

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: PCB ANRS 12-03 Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

SPONSOR(S): Agriculture & Natural Resources Subcommittee

TIED BILLS: None **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** None

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
Orig. Comm.: Agriculture & Natural Resources Subcommittee		Deslatte	Blalock

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

The bill provides that all proceeds from the Florida Panther license plate fees be deposited into the Florida Panther Research and Management Trust Fund, which is managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC). The bill deletes a requirement that 15%, but not less than \$300,000, of such fees be deposited in the Florida Communities Trust Fund.

Current law provides for vessel registration fees to be distributed to the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund to be used for marine mammal care. The bill repeals an outdated statutory reference to documentary stamp tax revenue distributed to the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund to reflect the fact that such revenues are no longer deposited into the fund.

The bill repeals the statutory requirement that the FWCC publish a printed version of the *Florida Wildlife* magazine, and abolishes the *Florida Wildlife* Magazine Advisory Council.

The bill deletes the one-year limitation on the special authorization allowing persons to hunt without taking a hunter safety course, under the supervision of a licensed hunter 21 years old or older.

The bill amends current statute to reduce the fee for a commercial blue crab soft shell endorsement from \$250 to \$125 for each endorsement, which will make the fee for all endorsements for trap fisheries (spiny lobster, stone crab, soft shell blue crab, and hardshell blue crab) the same.

The bill designates spiny lobster trap violations as a Level 5 violation, which equals 28 sentencing points, and thus, affords judges the discretion to sentence persons that steal or molest spiny lobster traps to the maximum allowed for a third degree felony (five years in prison) on a case by case basis.

The FWCC anticipates a slight reduction of revenues into the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund due to the reduction in the fee for the blue crab soft shell endorsement, but indicates it will be able to absorb this loss of revenue. The FWCC also expects a loss of \$38,000 in subscription fees for the *Florida Wildlife* magazine. The bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on local governments.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Florida Panther License Plate

Current Situation

Beginning in 1990, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) was charged with developing a Florida Panther license plate. Fifty percent of the proceeds from the license plate were distributed to the Florida Panther Research and Management Trust Fund in the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (now the FWCC), and 25% were distributed into the Florida Communities Trust Fund within the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to fund the administration of the Florida Communities Trust program.

In 1993 the distribution was changed to 45% for the Florida Panther Research and Management Trust Fund and 15%, but not less than \$300,000, for the Florida Communities Trust Fund. In 1996, the distribution was changed again to 85% for the Florida Panther Research and Management Trust Fund. However the distribution remained the same for the Florida Communities Trust Fund.

During the 2011 legislative session, the Department of Economic Opportunity was created, in part, to replace the DCA. Subsequently, the Florida Communities Trust program was transferred from the DCA to the DEP. Now that the Florida Communities Trust program has been transferred from the DCA to the DEP, there is no longer a reason for the DEP to transfer funds collected from the Florida Panther License Plate fee to the DCA for administrative purposes. The DEP indicates it does not need these funds to administer the Florida Communities Trust program.

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill deletes the provision in s.320.08058, F.S., requiring 15%, but not less than \$300,000, be deposited in the Florida Communities Trust Fund. The bill provides that all proceeds from the Florida Panther license plate fees be deposited into the Florida Panther Research and Management Trust Fund. The bill also deletes a reference in s. 380.511, F.S., to the proceeds of the sale of environmental license plates as a funding source for the Florida Communities Trust Fund.

Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund

Current Situation

Section 379.208, F.S., establishes the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund within the FWCC. During the 2008 legislative session, a subsection of s. 201.15, F.S., that distributed documentary stamp tax revenue to the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund for marine mammal care was repealed. A cross-reference to s. 201.15, F.S., in s. 379.208, F.S. was not amended or repealed.

Section 328.76, F.S., requires all funds collected from the registration of vessels through the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles and the tax collectors of the state to be deposited in the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund to be used for: recreational channel marking; public launching facilities; law enforcement and quality control programs; aquatic weed control; manatee protection, recovery, rescue, rehabilitation, and release; and marine mammal protection and recovery.

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill amends s. 379.208, F.S., pertaining to the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund, to repeal the outdated reference to s. 201.15, F.S., requiring documentary stamp tax revenue to be distributed to the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund, and replace it with a cross-reference to

s. 328.76, F.S., since the funds collected pursuant to s. 328.76, F.S., are already allocated for marine mammal care as described above.

Florida Wildlife Magazine

Current Situation

The *Florida Wildlife* magazine was first published in 1947 by the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, the predecessor to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC). The goal of the magazine was to promote hunting, fishing, and nature-based recreation in Florida, and also to encourage good stewardship of the state's wildlife resources¹.

In 2004, a seven-member Florida Wildlife Magazine Advisory Council (Council) was created² to provide advice and guidance relating to the editorial and advertising content of the magazine. The Council has been inactive since 2006.

During the 2011 session, the Legislature permanently cut the budget for the *Florida Wildlife* magazine by \$240,000, and in the appropriations implementing bill directed the FWCC to suspend the printed publication of the magazine and the operations of the Council during fiscal year 2011-2012. However, a statutory change is needed in order to permanently repeal the required publication of a printed version of the magazine and to repeal the authorization of the Council.

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill repeals s. 379.2342, F.S., which ends the required printing of the magazine and dissolves the Florida Wildlife Magazine Advisory Council. However, the FWCC still intends to offer the *Florida Wildlife* magazine online.

Hunter Safety Course

Current Situation

Section 379.3581(2), F.S., provides that a person born on or after June 1, 1975, who has not successfully completed a hunter safety course, can apply to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) for a special authorization to hunt under supervision. The special authorization for supervised hunting must be designated on any license or permit required under Chapter 379, F.S. for a person to take game or fur-bearing animals and must be valid for not more than one year. A special authorization for supervised hunting also cannot be issued more than once to the person applying for such authorization. Any person issued a license with the special authorization to hunt under supervision must hunt under the supervision of, and in the presence of, a person 21 years of age or older, who is licensed to hunt pursuant to s. 379.354, F.S., or who is exempt from licensing requirements or eligible for a free license pursuant to s. 379.353, F.S.

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill amends s. 379.3581(2), F.S., deleting the one-year limitation on the special authorization for supervised hunting. A hunting license will still be required every year, but it will have the special authorization on it, so that law enforcement will know that the individual must comply with this section.

¹ FWCC 2011 analysis, on file with staff.

² See s. 279.2343(2), F.S.

Blue Crab Soft Shell Endorsement Fee Reduction

Current Situation

Pursuant to s. 379.361, F.S., a Saltwater Products License (SPL) is required for commercial fishermen harvesting in Florida's state waters. The SPL authorizes the license holder to fish for commercial quantities of fish instead of recreational bag limits. The fee for an SPL is: \$50 for Florida residents; \$100 for non-residents; and \$150 for aliens. Along with SPLs, an endorsement may be required for some fisheries. These may be free or there may be a charge for the endorsement.

Beginning in 1998, a moratorium was established on the issuance of new blue crab endorsements due to concerns about the increasing number of traps for blue crabs and the resulting stress on the marine resources environment. The moratorium was extended twice and lasted until July 1, 2007.

In 2003, the FWCC established an ad hoc Blue Crab Advisory Board (Board) to develop a management program for the harvesting of blue crab. The Board endorsed adopting a program that would limit the total number of participants in the fishery, and allow for an equal number of trap tags available for each endorsement issued³. The Board also recommended separating the hard shell blue crab fishery from the soft shell blue crab fishery and having separate endorsements for each.

To qualify for a soft shell crab endorsement, applicants had to demonstrate reported soft shell blue crab landings of 750 crabs on their SPL during any one of the same qualifying years. To qualify for an additional endorsement on one additional SPL, applicants had to demonstrate reported landings of 2,500 soft shell crabs. Each initial endorsement is allotted 400 trap tags with an additional 250 trap tags for a subsequent qualified endorsement. The endorsements must be re-qualified every three years. If the endorsement holder does not re-qualify, the endorsement is not renewed the next year and is required to be forfeited.

The Legislature, with the recommendation of the Board and the FWCC, set endorsement fees at the following rates: \$125 for hard shell crab and net limitation endorsements; \$250 for soft shell crab endorsements; and \$25 for the incidental take endorsement⁴.

Due to the cap on the fishery and the forfeiture of non-renewed licenses, the endorsements for soft shell crab have dropped from 152 the first year of the program to 83 available to be issued for the 2012 year. In 2009, the Board voted to reduce the fee for soft shell crab from \$250 to \$125, which is the same for the hard shell crab.

All monies generated from the sale of blue crab endorsements, trap tags, replacement tags, and from the assessment of administrative penalties are distributed into the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund. The revenues are to be used for the management of the fishery, trap retrieval, research, law enforcement, and public education.

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill reduces the fee for a soft shell crab endorsement from \$250 to \$125 for each endorsement, making the fee for endorsements for all trap fisheries the same.

³ FWCC 2011 analysis, on file with staff.

⁴ Section 379.366, F.S.

Spiny Lobster Trap Theft

Current Situation

When measured annually in dollars, the spiny lobster fishery is the largest commercial fishery in Florida. For the last 10 years, \$20 million has been generated annually. Due to demand, supply, and higher prices, the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 seasons have had a sharp increase in lobster trap theft. According to the FWCC, as a result of the theft, \$4.2 million is lost per commercial fishing season.

Section 379.367, F.S., provides that it is unlawful for any person to willfully molest any spiny lobster traps, lines, or buoys belonging to another without permission of the licenseholder. Furthermore, anyone who violates this section commits a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082 or s. 775.083, F.S. Section 775.082, F.S., provides that a felony of the third degree may not exceed five years imprisonment and/or up to a \$5,000 fine. In 2009, changes were made to the sentencing statutes that prevented judges from administering any state prison time (sentences of one year or greater) for a non-forcible felony of the third degree, unless the total sentence points, pursuant to the offense severity ranking chart, equaled 23 points or more. When scoring is applied to theft/molestation of spiny lobster traps, the score is 22. As a result, for anyone who violates s. 379.367, F.S., the maximum sentence that a judge can give is 364 days or less in county jail.

Section 921.0022, F.S., provides an offense severity ranking chart for specific offenses that must be used with the Criminal Punishment Code worksheet⁵ to compute a sentence score for each felony offender whose offense was committed on or after October 1, 1998.

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill amends s. 921.0022, F.S., designating a spiny lobster trap violation in s. 921.022, F.S., as a Level 5 violation, which equals 28 sentencing points, and thus affords judges the discretion to sentence persons convicted of stealing or molesting spiny lobster traps to the maximum allowed for a third degree felony (five years in prison) on a case by case basis.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Amending s. 320.08058, F.S., deleting the distribution to the Florida Communities Trust Fund and directing all proceeds from the Florida Panther license plate to the Florida Panther Research and Management Trust Fund in the FWCC.

Section 2. Amending s. 379.208, F.S., providing for funds from vessel registration fees to be distributed into the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund for marine mammal care; removing funds from documentary stamp tax revenue as a funding source for marine mammal care.

Section 3. Repealing s. 379.2342, F.S., ending the required printing of the *Florida Wildlife Magazine* and dissolving the Florida Wildlife Magazine Advisory Council.

Section 4. Amending s. 379.3581, F.S., deleting the one-year limitation on the current special authorization that allows persons to hunt without taking a hunter safety course under the supervision of a licensed hunter 21 years or older.

Section 5. Amending s. 379.366, F.S., reducing the fee for the blue crab soft shell endorsement from \$250 to \$125.

Section 6. Amending s. 380.511, F.S., deleting a reference to proceeds of the sale of environmental license plates as a funding source for the Florida Communities Trust Fund.

⁵ Section 922.0024, F.S.

Section 7. Amending s. 921.0022, F.S., reclassifying spiny lobster trap violations as a Level 5 violation.

Section 8. Providing an effective date.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

FWCC would receive additional revenues of at least \$300,000 annually from the proceeds of the sale of Florida Panther license plates to the Florida Panther Research and Management Trust Fund for the purposes of protecting the endangered Florida panther. The Department of Environmental Protection would no longer receive 15%, but not less than \$300,000, of such proceeds to fund the Florida Communities Trust Act.

2. Expenditures:

See Fiscal Comments below.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

Subscribers to the printed version of the *Florida Wildlife* magazine would be refunded after July 1, 2011. The magazine will be available for free through an electronic format.

The reduction in fees for the Soft Shell Blue Crab endorsement will have a positive impact on the commercial crabbers in Florida.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

Florida Wildlife Magazine: According to the FWCC analysis, \$38,000 in subscription fees would be lost due to the elimination of the print version of the magazine.

Blue Crab Soft Shell Endorsement reduction fee: There would be a slight reduction of revenues to the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund. If all 83 endorsements were renewed for 2011-12, at a cost of \$125, the reduction would be \$10,375. All monies in the Trust Fund are appropriated to the FWCC's Division of Marine Fisheries Management, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, Division of Law Enforcement, and the Office of Licensing and Permitting. These entities would absorb the reduction of revenue to the Trust Fund.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

This bill does not appear to require counties or municipalities to take an action requiring the expenditure of funds, reduce the authority that counties or municipalities have to raise revenue in the aggregate, nor reduce the percentage of state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

None.