

Green Swamp Legislation in the Florida Statutes

373.462 Legislative findings and intent.—

(1) The Legislature recognizes that by law in 1979, portions of Lake and Polk Counties were designated as the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern in acknowledgment of its regional and statewide importance in maintaining the quality and quantity of Florida’s water supply and water resources for the public and the environment.

(2) The Legislature also recognizes the Green Swamp, which encompasses approximately 560,000 acres, is located in a regionally significant high recharge area of the Floridan Aquifer system, and it helps protect coastal communities from saltwater intrusion.

(3) The Legislature finds that the Green Swamp or Polk County make up the headwaters or portions of the headwaters of six major river systems in the state, which are the Alafia, Hillsborough, Kissimmee, Ocklawaha, Peace, and Withlacoochee Rivers. In addition, due to the area’s unique topography and geology which receives no other water inputs other than rainfall, the area is essential in maintaining the potentiometric head of the Floridan Aquifer system that directly influences the aquifer’s productivity for water supply.

(4) The Legislature also finds that the Green Swamp and the surrounding areas are economically, environmentally, and socially defined by some of the most important and vulnerable water resources in the state.

(5) The Legislature recognizes that the Central Florida Water Initiative Guiding Document dated January 30, 2015, and the Southern Water Use Caution Area Recovery Strategy dated March 2006 recognized the fact that the surface water and groundwater resources in the heartland counties of Hardee, Highlands, and Polk are integral to the health, public safety, and economic future of those regions.

(6) The Legislature declares that there is an important state interest in partnering with regional water supply authorities and local governments, in accordance with s. [373.705](#), to protect the water resources of the headwaters of the Alafia, Hillsborough, Kissimmee, Ocklawaha, Peace, and Withlacoochee Rivers and the surrounding areas. The Legislature further declares that funding consideration be given to regional collaborative solutions, including, but not limited to, the heartland counties, to manage the water resources of the state.

History.—s. 2, ch. 2017-111.

380.0551 Green Swamp Area; designation as area of critical state concern.—

(1) The Green Swamp Area, the boundaries of which are described in ¹chapter 22F-5, Florida Administrative Code, is hereby designated an area of critical state concern effective July 1, 1979. The state land planning agency, in conjunction with the applicable local governments, shall review suggested changes to the existing boundary in the area immediately to the south of the southern boundary of the City of Clermont in Lake County and the area along the existing southern boundary around Lake Juliana and the City of Polk City in Polk County for possible deletion from the area of critical state concern. The state land planning agency shall report to, and shall make specific recommendations to, the commission relative to any proposed deletion by August 1, 1979. The commission shall take action on the recommendations of the state planning agency no later than October 1, 1979. ¹Chapters 22F-5, 22F-6, and 22F-7, Florida Administrative Code, are hereby adopted and incorporated herein by reference. The boundaries described in ¹chapter 22F-5, Florida Administrative Code, shall be modified pursuant to s. 380.05(12). There shall be appointed a resource planning and management committee as provided in s. 380.045.

(2) The land development regulations contained in ¹chapters 22F-6 and 22F-7, Florida Administrative Code, shall be the land development regulations for the applicable local government's portion of the area of critical state concern until either:

- (a) An applicable local government complies with the provisions of s. 380.05(10); or
- (b) Such regulations are repealed pursuant to subsection (3).

(3) ¹Chapters 22F-5, 22F-6, and 22F-7, Florida Administrative Code, shall be repealed by the commission no earlier than July 1, 1980, and no later than July 1, 1982. Upon recommendation by the state land planning agency to the commission, any repeal of such rules pursuant to this subsection may be effective only for one local government's portion of the Green Swamp Area. Such repeal shall be contingent upon approval by the state land planning agency of local land development regulations pursuant to s. 380.05(6) or (10), upon such regulations being effective for a period of 12 months, and upon adoption or modification by the applicable local government of a local government comprehensive plan pursuant to s. 380.05(14).

373.0363 Southern Water Use Caution Area Recovery Strategy.—

(1) As used in this section, the term:

(a) “Central Florida Coordination Area” means all of Polk, Osceola, Orange, and Seminole Counties, and southern Lake County, as designated by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the South Florida Water Management District, and the St. Johns River Water Management District.

(b) “District” means the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

(c) “Southern Water Use Caution Area” means an area that the district designated, after extensive collection of data and numerous studies, in order to comprehensively manage water resources in the Southern West-Central Groundwater Basin, which includes all of Desoto, Hardee, Manatee, and Sarasota Counties and parts of Charlotte, Highlands, Hillsborough, and Polk Counties.

(d) “Southern Water Use Caution Area Recovery Strategy” means the district’s planning, regulatory, and financial strategy for ensuring that adequate water supplies are available to meet growing demands while protecting and restoring the water and related natural resources of the area.

(e) “West-Central Florida Water Restoration Action Plan” means the district’s regional environmental restoration and water-resource sustainability program for the Southern Water Use Caution Area.

(2) The Legislature finds that:

(a) In response to the growing demands from public supply, agriculture, mining, power generation, and recreational users, groundwater withdrawals in the Southern Water Use Caution Area have steadily increased for nearly a century before peaking in the mid-1970s. These withdrawals resulted in declines in aquifer levels throughout the groundwater basin, which in some areas exceeded 50 feet.

(b) While groundwater withdrawals have since stabilized as a result of the district’s management efforts, depressed aquifer levels continue to result in saltwater intrusion, reduced flows in the Upper Peace River, lowered water levels, and adverse water quality impacts for some lakes in the Lake Wales Ridge areas of Polk and Highlands Counties.

(c) In response to these resource concerns, and as directed by s. 373.036, the district determined that traditional sources of water in the region are not adequate to supply water for all existing and projected reasonable and beneficial uses and to sustain the water resources and related natural systems.

(d) The expeditious implementation of the Southern Water Use Caution Area Recovery Strategy is needed to meet the minimum flow requirement for the Upper Peace River, slow saltwater intrusion, provide for improved lake levels and water quality along the Lake Wales Ridge, and ensure sufficient water supplies for all existing and projected reasonable and beneficial uses.

(e) Sufficient research has been conducted and sufficient plans developed to immediately expand and accelerate programs to sustain the water resources and related natural systems in the Southern Water Use Caution Area.

(f) The implementation of components of the Southern Water Use Caution Area Recovery Strategy, which are contained in the West-Central Florida Water Restoration Action Plan, is for the benefit of the public health, safety, and welfare and is in the public interest.

(g) The implementation of the West-Central Florida Water Restoration Action Plan is necessary to meet the minimum flow requirement for the Upper Peace River, slow saltwater intrusion, provide for improved lake levels and water quality along the Lake Wales Ridge, and ensure sufficient water supplies for all existing and projected reasonable and beneficial uses.

(h) A continuing source of funding is needed to effectively implement the West-Central Florida Water Restoration Action Plan.

(3) The district shall implement the West-Central Florida Water Restoration Action Plan in a manner that furthers progressive strategies for the management of water resources, is watershed-based, provides for consideration of water quality issues, and includes monitoring, the development and implementation of best management practices, and structural and nonstructural projects, including public works projects. The district shall coordinate its implementation of the plan with regional water supply authorities, public and private partnerships, and local, state, and federal partners in order to maximize opportunities for the most efficient and timely expenditures of public funds.

(4) The West-Central Florida Water Restoration Action Plan includes:

(a) The Central West Coast Surface Water Enhancement Initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to make additional surface waters available for public supply through restoration of surface waters, natural water flows, and freshwater wetland communities. This initiative is designed to allow limits on groundwater withdrawals in order to slow the rate of saltwater intrusion. The initiative shall be an ongoing program in cooperation with the Peace River-Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority created under s. 373.713.

(b) The Facilitating Agricultural Resource Management Systems Initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to expedite the implementation of production-scale, best management practices in the agricultural sector, which will result in reductions in groundwater withdrawals and improvements in water quality, water resources, and ecology. The initiative is a cost-share reimbursement program to provide funding incentives to agricultural landowners for the implementation of best management practices. The initiative shall be implemented by the district in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Cooperative funding programs approved by the governing board shall not be subject to the rulemaking requirements of chapter 120. However, any portion of an approved program which affects the substantial interests of a party shall be subject to s. 120.569.

(c) The Ridge Lakes Restoration Initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to protect, restore, and enhance natural systems and flood protection by improving and protecting the water quality of approximately 130 lakes located along the Lake Wales Ridge in Polk and Highlands Counties, which

quality is threatened by stormwater runoff, wastewater effluent, fertilizer applications, groundwater pollution, degradation of shoreline habitats, and hydrologic alterations. This initiative shall be accomplished through the construction of systems designed to treat the stormwater runoff that threatens the water quality of such lakes. Such systems include swales, retention basins, and long infiltration basins, if feasible.

(d) The Upper Peace River Watershed Restoration Initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to improve the quality of waters and ecosystems in the watershed of the Upper Peace River by recharging aquifers, restoring the flow of surface waters, and restoring the capacity of natural systems to store surface waters. The Legislature finds that such improvements are necessary because the quantity and quality of the fresh water that flows to the basin of the Peace River and Charlotte Harbor are adversely affected by the significant alteration and degradation of the watershed of the Upper Peace River and because restoration of the watershed of the Upper Peace River is a critical component of the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, the Southwest Florida Water Management District's Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan, and the Southern Water Use Caution Area Recovery Strategy. This initiative shall include an Upper Peace River Component. In addition to the initiative's other purposes, this component will provide a critical link to a major greenway that extends from the lower southwest coast of this state through the watershed of the Peace River and the Green Swamp and further north to the Ocala National Forest.

(e) The Central Florida Water Resource Development Initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to create and implement a long-term plan that takes a comprehensive approach to limit groundwater withdrawals in the Southern Water Use Caution Area and to identify and develop alternative water supplies for Polk County. The project components developed pursuant to this initiative are eligible for state and regional funding under s. [373.707](#) as an alternative water supply, as defined in s. [373.019](#), or as a supplemental water supply under the rules of the Southwest Florida Water Management District or the South Florida Water Management District. The initiative shall be implemented by the district as an ongoing program in cooperation with Polk County and the South Florida Water Management District.

(5) As part of the consolidated annual report required pursuant to s. [373.036\(7\)](#), the district may include:

(a) A summary of the conditions of the Southern Water Use Caution Area, including the status of the components of the West-Central Florida Water Restoration Action Plan.

(b) An annual accounting of the expenditure of funds. The accounting must, at a minimum, provide details of expenditures separately by plan component and any subparts of a plan component, and include specific information about amount and use of funds from federal, state, and local government sources. In detailing the use of these funds, the district shall indicate those funds that are designated to meet requirements for matching funds.

History.—s. 1, ch. 2009-243; s. 12, ch. 2010-205; s. 74, ch. 2014-17; s. 74, ch. 2023-8.