

CHAPTER 98-69

Committee Substitute for Senate Bill No. 592

An act relating to water management; creating the Lake Panasoffkee Restoration Council; providing for its membership, powers, and duties; requiring the Southwest Florida Water Management District to provide staff for the council and to award contracts subject to an appropriation of funds; providing an appropriation; providing an effective date.

WHEREAS, Lake Panasoffkee is a waterbody of historic, hydrologic, and ecological significance, and

WHEREAS, Lake Panasoffkee is a major tributary to the Withlacoochee River, and

WHEREAS, Lake Panasoffkee is plagued by fluctuating water levels and sedimentation and excessive growth of aquatic plants, which are degrading its water quality and recreational values and adversely affecting the Withlacoochee River, and

WHEREAS, Lake Panasoffkee continues to provide wildlife habitat for fish, birds, and game, and offers recreational opportunities for the residents of Sumter County and Central Florida and visitors to the area, despite its current problems, and

WHEREAS, the economic potential of Lake Panasoffkee has yet to be tapped, and

WHEREAS, the Southwest Water Management District, in cooperation with several state, regional, and local entities, has developed proposals to restore Lake Panasoffkee, NOW, THEREFORE,

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

Section 1. Lake Panasoffkee Restoration Council—There is created within the Southwest Florida Water Management District the Lake Panasoffkee Restoration Council.

(1)(a) The council shall consist of seven voting members: two representatives of lakefront property owners, one environmental engineer, one person with training in biology or another scientific discipline, one person with training as an attorney, one person with training as an engineer, and one representative of the sport fishing industry, all to be appointed by the Sumter County Commission. No person serving on the council may be appointed to any of the council advisory group agencies' councils, board, or commission. The council members shall serve as advisors to the governing board of the Southwest Florida Water Management District. The council is subject to the provisions of chapter 119 and chapter 120, Florida Statutes.

(b) The council advisory group to the council shall consist of: one representative each from the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Department of Transportation, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, the Withlacoochee River Basin Board, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers, to be appointed by their respective agencies, all of whom must have training in biology or another scientific discipline.

(2) Immediately after their appointment, the council shall meet and organize by electing a chair, a vice chair, and a secretary, whose terms shall be for 2 years each. Council officers shall not serve consecutive terms. Each council member shall be a voting member.

(3) The council shall meet at the call of its chair, at the request of six of its members, or at the request of the chair of the governing board of the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

(4) The council shall have the powers and duties to:

(a) Review audits and all data specifically related to lake restoration techniques and sport fish population recovery strategies, including data and strategies for shoreline restoration, sediment control and removal, exotic species management, floating tussock management or removal, navigation, water quality, and fisheries habitat improvement, particularly as they may apply to Lake Panasoffkee.

(b) Evaluate whether additional studies are needed.

(c) Explore all possible sources of funding to conduct the restoration activities.

(d) Advise the governing board of the Southwest Florida Water management District regarding the best approach to restoring Lake Panasoffkee, and make a recommendation as to which techniques should be part of the restoration program. The governing board of the Southwest Florida Water Management District shall respond in writing to the council if any recommendations from the council require re-evaluation. The response shall detail reasons for re-evaluation.

(e) Report to the Legislature before November 25 of each year on the progress of the Lake Panasoffkee restoration plan and any recommendations for the next fiscal year.

(5) The Southwest Florida Water Management District shall provide staff to assist the council in carrying out the provisions of this act.

(6) Members of the council shall receive no compensation for their services, but are entitled to be reimbursed for per diem and travel expenses incurred during execution of their official duties, as provided in section 112.061, Florida Statutes. State and federal agencies shall be responsible for the per diem and travel expenses of their respective appointees to the council and the Southwest Florida Water Management District shall be responsible for per diem and travel expenses of other appointees to the council.

Section 2. Lake Panasoffkee restoration program.—

(1) The Southwest Florida Water Management District, in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, the Sumter County Commission, and the Lake Panasoffkee Restoration Council, shall review existing restoration proposals to determine which ones are the most environmentally sound and economically feasible methods of improving the fisheries and natural systems of Lake Panasoffkee.

(2) The Southwest Florida Water Management District, in consultation and by agreement with the Department of Environmental Protection, the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, and pertinent local governments, shall develop tasks to be undertaken by those entities necessary to initiate the Lake Panasoffkee restoration program recommended by the Lake Panasoffkee Restoration Council. These agencies shall:

(a) Evaluate different methodologies for removing the extensive tussocks and build up of organic matter along the shoreline and of the aquatic vegetation in the lake; and

(b) Conduct any additional studies as recommended by the Lake Panasoffkee Restoration Council.

(3) Contingent on the Legislature appropriating funds for the Lake Panasoffkee restoration program and in conjunction with financial participation by federal, other state, and local governments, the appropriate agencies shall through competitive bid award contracts to implement the activities of the Lake Panasoffkee restoration program.

Section 3. The sum of \$45,000 is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Southwest Florida Water Management District for the purpose of paying administrative, per diem, and travel expenses of the Lake Panasoffkee Restoration Council.

Section 4. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.

Approved by the Governor May 21, 1998.

Filed in Office Secretary of State May 21, 1998.