

[**UPDATE:** This provision is moving forward, having been amended to other bills, but the final resolution is uncertain.]

### **Environmental Reorganization**

**Senate Bill 1878 (Senator Dantzler)** Merges the Department of Environmental Regulation and the Department of Natural Resources into a single department. This won't fly this year, and is one of many bills on the general subject of environmental reorganization. Everybody wants to change the status quo, but there's no consensus on how it should be changed.

**Senate Bill 1794 (Senator Kirkpatrick)** Reorganizes environmental activities. Merges Bureau of Aquatic Plants into the Game and Fish Commission. Merges DER with Game and Fish Commission in a fuzzy structure with many difficulties (GFC has constitutional status; all other departments report to the Governor or Governor and Cabinet). This bill renames DER as the Department of Environmental Protection and folds in almost all of the Department of Natural Resources. It also creates the "inter-governmental task force on environmental efficiency" which would study the idea of creating a Department of Fish and Wildlife and further reorganizing the Department of Natural Resources out of existence.

**House Bill 1903 (Representative Harris)** Provides for fees on first landing for foreign vessels (boats or aircraft) to finance additional agricultural inspection; provides for registration of aquatic plant nurseries; transfers aquatic plant nursery inspection from DNR to DACS, eliminating duplication. The bill has passed both Senate and House Ag committees, and goes to Finance and Taxation, and to Appropriations.

[**UPDATE:** Fees have been removed from HB 1903 but aquatic nursery transfer is still alive. Other reorganization bills change daily, or are mired down. Significant change is unlikely this year.]

### **Aquatic Weed Control**

**Senate Bill 1438 (Senator Thurman)** with companion **House Bill 435 (Representatives Chuck Smith and Mackey)** This reorganizes the Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Aquatic Plants, sending its research activities to IFAS, its regulatory and permitting activities to the water management districts, creating the Aquatic Plant Advisory Council.

All are good moves. A similar bill didn't go anywhere last year, and I don't know the likely fate of this bill. It's yet another environmental reorganization bill, but with a difference: it responds to a real problem.

Call Senator Thurman and Representatives Smith and Mackey and tell them you support this. If we get a little public enthusiasm, there is a chance it might go through.

[**UPDATE:** No action taken yet on this bill. Call anyway and applaud the effort.]

*Members of the FTGA External Affairs Committee are: T.M. Latta, chairman, Mark Jarrell, Nick Dennis and Brian Combs.*

## **April Is National Lawn Care Month; practice 'Grasscycling'**

April is the month when people all across the country begin tending more than 25 million acres, using more than 61 million power mowers, and spending about a billion hours a year mowing the nation's lawns, parks and sports turf areas.

That's why the Florida Turf Grass Association (FTGA) and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) support the establishment of April as "National Lawn Care Month."

Through National Lawn Care Month the FTGA and PLCAA hope to create an understanding of the environmental, as well as the recreational and aesthetic, benefits of maintaining healthy lawn grasses.

Lawns help replenish the oxygen supply, prevent soil erosion, increase water retention in the soil, build top soil and even act as evaporation coolers to reduce surrounding air temperatures.

From a less scientific point of view, the care of lawns has become a recreational activity for many Americans, considered more of a hobby than a chore. Indeed, it may be one of the few opportunities we take to exercise and spend time in the sunshine.

The FTGA will be joining the annual Earth Day observation on April 22 to promote "grasscycling" as an ecologically-sound answer to the problem of over-burdened landfill.

"Grasscycling" is a term coined to signify a public awareness campaign about home recycling of grass clippings. With 6,000 landfills expected to close in the next five years and fewer new landfills being opened because of strict licensing procedures, a potential crisis in waste management is on the horizon.

Waste management is the subject of many recent articles promoting recycling and environmentally safe methods of preserving our fragile ecosystem. One of the easiest and most effective ways to prolong the life of our landfills is by recycling clippings and leaves in our own yards, estimated to comprise about 20 percent of landfill material.

According to university research, grass clippings are 85 percent water, so they deteriorate rapidly, returning 20 percent of their nitrogen to fertilize grass roots.

Therefore, clippings can be left on the lawn with no ill effects.

Contrary to popular lawncare "folklore," thatch problems are not caused by grass clippings. The accumulation of dead grass roots on the surface of the soil is actually caused by improper mowing techniques. Mowing more than one-third of the grass blade height causes some of the root system to die. Yet mowing only one-third of the height minimizes shock to the grass and prevents the death of the roots.

When following the one-third rule, every mower is a mulching mower because the clippings are short enough to break down quickly.

If a rainy season or a vacation trip interferes with the one-third Rule, then a mulching mower can make long clippings into short ones by holding them in the mowing chamber longer.