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## Wetlands permitting bill is criticized

### Environmentalists fear shortened review process

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A bill that would speed up decisions on state wetlands permits is raising concerns among environmentalists who say it would provide less review of some undesirable industries.

Rep. Robert C. "Rob" Schenck, R-Spring Hill, said HB 147 is needed to help Florida attract jobs. Other members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Council also said Florida is losing new industries to other states because of the permitting process.

"I would say Florida is not as competitive as other states are in the realm of economic development," Schenck said. "Especially with the downturn in the economy, it should really be one of our top focuses."

But an Audubon of Florida representative said the proposal could make it easier to permit projects such as marinas, airports or trucking distribution centers.

"This could become a form of drive-by permitting for undesirable land uses," said Eric Draper, Audubon's policy director.

The bill requires water management districts to approve or deny an Environmental Resource Permit in 45 days instead of the 90 days now allowed. Schenck proposed requiring a decision in 30 days but he agreed Wednesday to the compromise after a Southwest Florida Water Management District said his agency's board meets only once a month to vote on permits.

The list of industries that could benefit would be very narrow as defined under state law, Schenck said. The bill also requires a vote of the local city or county to vote to put the project on the permitting fast track.

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