

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 217 Conservation Area Designations

SPONSOR(S): Hunschofsky, Overdorf and others

TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 588

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 119 Y's 0 N's **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Pending

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

HB 217 passed the House on March 18, 2021, and subsequently passed the Senate on April 7, 2021.

Coral reefs are an important ecological and economic resource in Florida. They protect coastlines by reducing wave energy from storms and hurricanes, provide a critical habitat for over 6,000 species, including commercially important fisheries, and provide many recreational opportunities. Florida's coral reef extends over 330 nautical miles, from the St. Lucie Inlet in Martin County past Key West to the Dry Tortugas. Coral reefs are vulnerable due to environmental changes, particularly those resulting from human activities.

In 2018, the Legislature passed House Bill 53 to establish the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area. This area consists of sovereign submerged lands and waters offshore of Martin, Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade Counties stretching from the St. Lucie Inlet to the northern boundary of Biscayne National Park. The prime sponsor of the bill was Representative Kristin Jacobs, who passed away in 2020.

The bill designates the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area as the Kristin Jacobs Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area and directs the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to erect markers to designate the area.

The bill may have an insignificant negative fiscal impact on DEP that can be absorbed within existing resources.

Subject to the Governor's veto powers, the effective date of this bill is July 1, 2021.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Background

Coral Reefs

Coral reefs are valuable natural resources. They protect coastlines by reducing wave energy from storms and hurricanes,¹ serve as a source of food and shelter, and provide a critical habitat for over 6,000 species, including commercially important fisheries.² Many medicines, as well as other health and beauty products, are derived from marine plants, algae, and animals found on coral reefs.³ Coral reefs are vulnerable due to environmental changes, particularly those resulting from human activities.⁴

Florida's coral reef extends 330 nautical miles, from the St. Lucie Inlet in Martin County past Key West to the Dry Tortugas.⁵ It is the only coral reef system in the continental United States and is home to over 40 species of reef-building corals that provide shelter, food, and breeding sites for millions of plants and animals.⁶ The reef supports a rich and diverse assemblage of stony corals, octocorals, macroalgae, sponges, and fishes.⁷

Coral reefs serve as a resource for recreation, education, scientific research, and public inspiration. Millions of tourists and local residents enjoy scuba diving, snorkeling, and fishing on Florida's coral reefs. These activities provide a source of income for the state and its coastal communities. The tourism value of Florida's coral reefs is estimated at \$1.1 billion annually, and the reefs are estimated to support 71,000 jobs in south Florida.⁸

Florida Coral Reef Conservation Program

The Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP) manages the northern section of the reef from the St. Lucie Inlet to the northern border of Biscayne National Park.⁹ This area is known as the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area.¹⁰ The CRCP coordinates research and monitoring, develops management strategies, and promotes partnerships to protect the coral reefs, hardbottom communities, and associated reef resources.¹¹

The CRCP also implements and coordinates the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative (SEFCRI). The SEFCRI identifies and implements priority actions needed to reduce key threats to coral reef resources in southeast Florida, through a local action strategy for collaborative action among government and non-governmental partners.¹²

¹ *Coral Reef Conservation Program 2011-2016 Strategic Plan*, (July 2011), p. 3, available at https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/CRCP_Strategic_Plan_2011-2016.pdf (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, *The National Action Plan to Conserve Coral*, p. 3, available at <http://www.coralreef.gov/about/CRTFAxnPlan9.pdf> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

⁵ DEP, *Coral Reef Conservation Program*, <https://floridadep.gov/rcp/coral> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

⁶ Florida's Coral Reef, *Conserving Florida's Coral Reef*, <https://floridascoralreef.org/> (last visited Feb. 9, 2021).

⁷ DEP, *Coral Reef Conservation Program*, <https://floridadep.gov/rcp/coral> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

⁸ *Id.*

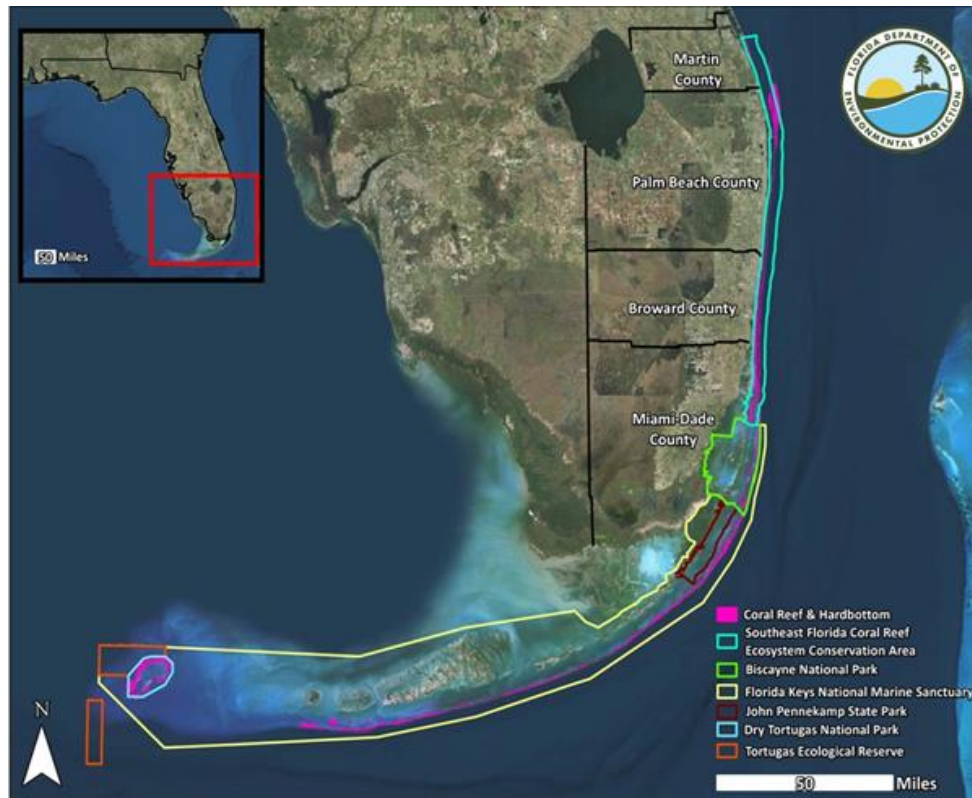
⁹ DEP, *Coral Reef Conservation Program*, <https://floridadep.gov/rcp/coral> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

¹⁰ Chapter 2018-30, Laws of Fla.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² SEFCRI, *What is SEFCRI?*, <https://southeastfloridareefs.net/who-we-are/> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area



The Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area, formerly referred to as the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative Region, was officially established on July 1, 2018.¹³ The conservation area, depicted in the map above,¹⁴ includes the sovereign submerged lands and state waters offshore of Martin, Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade Counties from the northern boundary of Biscayne National Park to the St. Lucie Inlet.¹⁵

The Florida Keys portion of the reef is recognized and protected by management plans of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, National Parks, and National Wildlife Refuges.¹⁶ Prior to the designation of the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area, the stretch of corals from the St. Lucie Inlet to the northern border of Biscayne National Park was not protected by a state-adopted management plan.¹⁷

Kristin Jacobs

Kristin Jacobs was a member of the Florida House of Representatives, representing District 96 in Broward County, from 2014 until her passing on April 11, 2020.¹⁸ Representative Jacobs was the prime sponsor of House Bill 53 in 2018, which created the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Conservation Area.¹⁹ Prior to her time in the Legislature, she served as Broward County Commissioner for 16 years and as

¹³ Chapter 2018-30, Laws of Fla.

¹⁴ DEP, *Coral ECA: Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area*, <https://floridadep.gov/rcp/coral/content/coral-eca-southeast-florida-coral-reef-ecosystem-conservation-area> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

¹⁵ Chapter 2018-30, Laws of Fla.

¹⁶ DEP, *Coral ECA: Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area*, <https://floridadep.gov/rcp/coral/content/coral-eca-southeast-florida-coral-reef-ecosystem-conservation-area> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Florida House of Representatives, *Kristin Diane Jacobs*,

<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4613&LegislativeTermId=88> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

¹⁹ Chapter 2018-30, Laws of Fla.

Mayor of Broward County for two terms. Representative Jacobs was known for her advocacy and passion for protecting the environment and was twice chosen by the President of the United States to serve on national task forces dealing with climate resiliency and ocean protection.²⁰ She was also one of the original signers and champions of the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact.²¹

Effect of the Bill

The bill designates the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area as the Kristin Jacobs Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area. The bill directs DEP to erect markers to designate the area.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

The bill may have an insignificant negative fiscal impact on DEP that can be absorbed within existing resources associated with erecting markers to designate the Kristin Jacobs Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.

²⁰ Skyler Swisher, *Kristin Jacobs, a Broward state representative and advocate for the environment, dies at 60*, South Florida Sun Sentinel (April 11, 2020), <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/politics/fl-ne-kristin-jacobs-obituary-20200411-cchct6s5endqngfdhrcb7q23ze-story.html>. (last visited Feb. 9, 2021).

²¹ Rosemary O'Hara, *Armed with facts and charm, Kristin Jacobs was a principled political force in Broward County* | Rosemary O'Hara, South Florida Sun Sentinel (April 11, 2020), <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/opinion/commentary/fl-op-com-kristin-jacobs-rosemary-ohara-20200411-jwugiwzlnbhavgo54wr4yf7mr4-story.html>. (last visited Feb. 9, 2021).