

# SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

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

BILL: SB 1394

SPONSOR: Senator Cowin

SUBJECT: Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council

DATE: March 30, 2001      REVISED: 04/04/01 \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Branning</u>	<u>Voigt</u>	<u>NR</u>	<u>Fav/1 amendment</u>
2.	_____	_____	<u>AGG</u>	_____
3.	_____	_____	<u>AP</u>	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

**I. Summary:**

This bill creates the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council within the St. Johns River Water Management District. The council membership is specified and is appointed by the Lake County legislative delegation. An advisory group is created for the council. The council powers and duties are specified. Provides for the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Program. Provides that the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, with assistance from the St. Johns River Water Management District and in consultation with the Department of Environmental Protection and pertinent local governments, shall develop tasks to be undertaken for the enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat. Provides for an appropriation for per diem expenses and an appropriation for a demonstration project on the Harris Chain of Lakes.

**II. Present Situation:**

Florida has more than 1,700 streams, over 7,700 freshwater lakes and abundant wetland systems. Eutrophication is the natural process of aging of lakes. All lakes receive a steady supply of nutrients, particularly nitrogen and phosphorous from rainfall and runoff. Today most Florida lakes receive excessive nutrients in stormwater runoff draining from urban areas and agricultural fields and other sources.

Current general law provides two mechanisms for the management and restoration of lakes and other waterways. The first mechanism, enacted in 1987, is the Surface Water Improvement and Management Act (SWIM Act, see ss. 373-451-373.4595, F.S.) The second mechanism, enacted in 1999, is the Watershed Protection Act (see Chapter 99-223, Laws of Florida).

The SWIM Act establishes an interagency, intergovernmental process and criteria for water management districts to develop and implement plans and programs for restoring and protecting water bodies of regional or statewide significance. In developing surface water improvement and management plans for water bodies, the Department of Environmental Protection and Water Management Districts are directed to cooperate with the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Department of Community Affairs, the Department of Agriculture and local governments.

Section 373.451, F.S., directed each water management district to develop and maintain a priority list of water bodies within each water management district. For each priority water body, a SWIM restoration plan had to be developed. Section 373.453, F.S., provided that, in developing their respective priority lists, water management districts were to give consideration to certain named water bodies. Those named water bodies include Lake Okeechobee, Biscayne Bay, the Indian River Lagoon system, Tampa Bay, Lake Apopka, and the Lower St. Johns River.

In a report prepared by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA), it was found that the SWIM program has insufficient funding to meet the program's requirements for the 29 water bodies which have SWIM plans.

The Watershed Protection Act (s. 403.067, F.S.), provides a process for establishing the total maximum daily load (TMDL) for water bodies that are considered impaired. The Legislature directs the Department of Environmental Protection to be the lead agency and to coordinate with local governments, water management districts, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, local soil and water conservation districts, environmental groups, regulated interests, and others in developing the TMDL program.

In developing and implementing the TMDL program for a water body, the department, in conjunction with a water management district, may develop a watershed or basin management plan. These plans will serve to fully integrate the management strategies available to the state for the purposes of implementing TMDLs and achieving water quality restoration.

In spite of these general law provisions authorizing interagency, intergovernmental processes to develop management and restoration plans for water bodies of regional and statewide significance, some lake-front property owners and users of lakes in Florida have urged legislators to pass separate laws to focus attention on particular lakes or waterways. These waterway-by-waterway enactments track the general laws by calling for an interagency intergovernmental council to be formed to develop management plans for specific lakes. In the final analysis, these work products are competing for the same scarce financial resources that are available for the SWIM Act or the Watershed Protection Act. It's not clear why the number of lake-by-lake enactments are occurring with increased frequency, rather than relying on the general law provisions for managing lake restoration on a statewide priority basis. If this trend continues the Florida Statutes will be replete with waterway-by-waterway enactments.

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council is created within the St. Johns Water Management District, with assistance from the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Lake County Water Authority.

The council shall consist of nine voting members, which include: a representative of waterfront property owners, a representative of the sport fishing industry, an environmental engineer, a person with training in biology or another scientific discipline, a person with training as an attorney, a physician, a person with training as an engineer and two residents of the country who do not meet any of the other qualifications for membership enumerated in this paragraph, each to be appointed by the Lake County legislative delegation. No person serving on the council may be appointed to a council, board, or commission of any council advisory group agency. The council members shall serve as advisors to the governing board of the St. Johns River Water Management District. The council is subject to the provisions of ch. 119 and 120, F.S.

There shall be an advisory group to the council which shall consist of one representative each from the St. Johns River Water Management District, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Transportation, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Lake County Water Authority, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and the University of Florida, each of whom shall be appointed by his or her respective agency, and each of whom, with the exception of the representatives from the Lake County Water Authority, and the University of Florida, shall have had training in biology or another scientific discipline.

Immediately after appointment, the council shall meet and organize by electing a chair, a vice chair, and a secretary, whose terms shall be for 2 years each. Council officers shall not serve consecutive terms. Each council member shall be a voting member.

The council shall meet at the call of its chair, at the request of six of its members, or at the request of the chair of the governing board of the St. Johns River Water Management District.

The council shall have the powers and duties to:

- Review audits and all data specifically related to lake restoration techniques and sport fish population recovery strategies, including data and strategies for shoreline restoration, sediment control and removal, exotic species management, floating tussock management or removal, navigation, water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat improvement, particularly as they may apply to the Harris Chain of Lakes.
- Evaluate whether additional studies are needed.
- Explore all possible sources of funding to conduct the restoration activities.
- Report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives before November 25 of each year on the progress of the Harris Chain of Lakes restoration program and any recommendations for the next fiscal year.

The St. Johns River Water Management District shall provide staff to assist the council in carrying out the provisions of this act.

Members of the council shall received no compensation for their services, but are entitled to be reimbursed for per diem and travel expenses incurred during executive of their official duties, as provided in s. 112.061, F.S. State and federal agencies shall be responsible for the per diem and travel expenses of their respective appointees to the council, and the St. Johns River Water Management District shall be responsible for per diem and travel expenses of other appointees to the council.

The Harris Chain of Lakes restoration program.—

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the St. Johns River Water Management District, in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Protection, pertinent local governments, and the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council, shall review existing restoration proposals to determine which ones are the most environmentally sound and economically feasible methods of improving the fish and wildlife habitat and natural systems of the Harris Chain of Lakes.

To initiate the Harris Chain of Lakes restoration program recommended by the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, with assistance from the St. Johns River Water Management District and in consultation and by agreement with the Department of Environmental Protection and pertinent local governments, shall develop tasks to be undertaken by those entities for the enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat. These agencies shall:

- Evaluate different methodologies for removing the extensive tussocks and buildup of organic matter along the shoreline and of the aquatic vegetation in the lake.
- Conduct any additional studies as recommended by the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council.

Contingent on the Legislature's appropriating funds for the Harris Chain of Lakes restoration program and in conjunction with financial participation by federal, other state, and local governments, the appropriate agencies shall, through competitive bid, award contracts to implement the activities of the Harris Chain of Lakes restoration program.

The sum of \$45,000 is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the St. Johns River Water Management District for the purpose of paying administrative per diem, and travel expenses of the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council.

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is authorized to conduct a demonstration restoration project on the Harris Chain of Lakes for the purpose of creating better habitat for fish and wildlife. The sum of \$100,000 is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for the purpose of conducting the demonstration restoration project.

**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:**

None.

**b. Private Sector Impact:**

To the extent that the council is able to develop an action plan and sources of funding for restoration of Harris Chain of Lakes, property owners around the waterways may benefit in terms of increased market values of their land. Area residents would benefit from restored waterways in terms of better recreational opportunities.

**c. Government Sector Impact:**

State agencies such as the Department of Environmental Protection, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, already participate in a variety of interagency work groups for 29 SWIM water bodies. This bill would create yet another interagency work group requiring man hours and travel expenses. In a 1995 report prepared by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA), it was found that the SWIM program has insufficient funding to meet the program's requirements for the 29 water bodies which have SWIM Plans.

OPPAGA recommended that the scope of the SWIM program be limited to fit funding levels. It is likely that future program activities of the various existing SWIM water bodies in the St. Johns River Water Management District and other restoration activities by the district will be competing for the same limited financial resources. Experience with SWIM projects and similar restoration activities have shown that these activities require multiple year funding commitments once they begin.

Furthermore, the Watershed Protection Act enacted in 1999 requires the participation of these same state agencies and water management district in the development of watershed management plans for impaired water bodies and will compete for the same scarce financial resources. Methods of funding these activities are unclear at this time.

It should be noted that changes in the Documentary Stamp Tax laws, effective July 1, 2001, will provide approximately \$5 million annually to the Fish and Wildlife Conversation Commission for lake restoration activities. The commission plans to use these funds on a priority basis for assisting lakes of regional and statewide significance.

It is not clear why the number of lake-by-lake or county-by-county enactments for restoration of water bodies are occurring with increased frequency, rather than relying on the existing general law provisions for managing waterway restoration on a statewide priority basis. These localized enactments duplicate the intended purposes of the general laws established to respond to these problems.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

On page 2, lines 8 and 9, “St. Johns Water Management District” should read “St. Johns River Water Management District.”

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Amendments:**

#1 by Natural Resources

Technical amendment to correctly reference the St. Johns River Water Management District.