

**ENROLLED**

**2021 Legislature**

**CS for CS for SB 976**

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2       An act relating to the protection of ecological  
3       systems; creating s. 259.1055, F.S.; providing a short  
4       title; providing legislative findings and a purpose  
5       for the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act; defining terms;  
6       requiring the Department of Environmental Protection  
7       to take certain actions to support the Florida  
8       wildlife corridor; providing construction; requiring  
9       the St. Johns River Water Management District, in  
10      consultation with the Department of Environmental  
11      Protection, Seminole County, the Fish and Wildlife  
12      Conservation Commission, and the Department of  
13      Transportation, to issue a report that includes  
14      information and updates regarding the implementation  
15      of recommendations from the Little Wekiva Watershed  
16      Management Plan Final Report dated November 2005 by a  
17      specified date; requiring the Department of  
18      Environmental Protection and the water management  
19      district to review certain permits along the Little  
20      Wekiva River; requiring certain enforcement actions to  
21      be taken against noncompliant permittees; providing an  
22      effective date.

23

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

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26           Section 1. Section 259.1055, Florida Statutes, is created  
27      to read:

28               259.1055 Florida wildlife corridor.—

29               (1) SHORT TITLE.—This section may be cited as the "Florida

30 Wildlife Corridor Act."

31               (2) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS.—The Legislature finds that this

32 state's population is growing rapidly and that lands and waters

33 that provide this state's green infrastructure and vital habitat

34 for wide-ranging wildlife, such as the Florida panther, need to

35 be preserved and protected. The Legislature further finds that

36 the Florida wildlife corridor is an existing physical,

37 geographically defined area consisting of more than 18 million

38 acres of land, 10 million of which are conservation lands.

39               (3) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this act, and of the Florida

40 wildlife corridor itself, is to create incentives for

41 conservation and sustainable development while sustaining and

42 conserving the green infrastructure that is the foundation of

43 this state's economy and quality of life by doing all of the

44 following:

45               (a) Maintaining wildlife access to the habitats needed to

46 allow for migration of and genetic exchange amongst regional

47 wildlife populations.

48               (b) Preventing fragmentation of wildlife habitats.

49               (c) Protecting the headwaters of major watersheds,

50 including the Everglades and the St. Johns River.

51               (d) Providing ecological connectivity of the lands needed

52 for flood and sea-level rise resiliency and large-scale

53 ecosystem functions, such as water management and prescribed

54 burns essential for land management and restoration.

55               (e) Preserving and protecting land and waters that are not

56 only vital to wildlife but are critical to this state's

57 groundwater recharge and that serve as watersheds that provide

58 drinking water to most Floridians and help maintain the health

59 of downstream coastal estuaries.

60               (f) Providing for wildlife crossings for the protection and

61 safety of wildlife and the traveling public.

62               (g) Helping to sustain this state's working ranches, farms,

63 and forests that provide compatible wildlife habitats while

64 sustaining rural prosperity and agricultural production.

65 (4) DEFINITIONS.—As used in this section, the term:

66 (a) “Conserved lands” means federal, state, or local lands  
67 owned or managed for conservation purposes, including, but not  
68 limited to, federal, state, and local parks; federal and state  
69 forests; wildlife management areas; wildlife refuges; military  
70 bases and airports with conservation lands; properties owned by  
71 land trusts and managed for conservation; and privately owned  
72 land with a conservation easement, including, but not limited  
73 to, ranches, forestry operations, and groves.

74 (b) “Department” means the Department of Environmental  
75 Protection.

76 (c) “Florida Ecological Greenways Network” is a  
77 periodically updated model developed to delineate large  
78 connected areas of statewide ecological significance.

79 (d) “Florida wildlife corridor” means the conserved lands  
80 and opportunity areas defined by the department as priority one,  
81 two, and three categories of the Florida Ecological Greenways  
82 Network.

83 (e) “Opportunity area” means those lands and waters within  
84 the Florida wildlife corridor which are not conserved lands and  
85 the green spaces within the Florida wildlife corridor which lack  
86 conservation status, are contiguous to or between conserved  
87 lands, and provide an opportunity to develop the Florida  
88 wildlife corridor into a statewide conservation network.

89 (f) “Wildlife” has the same meaning as in Article II of the  
90 Wildlife Violator Compact Act, s. 379.2255.

91 (g) “Wildlife corridor” means a network of connected  
92 wildlife habitats required for the long-term survival of and  
93 genetic exchange amongst regional wildlife populations which  
94 serves to prevent fragmentation by providing ecological  
95 connectivity of the lands needed to furnish adequate habitats  
96 and allow safe movement and dispersal.

97 (h) “Wildlife crossing” means a landscape design element  
98 that connects two or more patches of wildlife habitat and that  
99 is meant to function as a safe conduit for wildlife over or

100 beneath roads, waters, and other barriers to wildlife movement  
101 and that is designed to protect Florida panther and other  
102 critical wildlife habitat corridor connections and to reduce  
103 motor vehicle collisions with wildlife, to reduce the likelihood  
104 of injuries and mortalities to humans and wildlife from such  
105 collisions, and to reduce the potential for damage to motor  
106 vehicles from such collisions.

107       (5) DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT.—The department shall:

108           (a) Encourage all state, regional, and local agencies that  
109 acquire lands, including, but not limited to, the Fish and  
110 Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Department of  
111 Transportation, to include in their land-buying efforts the  
112 acquisition of sufficient legal interest in opportunity areas to  
113 ensure the continued viability of the Florida wildlife corridor.

114           (b) Encourage investment in conservation easements  
115 voluntarily entered into by private landowners to conserve  
116 opportunity areas.

117           (c) Encourage state land-buying agencies and state land  
118 management agencies to consider the conservation of opportunity  
119 areas as a multiphased project for the purpose of listing,  
120 acquisition, and management.

121           (d) Consider the inclusion of private funds to supplement  
122 the state's contribution in its efforts to acquire a fee or  
123 less-than-fee interest in lands that contain recognized  
124 opportunity areas and conserved lands in the Florida wildlife  
125 corridor.

126           (e) Seek opportunities to attract new sources of federal  
127 funding and to strengthen existing programs to protect and  
128 conserve the Florida wildlife corridor.

129           (f) Encourage private landowners, through existing and  
130 future incentives and liability protections, to continue to  
131 allow their private property to be used for the preservation and  
132 enhancement of the Florida wildlife corridor.

133           (g) Encourage new approaches and novel financing mechanisms  
134 for long-term protection of the Florida wildlife corridor,  
135 including, but not limited to, public-private partnerships;

136 payments for ecosystem services; blended financing for growth,  
137 resilience, and green infrastructure; and support for the  
138 sustainable growth of agriculture.

139       (h) Encourage state and local agencies with economic and  
140 ecotourism development responsibilities to recognize the  
141 importance of the Florida wildlife corridor in encouraging  
142 public access to wildlife areas and bringing nature-based  
143 tourism to local communities and to support acquisition and  
144 development activities for preservation and enhancement of the  
145 Florida wildlife corridor.

146       (i) Encourage private investment in ecotourism focused on  
147 the Florida wildlife corridor.

148       (j) Encourage the protection, preservation, and enhancement  
149 of the natural value of the Florida wildlife corridor for  
150 current and future residents of this state.

151       (6) CONSTRUCTION.—This section may not be construed to  
152 authorize or affect the use of private property.

153       Section 2. (1) The St. Johns River Water Management  
154 District, in consultation with the Department of Environmental  
155 Protection, Seminole County, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
156 Commission, and the Department of Transportation, shall issue a  
157 report by December 31, 2021, that includes information and  
158 updates regarding the implementation of recommendations from the  
159 Little Wekiva Watershed Management Plan Final Report dated  
160 November 2005. The report must include, but not be limited to,  
161 the following information: a description of all projects or  
162 recommendations included in the report that have been  
163 implemented and their completion dates, an analysis of how the  
164 projects or recommendations achieved the results included in the  
165 report, an analysis of costs for ongoing operation and  
166 maintenance of the constructed projects completed, a list of  
167 permit violations which may have contributed to sediment buildup  
168 north of S.R. 436, an analysis of any new projects that may  
169 benefit the watershed, and recommendations and cost estimates  
170 for future studies or projects that may be necessary to identify  
171 new or potentially significant contributors of sediment

172     accumulation in the Little Wekiva River.  
173         (2) (a) The Department of Environmental Protection and the  
174         water management district shall immediately review, with the  
175         goal of identifying significant contributors of sediment  
176         accumulation, any permits which the water management district  
177         has determined may have contributed to sediment buildup north of  
178         S.R. 436 to assess whether the permittee is in violation of any  
179         permit conditions. Appropriate action to resolve compliance  
180         issues shall be undertaken pursuant to chapter 373, Florida  
181         Statutes, if the department or the water management district  
182         discovers a violation of any permit condition.

183         (b) As part of the review, the Department of Environmental  
184         Protection and the water management district shall review known  
185         violations of such permits since 2018 and attempt to determine,  
186         using existing information, what effects such violations may  
187         have had on sediment accumulation in the Little Wekiva River.

188             Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2021.

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2021/976/BillText/er/HTML>