



FLORIDA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Affiliated With National Wildlife Federation

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Bills to Watch - Final Action Report:

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The Florida Wildlife Federation (FWF) tracked a number of bills during the 2007 Legislature. SB refers to Senate Bills, HB refers to House Bills, JR refers to a Joint Resolution. CS refers to a committee substitute for the bill and may be repeated to reflect several amendments incorporated into the bill. Please note that while a bill may be reported as having not passed (or having died on calendar) we must wait until all amendments to other bills have been accounted for before declaring language from a bill defeated. This may take several weeks in some cases.

HB 7173 – passed both chambers on May 1. Now going to the Governor to be signed into law. Provides for a long overdue increase in fees for hunting and fishing licenses. FWF supported this much needed increase in fees to meet the financial needs of the agency and improve wildlife management. We would have preferred the Senate version (SB 1982) which included language that tied future fees and permit increases to the Consumer Price Index and increases certain permits to ten dollars. However, both of these provisions died when the Senate Bill was withdrawn in lieu of the House version.

CS/SB 392 – was approved by the House for final passage on May 2. This bill provides for the issuance of Everglades restoration bonds to implement the Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan and expands the program to provide for a Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie River Estuary Protection Program. The restoration bill designates \$200 million in the first year and at least \$100 million for the next 12 years to improve water quality in Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. Responsibility for carrying out the restoration is placed with local governments and the South Florida Water Management District.

The bill sets aside \$30 million for projects to benefit the hydrology, water quality and aquatic habitat of the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie watersheds. The funding can be used to plan and design a water treatment facility for the C-43 reservoir being built in Hendry County to hold damaging flows from Lake Okeechobee.

The bill creates a Caloosahatchee protection program, which is designed to reduce pollution that flows into the river, restore the natural hydrology of the river and ensure that the water body complies with future water quality standards.

SB 2446/ HB 7185 – Died on the calendar. These bills would have established the Florida Climate Action Partnership, an appointed body that would be responsible for setting Florida's climate policy agenda and developing an action plan for our state. Late in the session it became clear the Governor wanted a more flexible approach to the organization and overview of this entity. As time ran out on the session, it became more practical for the Governor to enact an executive order establishing the commission than to attempt to move the bill through both chambers. FWF looks forward to working with Governor Crist as he fashions the Partnership language. Senator Burt Saunders and Rep. Trudi Williams deserve much credit for having moved the debate to this level.

HB 7123 – Passed as amended by both chambers. Considered the omnibus energy efficiency legislation for the 2007 session, late amendments reduced state funding for renewable energy initiatives from \$85 million to \$68 million; omitted a two week tax holiday for purchase of energy efficient household equipment and for hybrid vehicles; increases sales tax exemptions for materials used in distribution of biodiesel & ethanol fuels; directs DEP to develop greenhouse gas inventories and establishes the Farms-to-Fuel Grants Program. Even in its less ambitious form, FWF will seek the Governor's signature on the bill.

HB 57/ CS SB 444 – dubbed the "Clean Ocean Act" HB 57 would have required gambling boats to pump out sewage at the docking marina and pay for pump-out service. The Senate companion bill (SB 444) simply called for a study of the already well documented problem. FWF supported the House version and worked with allies to get the bill through the Senate as an amendment on other legislation. Unfortunately, time ran out before this could be accomplished. Kudos to Rep. Bob Allen for his work on this bill. We look forward to supporting his measure when it is filed in 2008.

CS/CS/HB985 – passed both chambers on the final day of session. This bill authorizes \$10 billion in Turnpike Enterprise bonds (currently capped at \$4.5 billion) to build new roads. CS/CS/HB 985 would encourage real estate development as a means to finance or supplement revenue for toll road construction. FWF believes this bad legislation would effectively place the Department of Transportation in the role of directing growth management rather than the Department of Community Affairs. Working with our allies, we were able to delete changes to the current "Financial Feasibility" test, which would have set a far more lenient 30 year financial projection test. It is unlikely, though not impossible, to expect a veto of this major transportation bill. However, Governor Crist's office had expected a bill that addresses existing road improvements not new road expansion.

CS/CS/HB985 Construction Aggregate Materials section – This section remained in the final version of the bill. The language sites a strategic and critical need for additional sources of construction aggregate such as limestone rock. Mining for these aggregates has caused extensive damage to surrounding properties and the environment. The bill requires local governments to factor in the impacts that land use changes will have on mining. It states that no moratorium on mining may extend for more than 12 months. Expedited permitting is required on any previously submitted mine applications. The bill directs that a task force examine the status of aggregate resources and availability and report to the Legislature next year.

HB 7203 – is the Growth Management package for the 2007 session. This bill took a decidedly negative turn when it was amended to provide that Broward and Pinellas counties and their municipalities, as well as Jacksonville, Miami, Tampa and Hialeah, would be given exemption from required state Dept. of Community Affairs, Comprehensive Plan reviews for three years. FWF joined other conservation groups in opposing the more onerous sections of this bill, however, final passage came on one of the last bills to be considered in the 2007 session.

One saving grace of this otherwise bad legislation was the Tax Increment Financing for Conservation Lands. This language allows one or more local governments to come up with a common plan to designate growth in property tax for purchase of conservation lands. This aspect of the bill would allow counties to work together using local initiatives to acquire conservation lands that span their common political borders. Wildlife is not restricted by political lines and neither should conservation lands.

SB 2346 – This bill was passed and will serve to encourage extension of the Wild and Scenic designation for the Myakka River and will be referred to as the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council.

SB 1486 /HB 299 – called for the Dept. of Environmental Protection, Dept. of Agriculture and the effected Water Management Districts to establish “springshed delineations”. The bill was reduced to a study of the 33 first magnitude springs to establish steps that could be taken to protect these critical water recharge systems. This would have resulted in taking a step backward from existing springs protection. The House Bill did see last minute amendments to improve the measure but ran out of time before both chambers could vote on the final version.

SB 1472 – passed both chambers in the final week. Facing the erosion of valuable shoreline, many beachfront homeowners are looking for new ways to stop erosion. Primarily this has been accomplished by armoring - the practice of installing hardened structures such as sea walls - which fight to prevent shoreline erosion. This legislation provides for a new form of coastal armoring called “geo-textiles”. These sand filled tubes are promoted by the company that created and markets them as more enviro-friendly than seawalls. However, reports provided to the Department of Environmental Protection show existing tube systems in Gulf and Brevard counties require repeated monitoring and reburying, and in some cases increase nearby erosion as well as posing a threat to sea turtles and other wildlife. Compromise language limits installation to areas where oceanfront homes or other structure are in danger, require property owners to post financial bonds, secure permits for incidental taking of endangered sea turtles, and keep the tubes covered beneath a bed of sand. The bill also establishes a sand inventory, to be maintained by DEP, for communities in search of appropriate sand and its location

HB 427 /SB 1930 – Good news! These bills, that would have placed another roadblock to restoration of the Ocklawaha, died in committee. Credit goes to the Senate Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee who voted 4-2 against passage of SB 1930. Rodman Dam, a relic of the abandoned Cross Florida Barge Canal, has held back the waters of the Ocklawaha River for more than 35 years; effecting the health of the river and its estuaries, as well as the wildlife that depend on this system for life. FWF has been joined by a host of conservation entities who would like to see the river restored. However, these bills would have created a public recreation area dependent upon the reservoir created by the dam, and provided funding for the ongoing and expensive maintenance of the water control structures.

SB 2170 / HJR 79 – Would have removed the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission from its constitutional status and replaced the agency with a Department of the Interior under the Governor’s office. This bad legislation was never voted on nor did the Senate companion bill get a hearing.

HB 957 / SB 2054 – would have consolidated federal and state oversight of wetland dredge and fill permits, eliminating the checks and balances essential to protecting some of our most sensitive wetlands from piecemeal development. Both measures passed in their respective chambers but differences in the bills were not able to be reconciled. However, content of the bills may have been added to other legislation as yet to be identified. Therefore, it can not be assumed the issue died on the calendar at this time.

SB 2176 / HB 0719 – These bills would have removed environmental and governmental oversight from decisions made to maintain, expand and create new channels through aquatic preserves and other environmentally sensitive submerged lands. SB 2176 was improved by amendments that call for oversight by the Florida Cabinet and prohibit navigation agencies from creating new channels through aquatic preserves and allow only for maintenance of existing ones. HB 719 was never heard in committee, thus the bills died.