

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILL ANALYSIS

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BILL #: [HB 1421](#)

TITLE: Cattle Grazing on State Land

SPONSOR(S): Albert

COMPANION BILL: [SB 1658](#) (Truenow)

LINKED BILLS: None

RELATED BILLS: None

Committee References

[Natural Resources & Disasters](#)

16 Y, 2 N

[State Affairs](#)



SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

The bill requires land managing entities of state-owned conservation lands to consider, when developing or updating land management plans, the feasibility of cattle grazing on such lands. If any lands are determined to be suitable for cattle grazing, the bill requires such lands to be leased for such purpose.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

To the extent that state-owned conservation lands are leased for cattle-grazing, the bill may have a positive fiscal impact on state expenditures.

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ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

The bill requires land [managing entities](#) of [state-owned conservation lands](#) to consider, when developing or updating [land management plans](#) (LMP), the feasibility of leasing portions of the land to private entities for [cattle grazing](#). Any lands determined to be suitable for cattle grazing must be described in the LMP and allowed to be leased for such purpose. If no portions of the land are determined to be suitable, the LMP must include an explanation of that determination. (Section [1](#))

The bill specifies that these provisions apply to LMPs developed or updated on or after July 1, 2026. (Section [2](#))

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026. (Section [3](#))

FISCAL OR ECONOMIC IMPACT:

STATE GOVERNMENT:

To the extent that state-owned conservation lands are leased for cattle-grazing, the bill may have a positive fiscal impact on state expenditures due to lease payments.

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

Division of State Lands

The Division of State Lands (Division), a division of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), provides oversight, management, and stewardship for Florida's public lands.¹ As part of its stewardship of state lands, the

¹ Department of Environmental Protection, [Division of State Lands](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026).

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Division serves as staff to the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, providing real estate and land management services, which includes conducting appraisals of state lands and duties related to the purchase and sale of state lands.² The Division also manages the Florida Forever program, one of the largest land conservation programs in the nation.³

Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund

The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Board) is charged with the acquisition, administration, management, control, supervision, conservation, protection, and disposal of all lands owned or vested to the state or any of its agencies, departments, boards, or commissions.⁴ As part of this charge, the Board administers the Internal Improvement Trust Fund and the Land Acquisition Trust Fund.⁵ The Governor and Cabinet (the Attorney General, the Chief Financial Officer, and the Commissioner of Agriculture) comprise the four members of the Board.⁶

Acquisition and Restoration Council

The Acquisition and Restoration Council (Council)⁷ is a 10-member body that provides assistance to the Board in reviewing recommendations and plans for state-owned conservation lands.⁸ The Council develops rules, which the Board reviews and adopts, to define the criteria and performance measures needed for lands acquired with funds from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund or through the Florida Forever program.⁹ DEP provides primary staff to support the Council.¹⁰

State Conservation Land Management

Under current law, conservation lands are lands managed for conservation, outdoor resource-based recreation, or archaeological or historic preservation.¹¹ State lands acquired as part of land conservation programs are required to be managed to ensure the conservation of the state's plant and animal species and to ensure the accessibility of state lands for the benefit and enjoyment of all people of the state, both present and future.¹² Additionally, all such lands are required to be managed in a manner that provides the greatest combination of benefits to the public and to the natural resources, that provides opportunities for public outdoor recreation that are compatible with the conservation and protection of public lands, and that aligns with the purposes for which the lands were acquired.¹³

² See Department of Environmental Protection, [Office of the Director - State Lands](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026); [S. 253.002\(1\), F.S.](#); Department of Environmental Protection, [Division of State Lands](#) (last visited Jan. 16, 2026); and Department of Environmental Protection, [FAQ: Division of State Lands Services](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026).

³ Department of Environmental Protection, [About the Division of State Lands](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026).

⁴ [S. 253.03\(1\), F.S.](#)

⁵ The Internal Improvement Trust Fund contains lands and funds generated from the sale, both from previous sales and future sales, of land from the 500,000 acres of land granted to Florida by an Act of Congress passed on March 3, 1845 as well as land received as a result of the Swamp and Overflowed Lands Act of 1850. [S. 253.01, F.S.](#) See also Department of Environmental Protection, [History of State Lands](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026). The Land Acquisition Trust Fund contains documentary stamp tax revenues collected under ch. 201, F.S., which requires an excise tax on deeds and other documents related to real property. The fund finances or refinances the acquisition and improvement of land, water areas, and related property interests. Article X, s. 28, Fla. Const.

⁶ [S. 253.02\(1\), F.S.](#)

⁷ The Governor appoints four of the Acquisition and Restoration Council's ten members, with three of the four appointees from scientific disciplines related to land, water or environmental science. The Commissioner of Agriculture appoints one member from a discipline related to silviculture and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission appoints one member with a discipline related to wildlife management or ecology. The remaining four appointees are the Secretary of Environmental Protection, the director of the Florida Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the executive director of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the director of the Division of Historical Resources of the Department of State (or their designees). See [S. 259.035\(1\)\(a\)-\(c\), F.S.](#)

⁸ [S. 253.035\(3\), F.S.](#)

⁹ The Board adopts these rules and submits them to the Legislature for consideration. See [S. 259.035\(4\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

¹⁰ [S. 259.035\(1\)\(f\), F.S.](#)

¹¹ [S. 253.034\(2\)\(c\), F.S.](#) Rule 18-2.017(45) defines "state-owned lands" to mean land to which the title is vested in the Board.

¹² [Ss. 253.034\(1\), F.S.](#) and [253.034\(5\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

¹³ [Ss. 253.034\(1\), F.S.](#) and [259.032, F.S.](#)

Land Managing Entities

The Board may lease conservation lands to land management entities, such as state agencies, to ensure that the management of conservation lands is beneficial to the state and consistent with the purposes for which the lands were acquired.¹⁴ Several state agencies and divisions contribute to managing Florida's conservation lands, including DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks, Florida Coastal Office, and Office of Greenways and Trails, as well as the Florida Forest Service and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.¹⁵

Land Management Plans

Land management plans (LMPs) are a mechanism the state uses to ensure conservation lands that have been leased to land managers are being properly managed in accordance with conservation and recreation goals. LMPs designate state lands as either single use or multiple use.¹⁶ Managing entities for state conservation lands must submit an LMP to the Division at least every 10 years.¹⁷ Additionally, the LMP must be updated when the land manager proposes new facilities, makes substantive land use or management changes that were not addressed in the approved plan, or within one year after the addition of significant new lands.¹⁸ When developing or updating LMPs, at least one public hearing must be held in any one impacted county.¹⁹ If the LMP is for parcels that exceed 160 acres in size or are located in a state park, the Division must make electronic copies of the LMP publicly available at least 30 days before the public hearing.²⁰ Following the public hearing, managing entities amend and finalize the LMP then submit it to the Division and the Council for review and recommendations.²¹

For parcels that are over 160 acres or located in a state park, managing entities must develop the LMP with input from an advisory group.²² The advisory group must include representatives from the lead land management agency, co-managing entities, local private property owners, the appropriate soil and water conservation district, a local conservation organization, and a local elected official.²³ The advisory group must hold one publicly noticed hearing within the county where the parcel or project is located.²⁴ If the parcel or project extends beyond one county, an areawide meeting must be held within the county where the core parcels are located.²⁵ In the case of an areawide meeting, the lead land management agency must invite a local elected official from each county.²⁶

Land Management Plan Review

The Division reviews LMPs for consistency with short-term and long-term management goals.²⁷ LMPs must, at a minimum, contain:

- A physical description of the land.
- A quantitative data description of the land that includes an inventory of forest and other natural resources; exotic and invasive plants; hydrological features; infrastructure; and other significant land, cultural, or historical features.

¹⁴ [S. 253.03\(2\), F.S.](#); *see also* [S. 259.032\(7\), F.S.](#)

¹⁵ Department of Environmental Protection, [FAQ: Land Stewardship](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026).

¹⁶ Department of Environmental Protection, [Land Management Plan Compliance Checklist](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026). "Multiple use" lands allow for the coordinated management of timber, recreation, conservation of fish and wildlife, forage, archaeological and historic sites, habitat and other biological resources, or water resources. [S. 253.034\(2\)\(a\), F.S.](#) "Single use" lands are managed for one particular purpose, but allow for compatible secondary uses. [S. 253.034\(2\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

¹⁷ [S. 253.034\(5\), F.S.](#)

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ [S. 253.034\(5\)\(f\), F.S.](#)

²⁰ [S. 253.034\(5\)\(g\), F.S.](#)

²¹ [S. 253.034\(5\)\(d\), F.S.](#) and [S. 253.034\(5\)\(g\), F.S.](#)

²² [S. 259.032\(8\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ [S. 259.032\(8\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

²⁷ *Id.*

- A detailed description of each short-term and long-term land management goal, associated measurable objectives, and related activities that will be performed to meet the land management objectives.
- A schedule of land management activities that contain short-term and long-term land management goals and the related measurable objective and activities.
- A summary of the budget for the scheduled land management activities and associated costs for resource management, administration, support, capital improvements, visitor services, and law enforcement activities.²⁸

Once completed, the LMP is sent to the Council for review. The Council has 90 days to review the plan and make recommendations to the Board.²⁹ The Board reviews each LMP, as well as any Council and Division recommendations, then either approves (with or without modifications) or rejects the LMP.³⁰ Once approved by the Board, an LMP is effective. If a land management entity fails to comply with the requirements of an LMP, the state may revoke a state lands lease.³¹

Cattle Grazing

Livestock grazing and science-based grazing management is a tool for conserving wildlife habitat and keeping prairie healthy.³² Grazing management has a number of environmental benefits, including promoting thriving and sustainable rangelands, supporting quality watersheds and wildlife habitats, and reducing wildfire risk.³³ Livestock grazing can also have negative impacts on land, including soil compaction that leads to runoff and erosion, water quality issues due to contamination from fecal and urine waste, and ecosystem balance disruption due to reduced plant diversity.³⁴

Current law allows conservation lands acquired through state-funded purchases to be used for other purposes, including sustainable agriculture and forestry, if certain requirements are met. Such additional uses are authorized if:

- The use is not inconsistent with the management plan for the lands.
- The use is compatible with the natural ecosystem and resource values of the lands.
- The use is appropriately located on such lands and due consideration is given to the use of other available lands.
- The using entity reasonably compensates the titleholder for using the land.
- The use is consistent with public interest.³⁵

Three of Florida's five water management districts offer cattle grazing land leasing programs that allow cattle grazing land lease holders to temporarily keep public lands in production while maintaining the property in a manner consistent with the land management requirements.³⁶ As part of these programs, lease contracts identify site-specific best management practices and technologies that the lessee will implement to help reduce

²⁸ [S. 253.034\(5\)\(c\), F.S.; see also s. 259.037\(3\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

²⁹ [S. 253.034\(5\)\(d\), F.S.](#)

³⁰ [S. 253.034\(5\)\(h\), F.S.](#)

³¹ DEP, [Land Stewardship](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026).

³² University of Minnesota Extension, [Grazing and Pasture Management for Cattle](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026).

³³ American Farm Bureau, [Grazing on Public Lands](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026).

³⁴ See Western Watersheds Project, [Public Lands Ranching](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026); Hubbard, R K, Newton G L, and Hill, GM, (2004), [Water Quality and the Grazing Animal](#), Journal of Animal Science, 82, 255-263; Utah State University, [Can Grazing Animals Impact Water Quality?](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026).

³⁵ [S. 253.034\(9\)\(a\)-\(e\), F.S.](#)

³⁶ See Southwest Florida Water Management District, [Cattle Grazing Land Leasing](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026); South Florida Water Management District, [Cattle Grazing Land Leasing](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026); and St. Johns River Water Management District, [Cattle Lease Information](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026). In 2017, the Suwannee River Water Management District issued a request for proposals for a cattle grazing lease on District lands, however this program does not appear to be operational. See Suwannee River Water Management District, [Request for Proposals No. 17/18-001 AQ](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026).

phosphorus and pesticide pollution while protecting drinking water wells, springs, and wetlands.³⁷ Additionally, five state parks have cattle grazing as part of their unit management plan and maintain cattle grazing agreements: Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, Colt Creek State Park, Alafia River State Park, Lake Kissimmee State Park, and St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park.³⁸

BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
Natural Resources & Disasters Subcommittee	16 Y, 2 N	1/28/2026	Skinner	Jones
State Affairs Committee			Williamson	Jones

³⁷ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, [Nutrient Reduction Case Study: Cattle Grazing Land Leasing Program](#), last visited October 30, 2025.

³⁸ Management plans for state parks are referred to as Unit Management Plans (UMPs). DEP's Office of Park Planning updates these plans every 10 years. Chapters 253 and 259, Florida Statutes, provide for the content, development and maintenance of these plans. See Department of Environmental Protection, [State Park Planning](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026). See also Department of Environmental Protection, [Kissimmee Prairie Preserve Approved Unit Management Plan Approved–January 2019](#), Introduction-7 (last visited Jan. 24, 2026); Florida State Parks, [Hydrological Restoration at Colt Creek](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026); Department of Environmental Protection, [Alafia River State Park Unit Management Plan Approved–August 2019](#), 7 (last visited Jan. 24, 2026); Florida State Parks, [Lake Kissimmee's Historical Cow Camp](#) (last visited Jan. 24, 2026); and Department of Environmental Protection, [St. Sebastian River Preserve Unit Management Plan Approved–February 2019](#), 7 (last visited Jan. 24, 2026).