

Ballot Title, Summary and Proposed Amendment – Rights of the Wekiva River and Econlockhatchee River Committee

A. Introduction.

This Charter amendment would provide for definitions, create natural rights for the waters of Orange County, the right to clean water, a private right of action and standing for citizens of Orange County to enforce these rights and injunctive remedies. The proposed amendment prohibits any governmental agency, non-natural person or corporate entity from intentionally or negligently polluting the Wekiva River and Econlockhatchee Rivers, or any other Waters within Orange County.

B. Ballot Proposal: The ballot title and question for Question #__ are as follows:

PROHIBITING POLLUTION OF THE WEKIVA
AND ECONLOCKHATCHEE RIVERS OR
OTHER WATERS OF ORANGE COUNTY

Amending the charter by providing charter protections for the natural rights of the Wekiva and Econlockhatchee Rivers or other Waters of Orange County by prohibiting pollution, providing a definition of Waters, providing a private right of action and standing for citizens of Orange County to enforce these protections against governmental agencies, non-natural persons or corporate entities that intentionally or negligently pollute the Waters, and providing for severability and exceptions.

Comptroller estimated financial impact: _____.

_____ Yes

_____ No

C. Text Revisions: Article 7 of the Orange County Charter is amended by adding Section 704.1. (Underline text is added to the charter).

Section 704.1 – Right to Clean Water, Standing and Enforcement.

A. Natural Rights of Orange County Waters and Citizens.

(1) The Wekiva River and Econlockhatchee River, portions of which are within the boundaries of Orange County, and all other Waters within the boundaries of Orange County, have a right to exist and to be protected against Pollution.

(2) All Citizens of Orange County have a right to clean water by having the Waters of Orange County protected against Pollution.

B. Standing, Private Right of Action.

Orange County, municipalities within Orange County, any other public agency within Orange County, and all Citizens of Orange County shall have standing to bring an action in their own name or in the name of the Waters to enforce the provisions of this Section of the Charter. Such actions shall be filed in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court in and for Orange County, Florida, or, where jurisdiction exists, in the United States District Court, Middle District of Florida, Orlando Division.

C. Violations.

It shall be unlawful and a violation of this Section of the Charter for any governmental agency, non-natural person or corporate entity to intentionally or negligently pollute the Wekiva River and Econlockhatchee Rivers within the boundaries of Orange County, or any other Waters within the boundaries of Orange County. Violations include the Pollution of Waters which exist exclusively on private property owned by the same person(s) or entity, but only where Pollution thereon interferes with or causes Pollution of other Waters within Orange County or unreasonably interferes with or is injurious to the health and welfare of others. This Section of the Charter applies only to violations that occur after the effective date of the amendment as provided in Subsection (H).

D. Remedies.

(1) Remedies for violations of this Section of the Charter shall be injunctive and/or other equitable relief, including but not limited to a writ of mandamus requiring the violator, to the greatest extent reasonably possible, to restore the Waters at issue to the condition as it existed prior to being polluted by the violator. The prevailing party shall be entitled to recover its reasonable costs, including costs of expert witnesses.

(2) Attorneys' fees are not compensable unless the court determines that the action brought under this Section of the Charter is frivolous, vexatious, or is brought solely for the purpose of harassing the defendant. If such a finding is made, the Court may also award reasonable attorneys' fees to the defendant as a sanction.

E. Exception.

The provisions of the Section shall not apply to Constructed Wetlands.

F. Definitions.

(1) "Citizen" or "Citizen of Orange County" means an adult resident of Orange County with legal residence in the United States who has resided within the county for at least one (1) year prior to filing an action under this Section.

(2) “Constructed Wetland” means a non-natural swimming pool and any artificial wetland that uses natural processes involving wetland vegetation, soils, and their associated microbial assemblages to treat domestic wastewater, industrial water, greywater or stormwater runoff, to improve water quality.

(3) “Pollutant” means any substance or contaminant, whether manmade or natural, that is the source or cause of Pollution.

(4) “Pollution” shall have the same meanings as in FLA. STAT. § 376.031(17) and Rule 62-520.200(15), Florida Administrative Code, and means the non-natural presence in the Waters of Orange County of any one or more substances, contaminants, noise, or pollutants in quantities which are or may be potentially harmful or injurious to human health or welfare, animals, fish, plant life, and water quality or which may unreasonably interfere with the enjoyment of life or property, including outdoor recreation.

(5) “Waters” shall have the same meaning as in Rule 62-520.200(25), Florida Administrative Code, and includes, but is not limited to rivers, lakes, streams, springs, impoundments, and all other waters or bodies of water within the boundaries of Orange County, including fresh, brackish, saline, tidal, surface or underground waters. Waters owned entirely by one person or entity are included, but only to the extent the pollution thereon interferes or is injurious to other Waters, property or persons within Orange County.

G. Severability and Conflicts.

The rights and violations provided herein should be interpreted, to the greatest extent possible, in harmony with any superior state or federal law governing the same rights and conduct. To the extent any provision of this Section of the Charter impermissibly conflicts with any superior state or federal law governing the same conduct, such provision shall be severable and all other provisions shall remain fully enforceable.

H. Effective Date.

This amendment shall become effective upon passage, which is the date certified by the Supervisor of Elections and shall not require further enabling legislation by the Orange County Board of County Commissioners.

D. Financial Analysis and Impact:

Based on information provided by the Comptroller’s Office, the cost of the proposed amendment is approximately _____, which represents _____.