A bill to be entitled

An act relating to aquatic plant management; directing the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, in consultation with the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida and the Water School at Florida Gulf Coast University, to implement and study certain nutrient removal technologies and mechanical aquatic plant management techniques within the Lake Okeechobee watershed; providing study requirements; authorizing the commission to consult and contract with entities for such implementation and study; directing the commission to submit a report to the Governor and Legislature by a specified date; providing report requirements; providing an appropriation; providing an effective date.

WHEREAS, the health of the state's waterbodies is intricately connected to the wellbeing of our state, its residents, wildlife, and economy, and

WHEREAS, legacy nutrients derived from the treatment of invasive vegetation and unconsolidated biomass can contribute to degraded water quality, and

WHEREAS, removing legacy nutrients by physically removing invasive plants and biomass will improve water quality and help

combat algal blooms, and

WHEREAS, innovative pilot projects involving extraction of nutrient rich matter and biomass harvesting technologies have demonstrated success in significantly reducing the amount of undesirable nutrients in the state's waters, and

WHEREAS, physically removing unwanted vegetation and the nutrients contained therein will improve the health and ecology of the state's waters, benefit anglers and other fishing enthusiasts, and encourage tourism, and

WHEREAS, repurposing legacy nutrients trapped in our waterways will improve local economies by allowing for a new, natural, and local source of soil amendments or compost for agricultural purposes that will also give way to innovation and job creation in the state, NOW, THEREFORE,

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. (1) The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, in consultation with the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida and the Water School at Florida Gulf Coast University, shall implement and study the strategic use of innovative biomass nutrient removal technologies and mechanical aquatic plant management techniques where ecologically and technically feasible within the Lake Okeechobee watershed.

(2) At a minimum, the study must:

(a) Document the reduction in chemical control for each aquatic plant acre mechanically harvested on an acre-for-acre basis.

(b) If hay has been applied, analyze the harvested hay to provide data on nutrient content and soil nutrient content.

(c) Provide traceability and accountability for total nutrient removal.

(d) Determine the feasibility and sustainability of increased scalability of biomass nutrient removal technologies and mechanical aquatic plant management techniques statewide.

(3) The commission may consult and contract with entities for the implementation and study of the strategic use of innovative biomass nutrient removal technologies and mechanical aquatic plant management techniques.

(4) The commission shall submit to the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives by February 1, 2023, a report on the implementation and study of the strategic use of innovative biomass nutrient removal technologies and mechanical aquatic plant management techniques, including recommendations for statutory changes.

Section 2. For the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the sum of $500,000 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to implement and study the strategic use of innovative biomass

nutrient removal technologies and mechanical aquatic plant management techniques pursuant to this act.

Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2022.