

STORAGE NAME: h0869.ft

DATE: March 7, 2000

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
AS REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE & TAXATION
ANALYSIS - LOCAL LEGISLATION**

BILL #: HB 869

RELATING TO: Cow Slough Water Control District

SPONSOR(S): Representative Goodlette

TIED BILL(S): None

ORIGINATING COMMITTEE(S)/COMMITTEE(S) OF REFERENCE:

- (1) COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY AFFAIRS (PRC) YEAS 9 NAYS 0
 - (2) FINANCE & TAXATION
 - (3)
 - (4)
 - (5)
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I. SUMMARY:

The bill codifies all prior special acts relating to the Cow Slough Water Control District into a single act.

The bill does not make any substantive changes to current law.

The bill has no impact on state revenues.

II. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS:

A. DOES THE BILL SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

- 1. Less Government Yes No N/A
- 2. Lower Taxes Yes No N/A
- 3. Individual Freedom Yes No N/A
- 4. Personal Responsibility Yes No N/A
- 5. Family Empowerment Yes No N/A

For any principle that received a "no" above, please explain:

B. PRESENT SITUATION:

The 1997 Legislature amended Chapter 189, Florida Statutes, to provide for codification of all special districts' charters either by December 1, 2001, or when any act relating to such district is introduced to the Legislature, whichever occurs first. In addition, section 189.429, Florida Statutes, requires that no changes be made to a district's charter as it exists on October 1, 1997, in the codifying legislation and that all prior Legislative acts relating to the district be repealed.

The 1998 Legislature further amended section 189.429, Florida Statutes, by (1) extending the deadline to codify to December 1, 2004; (2) allowing for the adoption of the codification schedule provided for in an October 3, 1997, memorandum issued by the Chair of the Committee on Community Affairs; (3) removing the prohibition of substantive amendments in a district's codification bill; and (4) removing the requirement that a codified charter must be submitted prior to the introduction of any act relating to the charter or prior to the scheduled deadline.

SCHEDULE OF SUBMITTALS OF SPECIAL DISTRICTS' CHARTERS

Special Districts with 2 special acts (45 districts)	1999 Legislative Session
Special Districts with 3 or 4 special acts (63 districts)	2000 Legislative Session
Special Districts with 5, 6 or 7 special acts (53 districts)	2001 Legislative Session
Special Districts with 8, 9,10, 11 or 12 special acts (56 districts)	2002 Legislative Session
Special Districts with 13 or more (54 districts)	2003 Legislative Session
Special Fire Control Districts (47 districts)	2004 Legislative Session

STATUS STATEMENT LANGUAGE

Also, subsection 189.404(5), Florida Statutes, provides that after October 1, 1997, the charter of any newly created special district shall contain and, as practical, the charter of a preexisting special district shall be amended to contain, a reference to the status of the special district as dependent or independent. When necessary, the status statement shall be amended to conform with the department's determination or declaratory statement regarding the status of the district.

History of Water Control Districts

Water control districts have a long history in Florida. As early as the 1830s, the Legislature passed a special act authorizing landowners to construct drainage ditches across adjacent lands to discharge excess water. Following the passage of several special acts creating drainage districts, the Legislature passed the state's first general drainage law, the General Drainage Act of 1913, to establish one procedure for creating drainage districts--through circuit court decree--and to provide general law provisions governing the operation of these districts.

Between 1913 and 1972, the General Drainage Act remained virtually unchanged. In 1972 and 1979, the Legislature amended the Act to change the name of these districts to water management districts and then to water control districts. In neither year did the Legislature enact a major reform of the Act, although the 1979 Act did repeal provisions authorizing the creation of water control districts by circuit court decree.

Chapter 298, Florida Statutes

Chapter 298, Florida Statutes, contains provisions governing the creation and operation of water control districts. Some of these provisions are briefly described below.

Creation of Water Control Districts

Section 298.01, Florida Statutes, restricts the creation of new water control districts to special acts of the Legislature (independent water control districts) and under the provisions of section 125.01, Florida Statutes (dependent water control districts). Districts created by circuit court decree prior to July 1, 1980, are authorized to operate under the authority provided by Chapter 298, Florida Statutes.

Election of Board of Supervisors

Upon the formation of a water control district, the circuit court where the majority of the land is located has jurisdiction within the boundaries of the district. Once a district is organized, the clerk of the circuit court with jurisdiction over the district must announce the first landowners' meeting in a newspaper. At the first meeting, the landowners are required to elect a three-member board of supervisors. Supervisors serve 3-year rotating terms, with one supervisor elected each year at a required annual meeting. To qualify as a supervisor, a person must own property in the district and be a resident of the county in which the district is located. In the event a quorum is not present, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is required to fill the vacant seat.

One-Acre One-Vote

Section 298.11, Florida Statutes, provides for every acre of land within a district to represent one share, or vote. Each landowner within a district is entitled to one vote per acre of land they own. Landowners owning less than one acre are entitled to one vote. The section allows proxy voting by landowners as well.

Role of the Circuit Courts

As noted, once a water control district is formed, the circuit court of the county where the majority of the land is located has exclusive jurisdiction within the boundaries of the district. Circuit courts serve several functions in the creation and governance of water control districts. After a board of supervisors adopts a plan of reclamation, it must petition the circuit court to appoint three commissioners to appraise the lands that will be acquired to implement the plan of reclamation. A circuit court may require the report on assessment of benefits and damages to be amended and it must condemn lands described in the report that are needed to construct the district's works. In the event a circuit court determines that the value of land within the district has changed and additional conditions are met, the court is required to appoint three commissioners to readjust the original report on the assessments of benefits and damages.

Revenue Sources

The primary funding source for water control district activities is special assessments. Once a circuit court has issued its decree on the report on assessments of benefits and damages, a board of supervisors may levy a tax on the land that will be benefited by the works. This tax must be apportioned to, and levied on, each tract of land in said district in proportion to the benefits assessed, and not in excess thereof, as provided for in section 298.50, Florida Statutes. A board of supervisors is authorized to issue bonds, not to exceed 90 percent of the total amount of assessments levied. A board of supervisors also may levy an annual maintenance tax on each tract of land in the district to maintain and preserve the district's works once they are completed. This tax also must be apportioned on the basis of the net benefits accruing to the individual parcels.

Limitation on Special Acts

Paragraph (21) of Subsection 11(a), Article III of the State Constitution, prohibits special laws or general laws of local application pertaining to any subject when prohibited by general law passed by a three-fifths vote of the membership of each house. Furthermore, such law may be amended or repealed by like vote.

Section 298.76, Florida Statutes, was adopted pursuant to this authority. The section provides there shall be no special law or general law of local application granting additional authority, powers, rights, or privileges to any water control district formed pursuant to this chapter. However, this subsection does not prohibit special or local legislation that:

- (a) Amends an existing special act which provides for the levy of an annual maintenance tax of a district;
- (b) Extends the corporate life of a district;
- (c) Consolidates adjacent districts; or

- (d) Authorizes the construction or maintenance of roads for agricultural purposes as outlined in this chapter.

The section also authorizes special or local laws:

- (a) Changing the method of voting for a board of supervisors for any water control district;
- (b) Providing a change in the term of office of the board of supervisors and changing the qualifications of the board of supervisors of any water control district; and
- (c) Changing the governing authority or governing board of any water control district.

Finally, the section provides that any special or local laws enacted by the Legislature pertaining to any water control district shall prevail as to that District and shall have the same force and effect as though it had been a part of this chapter or any section thereof at the time the district was created and organized.

C. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

The bill codifies chapter 89-426, Laws of Florida, relating to the Cow Slough Water Control District (District) into a single act.

The bill removes obsolete language which was preempted by applicable chapters.

D. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS:

Section 1: Provides that this act is the codification required under section 189.429, Florida Statutes (1998). States Legislative intent for the act.

Section 2: Amends, codifies, reenacts, and repeals special acts relating to the District's charter.

Section 3: Provides for the recreation of the District and the charter for the District and the following provisions.

Section 1: Provides for the creation of the District and its boundaries. Determines that the lands in the boundaries require comprehensive water control and management for proper use and development rather than agricultural use as previously provided for.

Section 2: Provides that the District is an independent water control district and that it is subject to the provisions of Florida law applicable to water control districts.

Section 3: Provides the minimum charter requirements pursuant to section 189.404(3), Florida Statutes, by providing for:

- (i) the District's purpose;
- (ii) the District's powers, functions, and duties relating to ad valorem taxation, bond issuance, other revenue raising capabilities, liens, budget;

- (iii) the District's creation by special act;
- (iv) charter amendments by special acts;
- (v) the election and organization of the District's three member board;
- (vi) the compensation of board members;
- (vii) the administrative duties of the board;
- (viii) financial disclosure, meeting notices, public records, and per diem for officers and employees.
- (ix) procedure and requirements governing bond and other indebtedness issuance;
- (x) procedures for conducting District elections and elector qualifications;
- (xi) methods by which the District may be financed;
- (xii) methods for assessing and collecting non-ad valorem assessments and fees;
- (xiii) the District's planning requirements; and
- (xiv) the District's boundaries.

Section 4: Provides for the severability of any invalid provision.

Section 5: Provides for the resolution of conflict with other acts in favor of this act.

Section 6: Provides that this act shall be liberally construed as a remedial act for the purposes for which it was intended.

Section 7: Repeals special acts relating to the District's charter.

Section 8: Provides an effective date of upon becoming law.

III. NOTICE/REFERENDUM AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS:

A. NOTICE PUBLISHED? Yes [X] No []

IF YES, WHEN? September 25, 1999

WHERE? News-Press

B. REFERENDUM(S) REQUIRED? Yes [] No [X]

IF YES, WHEN?

C. LOCAL BILL CERTIFICATION FILED? Yes, attached [X] No []

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D. ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT FILED? Yes, attached [X] No []

IV. COMMENTS:

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

V. AMENDMENTS OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

None.

VI. SIGNATURES:

COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY AFFAIRS:

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