

**By** the Committee on Appropriations; the Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment, and General Government; the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources; and Senator Brodeur

576-02814-26

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1                   A bill to be entitled  
2           An act relating to tributaries of the St. Johns River;  
3           providing a short title; creating s. 373.464, F.S.;  
4           requiring the Department of Environmental Protection,  
5           by a specified date, to hire a project lead to oversee  
6           the implementation of the act; requiring that the  
7           project lead have certain expertise; requiring the  
8           department to develop, by a specified date, a project  
9           plan for the restoration of the Ocklawaha River;  
10          specifying requirements for the project plan;  
11          providing that the project plan is an environmental  
12          restoration or enhancement project subject to a  
13          general permit from the department and water  
14          management districts; requiring the department to  
15          complete the project plan by a specified date, subject  
16          to the provision of funds; providing for the creation  
17          of the Northeast Florida River and Springs Recreation  
18          and Economic Development Advisory Council by a  
19          specified date; assigning the council to the  
20          Department of Environmental Protection; providing that  
21          the project lead is the chair of the council;  
22          providing for council membership, meetings, and  
23          duties; requiring the council to submit an advisory  
24          report to the Governor, the Legislature, and the  
25          department by a specified date; specifying  
26          requirements for the advisory report; providing for  
27          future repeal; requiring the department to develop an  
28          outdoor recreation plan, in collaboration with certain  
29          commissions, councils, and local governments of river

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30 communities; specifying requirements for the outdoor  
31 recreation plan; requiring the department to implement  
32 the plan by a specified date; requiring the department  
33 to complete projects on state-owned lands in the  
34 outdoor recreation plan by a specified date, subject  
35 to certain funding; requiring the department to  
36 develop a grant program for a specified purpose;  
37 requiring that the grant program be compatible with  
38 certain plans; requiring the department to implement  
39 the grant program by a specified date; requiring the  
40 Department of Commerce to develop guidelines and  
41 processes for and implement an economic development  
42 program for Marion and Putnam Counties for a specified  
43 purpose by a specified date; requiring that the  
44 economic development plan be compatible with certain  
45 plans and programs; requiring the Department of  
46 Commerce to implement the economic development program  
47 by a specified date; providing an effective date.  
48

49 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:  
50

51 Section 1. This act may be cited as the "Northeast Florida  
52 Rivers, Springs, and Community Investment Act."

53 Section 2. Section 373.464, Florida Statutes, is created to  
54 read:

55 373.464 Ocklawaha River restoration, recreation, and  
56 economic development.-

57 (1) PROJECT LEAD.-The department shall, no later than  
58 August 31, 2026, hire a full-time equivalent contractor or

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59 employee, whose position title will be project lead, to oversee  
60 the implementation of this act. The project lead must have  
61 subject matter expertise in conservation and recreation  
62 planning.

63 (2) PROJECT PLAN.-

64 (a) By July 1, 2027, the department shall develop a project  
65 plan for the restoration of the Ocklawaha River. The project  
66 plan must provide for restoration and increased resiliency and  
67 recreation benefits of the Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers and  
68 Silver Springs. The project plan must be designed to restore the  
69 Ocklawaha River's natural flow, hydrology, and floodplain  
70 function to the approximate conditions that existed before the  
71 construction of the Cross Florida Barge Canal project and its  
72 associated project works by implementing measures that include  
73 breaching the Kirkpatrick Dam and decommissioning the Buckman  
74 Lock. The project plan must incorporate the best available  
75 science and include engineering and design updates, including  
76 topographic and bathymetric surveys, and precise estimates of  
77 material to be dredged or excavated. In addition, the project  
78 plan must provide recommendations for road and bridge  
79 construction which are compatible with the partial restoration  
80 plan and ensure continued access for the communities west of the  
81 project. The project plan must include estimates by fiscal year  
82 of the cost of implementing the project plan and potential  
83 sources of funding for such costs.

84 (b) Notwithstanding any law or rule, the project plan for  
85 the restoration of the Ocklawaha River is an environmental  
86 restoration or enhancement project subject to a general permit  
87 from the department and water management districts for

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88 environmental restoration or enhancement pursuant to rule 62-  
89 330.405, Florida Administrative Code, and rule 62-330.485,  
90 Florida Administrative Code.

91 (c) Subject to the provision of state, federal, or other  
92 funds, the department shall complete the restoration project  
93 plan by December 31, 2032.

94 (3) NORTHEAST FLORIDA RIVER AND SPRINGS RECREATION AND  
95 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL.-

96 (a) Establishment of the council.-

97 1. By October 31, 2026, the Northeast Florida River and  
98 Springs Recreation and Economic Development Advisory Council, an  
99 advisory council as defined in s. 20.03(7), shall be established  
100 and assigned to the department. The council shall be  
101 administratively housed within the department. The project lead  
102 shall serve as the council chair, and the members shall meet at  
103 the call of the project lead. Members shall serve without  
104 compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for per diem and  
105 travel expenses pursuant to s. 112.061. Council members shall  
106 serve 4-year terms, except that the initial terms shall be  
107 staggered.

108 2. The council shall be composed of the following 16  
109 members:

110 a. Nine members of the council shall be appointed by and  
111 serve at the pleasure of the Governor and shall include:

112 (I) Two representatives of river recreation-related  
113 businesses local to Marion or Putnam County.

114 (II) Two representatives of outdoor recreation user groups,  
115 one of whom represents fishing interests local to Marion or  
116 Putnam County.

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117 (III) One representative of the department's Office of  
118 Greenways and Trails.

119 (IV) One representative of the Florida Fish and Wildlife  
120 Conservation Commission's Division of Freshwater Fisheries  
121 Management.

122 (V) One representative of the Florida Fish and Wildlife  
123 Conservation Commission's Imperiled Species Management Section.

124 (VI) One representative of the Department of Commerce.

125 (VII) One representative of an environmental community  
126 support organization who has subject matter expertise in springs  
127 or rivers.

128 b. Six members of the council shall be appointed by the  
129 boards of county commissioners for the following counties:

130 (I) Putnam County shall appoint two members, one of whom  
131 oversees parks and recreation for the county.

132 (II) Marion County shall appoint two members, one of whom  
133 oversees parks and recreation for the county.

134 (III) Clay County shall appoint one member.

135 (IV) St. Johns County shall appoint one member.

136 c. One member shall be the commanding officer of Naval Air  
137 Station Jacksonville or his or her designee.

138 (b) Report.—The council shall submit an advisory report to  
139 the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the  
140 House of Representatives, and the department by February 1,  
141 2027. The report must include all of the following:

142 1. Recommendations for projects to be included in the  
143 outdoor recreation plan created in subsection (4), including  
144 priorities for state-funded land projects.

145 2. Recommendations to the department for the creation of

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146 guidelines to govern the grant program created in subsection  
147 (5).

148 3. Recommendations to the Department of Commerce for the  
149 creation of guidelines to administer the economic development  
150 program created in subsection (6).

151 4. Recommendations for measures to minimize the impact of  
152 the restoration plan on property owners or businesses directly  
153 affected by the restoration project.

154 (c) Repeal.—In accordance with s. 20.052(8), this  
155 subsection is repealed October 2, 2029, unless reviewed and  
156 saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

157 (4) OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN.—

158 (a) The department, in collaboration with the Fish and  
159 Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Northeast Florida River  
160 and Springs Recreation and Economic Development Advisory  
161 Council, and the local governments of river communities in Clay,  
162 Marion, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties, shall develop an outdoor  
163 recreation plan.

164 (b) The outdoor recreation plan must identify and implement  
165 projects for enhanced and expanded river and springs access for  
166 recreational activities, such as fishing, hunting, swimming,  
167 wildlife viewing, paddling, and hiking. Such projects must be  
168 compatible with the project plan and applicable statutes. The  
169 outdoor recreation plan must be made available for public  
170 comment before its implementation.

171 (c) The department shall implement the outdoor recreation  
172 plan by January 1, 2028.

173 (d) Subject to the provision of state, federal, or other  
174 funds, the department shall complete projects on state-owned

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175 lands identified in the outdoor recreation plan by December 31,  
176 2035.

177 (5) GRANT PROGRAM.—

178 (a) By January 1, 2028, the department shall develop a  
179 grant program for river communities in Clay, Marion, Putnam, and  
180 St. Johns Counties to implement the outdoor recreation plan.

181 (b) The grant program must be compatible with the project  
182 plan and outdoor recreation plan.

183 (c) The department shall implement the grant program by  
184 February 1, 2028.

185 (6) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.—

186 (a) The Department of Commerce shall develop guidelines and  
187 processes for an economic development program for Marion and  
188 Putnam Counties. The economic development program must support  
189 projects that encourage job creation, capital investment, and  
190 strengthening and diversification of each county's economy.

191 (b) The economic development program must be compatible  
192 with the project plan, the outdoor recreation plan, and the  
193 grant program.

194 (c) The Department of Commerce shall implement the economic  
195 development program by January 1, 2028.

196 Section 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.