users of the new program.

Landowners would benefit because the Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission would have greater flexibility to meet their financial needs. However, should landowners set a permit price that exceeds the free market, some of the permits may remain unsold and cause less than a full economic return. The program would also protect landowners from liability to the extent provided under limits set by the State.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The increased fees would not result in additional revenue for the commission because they only retain an administrative fee of \$25. Only minimal additional staff time would be required to execute contracts in this new program. The current appropriation of \$900,000 would be used for budgetary shortfalls such as better land management for enhanced hunting opportunities.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.