

1 A bill to be entitled
 2 An act relating to oyster fishery and resource
 3 management; creating s. 379.2445, F.S.; providing
 4 legislative intent; establishing the Nature Coast
 5 Oyster Alliance within the Fish and Wildlife
 6 Conservation Commission; requiring the alliance to
 7 meet a certain number of times per year; providing
 8 that the purpose of the alliance is to coordinate the
 9 development of a comprehensive oyster resource
 10 recovery and management plan; requiring the alliance
 11 to establish an Oyster Resource Recovery and
 12 Management Working Group; assigning certain
 13 responsibilities to the working group; providing an
 14 effective date.

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

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 18 Section 1. Section 379.2445, Florida Statutes, is created
 19 to read:

20 379.2445 Nature Coast Oyster Alliance.—

21 (1) LEGISLATIVE INTENT.—The Legislature finds that there
 22 is a need to develop a comprehensive strategy to guide the
 23 recovery and management of the oyster fishery in this state and
 24 particularly in the Apalachicola Bay and Suwannee Sound. It also
 25 finds that it is in the state's economic interest to manage its
 26 oyster resources to promote the highest level of environmental,

27 ecological, and economic benefit. Thus, the Nature Coast Oyster
28 Alliance is hereby created to make recommendations regarding the
29 management of the oyster fishery and oyster resources.

30 (2) CREATION.—The Nature Coast Oyster Alliance is an
31 advisory council created pursuant to chapter 20 and created
32 within the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The
33 alliance is composed of 17 members, appointed for 4-year terms,
34 as follows:

35 (a) Eleven members to be appointed by the executive
36 director of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission,
37 consisting of:

38 1. Two members from the Fish and Wildlife Conservation
39 Commission representing marine fisheries management and law
40 enforcement;

41 2. Two members from the oyster harvesting industry
42 representing the Nature Coast Oyster Alliance group;

43 3. Two members from the oyster harvesting industry
44 representing the Cedar Key Oystermen's Association, Inc., and
45 the Suwannee Oyster Association, Inc., respectively;

46 4. Two members from the oyster processing and sales
47 industry representing seafood processing businesses;

48 5. One member from the aquaculture industry to be
49 recommended by the Aquaculture Review Council;

50 6. One member from a private nonprofit organization
51 involved in oyster resource development and management; and

52 7. One member from the seafood community at large

53 representing other seafood producing, processing, and marketing
54 sectors.

55 (b) One member from the University of Florida Oyster
56 Recovery Team to be appointed by the University of Florida.

57 (c) One member from the Governor's office to be appointed
58 by the Governor.

59 (d) One member from the Department of Agriculture and
60 Consumer Services to be appointed by the Commissioner of
61 Agriculture.

62 (e) One member from the Department of Environmental
63 Protection to be appointed by the Secretary of Environmental
64 Protection.

65 (f) One member from the Suwannee River Water Management
66 District to be appointed by the executive director of the
67 Suwannee River Water Management District.

68 (g) One member from the Levy or Dixie County Board of
69 County Commissioners.

70 (3) MEETINGS.—The Nature Coast Oyster Alliance shall meet
71 at least four times each year and elect, by a quorum, a chair
72 and vice chair.

73 (a) The chair of the alliance shall preside at all
74 meetings and call meetings as often as necessary to carry out
75 the purposes and responsibilities of the alliance.

76 (b) The alliance shall keep a complete record of the
77 proceedings of each meeting, including the names of the members
78 present and the actions taken at each meeting.

79 (c) A quorum consists of a majority of members.

80 (d) Members are eligible to receive per diem and
81 reimbursement for travel expenses pursuant to s. 112.061.

82 (4) PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITIES.—The purpose of the
83 Nature Coast Oyster Alliance is to coordinate the development of
84 a comprehensive oyster resource recovery and management plan for
85 the purpose of recommending the best approaches for the
86 restoration, rehabilitation, and sustainability of oyster
87 resources and the oyster fishery in the Nature Coast region.

88 (5) OYSTER RESOURCE RECOVERY AND MANAGEMENT WORKING
89 GROUP.—The Nature Coast Oyster Alliance shall establish an
90 Oyster Resource Recovery and Management Working Group, whose
91 members shall be determined by the alliance, to develop an
92 Oyster Fishery Recovery and Management Plan. The Oyster Resource
93 Recovery and Management Working Group shall have all of the
94 following responsibilities:

95 (a) Establish an oyster resource recovery plan in response
96 to the oyster fishery failure which fosters the restoration and
97 rehabilitation of oyster resources in the Nature Coast region.

98 (b) Establish an oyster resource management plan that
99 provides recommendations to guide the long-term management and
100 sustainability of the oyster fishery in the Nature Coast region,
101 including the Shire River Basin, Suwannee Sound, Waccasassa Bay,
102 and Withlacoochee Bay. The management plan shall have the long-
103 term objectives of maintaining and protecting natural oyster
104 stocks; increasing oyster production to ensure the long-term

105 stability and sustainability of the oyster fishery; supporting
106 the development of fishery-related infrastructure to create jobs
107 in the processing, distribution, marketing, and sales sectors of
108 the industry; and providing long-term economic benefits for the
109 fishery-dependent community.

110 (c) Provide recommendations for the regulatory policies
111 for the commercial and recreational oyster fishery.

112 (d) Provide recommendations for adaptive management
113 strategies and practices used to restore, maintain, and protect
114 oyster resources and the oyster fishery, including: reshelling
115 and reseeded depleted oyster reefs and establishing priorities
116 for restoring reefs.

117 (e) Establish priorities and provide recommendations to
118 guide the appropriation, allocation, and use of funds directed
119 toward restoring, maintaining, and protecting the oyster
120 resources of Suwannee Sound.

121 (f) Establish guidelines and recommendations for seeking
122 federal assistance and using funds for related oyster fishery
123 projects, socioeconomic programs, job training, and economic
124 opportunity improvements.

125 (g) Establish priorities for research needed to support
126 restoring, maintaining, protecting, and sustaining oyster
127 resources and the oyster fishery.

128 (h) Establish monitoring strategies for mapping,
129 assessing, measuring, and evaluating oyster production
130 parameters to determine the success of oyster resource

131 management.

132 (i) Establish a decisionmaking matrix to ensure that
133 oyster resource management is based on the best available
134 science and economic information.

135 (j) Provide recommendations to adopt regulations and
136 establish enforcement policies to ensure continued production
137 and protection of oyster resources in the state.

138 (k) Provide recommendations to implement adaptive
139 management strategies that may be required to respond to
140 variations in fishery production resulting from adverse
141 conditions associated with catastrophic events, such as
142 droughts, floods, tropical storms, and hurricanes.

143 (l) Provide recommendations to support the development of
144 aquaculture as an alternative method to increase oyster
145 production and decrease dependence upon the natural oyster
146 stocks.

147 (m) Provide recommendations and assistance to support
148 statewide initiatives to protect freshwater sources,
149 particularly the Suwannee River, which are critical to
150 successful oyster resource management.

151 (n) Seek advice and expertise from representatives of
152 various related oyster fishery sectors, including community and
153 business leaders, universities, state and federal agencies,
154 nonprofit organizations, and other specialists that can provide
155 valuable information to the working group.

156 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2015.