



CHNEP Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting  
December 16, 2025, 9:30 AM – 2:00 PM  
Babcock Webb Wildlife Management Area, FWC Office  
29200 Tuckers Grade, Punta Gorda, FL 33955

**Draft Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
December 16, 2025**

**Members Present:**

Aaron Zimmerman	Sarasota County
Harry Phillips	Lee County
Cheryl Cook	Sarasota County
Church Roberts	Hendry County
Tonya Bramlage	Charlotte County
Linda Waters	Desoto County

**Others Present:**

Jennifer Hecker	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
Nicole Iadevaia	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
Sarina Barnard	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
Michelle McGill	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
Ashley Cook	Charlotte County Applicant
Suzanne Lindsey	Polk County Applicant
Stephen Buczynski	Hendry County Applicant

**Agenda Item #1 – Call to Order and Introductions — Harry Phillips, Co-Chair**

Co-Chair Harry Phillips called the meeting to order at 9:33 AM. Introductions were then made by existing members and new applicants. Ms. Ashley Cook was the first of the new applicants to introduce herself. She is the Director of Conservation of the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center, dedicated to environmental education, recreation, and conservation. She runs an oyster garden initiative to help restore oyster populations to improve water quality, educating participants along the way of the importance of water quality. She created a program called animal neighbors which teaches people the benefits of wildlife and informs them on how to peacefully and safely coexist with wildlife. She runs a mangrove education and restoration project on palm island as well, to help protect shoreline and provide wildlife habitat. She previously traveled abroad but has since returned to her home state where she is happy to bring her experience and knowledge to help her community. Mr. Steve Buczynski comes from the Clewiston area and is the president of Hendry/Glades Audubon Society where he guides and leads birding outings. He originally participated in research on citrus, but his focus has since shifted to water quality, where he conducts water quality tests of water leaving farms heading towards the Everglades, specifically the phosphorus levels. A member asked if he completed the Christmas Bird Count yet, to which he provided a list of upcoming dates and locations for the bird count. Ms. Suzanne Lindsey comes from Winter Haven and is a private citizen who spends a lot of her time volunteering in the community. She was part of an initiative to help fund the environmental lands program in Polk County and is currently a member of another CAC for the comprehensive plan update for the county.

**Agenda Item #2 – Agenda Additions or Deletions — Harry Phillips, Co-Chair**

No additions or deletions were made to the agenda.

**Agenda Item #3 – Public Comments on Agenda Items**

No public comments on agenda items were made.

**Agenda Item #4 – Introduction of New Applicants — Harry Phillips, Co-Chair**

A brief description was given by Harry Phillips, CAC Co-Chair, on CAC membership duties, followed by Jennifer Hecker making note to the new applicants that they were already meeting one criteria of the application process by being present at the meeting. She explained that the next step in their membership process is to bring Ms. Cook's, Ms. Lindsey's, and Mr. Buczynski's applications to the upcoming Policy Committee meeting (1/22/26) for Committee approval. Harry Phillips noted that the applicants gave an in-depth introduction of themselves during the Call to Order and moved on to the next agenda item for sake of time.

**Agenda Item #5 – Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025 Meeting Minutes — Harry Phillips, Co-Chair**

No changes were made to the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025 meeting minutes.

**AARON ZIMMERMAN MOVED, SECONDED BY LINDA WATERS TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED. THE MOTION WAS CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION.**

**Agenda Item #6 – CHNEP Citizen's Advisory Committee Bylaws 2025 Updates – Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP**

CHNEP's Executive Director, Ms. Jennifer Hecker, presented on the final edits to the CHNEP Citizen's Advisory Committee Bylaws and gathered additional comments or consensus on the edits made. Ms. Hecker first encouraged the CAC to open the two separate attachments located within their folders, explaining one was the tracked changes version and the other was the clean, final version with all edits folded in. To refresh the memory of current CAC members and to inform new applicants of the bylaws, Ms. Hecker walked through all of the edits, pointed out the edit that was made by the CAC at the previous meeting, and opened the floor to additional edits the CAC wished to make. One member pointed out numbering error, located under Article III: Membership, Section 3: Classes of Membership. He suggested to change it from "b. The Policy Committee has the authority to remove any member of the CAC" to "c. The Policy Committee..." to properly list the information in the section as a, b, c instead of a, b, b. He then went on to gain clarity on the reasoning of the Policy Committee to remove CAC members. Ms. Hecker explained that it is a blanket ruling of the Policy Committee as they are the ones to appoint the members, but it is a power that has never had to be used or enforced.

**TONYA BROMLAGE MOVED, SECONDED BY AARON ZIMMERMAN, TO APPROVE THE CHNEP CITIZEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE BYLAWS 2025 UPDATES WITH THE ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBER EDIT. THE MOTION WAS CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION.**

**Agenda Item #7 – CHNEP Communications & Outreach Strategy 2025 Updates – Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP**

The 2025 Update to the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) was reviewed by the CHNEP Management Conference Committees (including CAC) at meetings throughout 2023-2024. The CAC provided feedback on new science and partner programs, and these were subsequently integrated in the 2025 Update to the CHNEP CCMP.

The Communications and Outreach Strategy specifically addresses how partners are engaging in environmental education outreach and communication within the region. The guiding principle is to equitably distribute CHNEP outreach materials, activities, and grants to all 10 counties; and identify realistic and achievable communications and public engagement projects and activities that can be accomplished to do so.

Ms. Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP Director of Research and Restoration lead CAC members through a review of the final edits with those brought by CHNEP staff and CAC members at the August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025 meeting to gather final input. She emphasized that the purpose of the document is to see what the CCMP looks like in practice and that it is meant to be a “living” document that continues to grow and change as the community it serves changes as well.

One member asked if funding has changed for CHNEP under the new administration to which Ms. Hecker explained that we received our base funding for FY26 however we did not receive our IJA grant funding. The award notification for that funding is pending and as a result of other funding uncertainties, CHNEP developed multiple contingency budgets, has slowly added to a reserve budget over the years, and has shifted to promoting external events instead of hosting them which has resulted in cost-savings. This prompted another member to ask if CHNEP does any fundraising, to which Ms. Hecker explained that we do however the recent focus has been on spending all the federal funding we receive, but as IJA funding disappears we will look towards fundraising as an avenue once again. Another member commended the communications strategies that CHNEP uses, especially the Water Atlas, which she described as seamless and so well organized that you can easily find the information you’re looking for. The work that CHNEP has done to make the enormity of information accessible and digestible for anyone to use is a helpful and deeply appreciated resource by CAC. The same member also shared her experience of seeing CHNEP developed fact sheets used in presentations to governing boards as evidence of the effectiveness of having the information in hand ready to distribute to educate and inform. She also commended the calendar for the graphical beauty that leads people to spend more time with the calendar and subsequently the information within, especially in the context of families she sees in the libraries looking at the calendars, and how much of a difference it is making in the community. Lastly, one member recommended to carry the term “fisherperson” on page 3 throughout all sections of the document for uniformity purposes.

**CHERYL COOK MOVED, SECONDED BY TONYA BROMLAGE, TO APPROVE THE CHNEP COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH STRATEGY 2025 UPDATES WITH THE ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBER EDIT. THE MOTION WAS CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION.**

### **Agenda Item #8 – CHNEP Update — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP**

CHNEP's Executive Director, Ms. Jennifer Hecker, presented on programmatic activity occurring since the last Citizen's Advisory Committee meeting. Highlights are as follows:

CHNEP planned and executed the Fall Committee meetings. New members from various organizations, including the EPA and local municipalities, were onboarded, ensuring that diverse perspectives are incorporated into CHNEP's decision-making processes. This structured approach supports a well-informed and engaged committee that can address regional environmental challenges.

In addition to the meetings, CHNEP received a Final Program Evaluation Letter affirming its proficiency and ongoing eligibility for federal funding. This achievement underscores the program's effectiveness and credibility in managing environmental resources. The 2026 Amended Master Work Plan and Budget was drafted and approved, along with legislative priorities for the upcoming year. CHNEP onboarded a new team member - Conservation Specialist Michelle McGill, completed annual staff interviews and evaluations, and conducted follow-up actions from the 2025 Resiliency Summit, including the sharing of resources on YouTube.

With regards to finance and grants, CHNEP updated the funding opportunities fact sheet and notified CHNEP Committees about significant state and federal funding options; submitted annual end-of-year reports for EPA grants and finalized the FDEP final report, securing \$75,000 in funding; completed edits to the Amended FY2026 CHNEP Work Plan & Budget, which received approval from the CHNEP Policy Committee; received and partially executed the FY26 Agreement for programmatic support from SWFWMD, pending full execution; processed invoices related to the CHNEP Water Atlas and other water quality monitoring projects for Q4 deliverables; drafted and submitted a report detailing significant accomplishments for specific EPA grants; and finalized the FY2026 Agreement for programmatic support from the FDEP, moving toward board approval. CHNEP staff also provided letters of acknowledgment and support for various grant opportunities and initiatives, including projects from local conservation organizations and universities.

CHNEP staff attended numerous partnership meetings (as outlined in meeting agenda packet). CHNEP staff presented on the CHNEP Water Atlas to the Suncoast Reef Rovers, highlighting ongoing environmental initiatives; at the CERF Conference, discussions focused on enhancing water quality and ecosystem management through innovative partnerships and tools; CHNEP hosted the 2025 Southwest Florida Resiliency Summit, emphasizing comprehensive vulnerability assessments to safeguard vital community assets; and to the Punta Gorda City Council, demonstrating collaboration on co-funded projects to address local environmental challenges.

For publications and outreach, CHNEP staff distributed monthly emails through Constant Contact to inform subscribers about upcoming public engagement events in the CHNEP region; developed a speaker request form to facilitate presentations using preferred software by hosts; collaborated with volunteers at the Wildcat Tailgate Festival to educate over 80 families using outreach materials; conducted a Photo Contest Voting Meeting with the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to finalize selections for the 2026 Calendar; organized a CAC workshop to gather feedback on the committee's role, outreach resources, and proposed bylaw updates; hosted the 2025 Southwest Florida Resiliency Summit with approximately 150 attendees, featuring interactive sessions and continuing education credits for professionals; engaged in National Estuaries Week via social media, partnering with various environmental organizations to promote awareness; developed new educational activities related to microplastics for outreach, provided educational materials to Gasparilla Island State Park; and finalized the 2026 Nature Calendar design while updating project factsheets to reflect new information.

CHNEP has 14 new Facebook followers, 5,809 subscribers for the educational mailings, 3,551 unique visitors and 4,742 page visits to the CHNEP website, 18,090 YouTube views with 107 subscribers and 368 videos, and 19 new Instagram followers.

Lastly, Ms. Hecker announced the save the date information for upcoming events hosted by CHNEP, including the Triennial Watershed Summit and the Annual Southwest Florida Resiliency Summit.

#### **Agenda Item #9 – CHNEP ‘Resources’ Guide – Sarina Barnard, CHNEP**

As representatives of leading environmental groups, CAC members attending meetings share resources with one another to create joint regional initiatives. At the previous CAC meeting, members participated in a workshop and discussion to gather member input and share ideas. The workshop discussion underscored the importance of effective communication and resource-sharing among CAC members involved in environmental initiatives. By addressing the identified limitations—such as the need for a comprehensive resource guide, timely communication, and the provision of printed materials—members aim to enhance their collective impact. With that in mind, CHNEP staff provided printed copies of the updated resource guide, technical project fact sheets, economic valuations by county, funding opportunities, CCMP brochures in both English and Spanish, kids activity books and more to provide members with hard copies that they could take and distribute as needed. Sarina walked through each resource outlined in the guide, giving context of each and the purpose of each as an educational tool for CAC members to share. A member asked if the information about past summits is available on the website, which Ms. Barnard answered yes and pointed out the hotlink. Another member asked if the Harbor Happenings are still in print, to which Ms. Hecker explained they are no longer in print but we still include a version in the nature calendar to cut costs and put publication energy into one great resource. CAC members showed excitement and appreciation to receiving the physical materials to be able to take back to share with their communities.

#### **Agenda Item #10 – Conservation Grant Applications — Michelle McGill, CHNEP**

The Conservation Grants Program supports the public engagement pillar by increasing the proportion of the population that supports and participates in actions to protect and restore estuaries and watersheds. It is designed to stimulate grassroots community natural resource protection and restoration as well as non-profit partnerships. Preference is given to underserved communities or new applicants and projects. Conservation grants are now given in the \$500 to \$9,999 range and are reimbursement-based. Applications may be accessed at <https://www.chnep.org/conservation-grants> (or select “Funding” menu from CHNEP’s homepage). New applications for the next cycle should be submitted via email to [Grants@chnep.org](mailto:Grants@chnep.org) by 5:00 PM April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026, for FY26 funds. Certain projects and activities are excluded from funding such as events or services with an admission fee or charge though need-based scholarships will be considered; restoration or improvement on private property; projects that personally benefit the applicant; political action or legislative advocacy; fundraising activities; projects completed prior to the award of the grant; items that will be sold by the grant recipient; reprinting of existing material unless part of a larger educational program; and capital improvement or endowment funds or usual operating costs. All applications described below are new applicants, meaning we give preference to funding these to increase the diversity and location of projects we fund to expand the breadth of CHNEP’s impact across its entire area.

The first conservation grant title is “Great American Cleanup 2026”, requesting \$5,000 to engage volunteers across Lee County to remove litter and debris from shorelines, waterways, parks, and neighborhoods. CHNEP staff recommend to fully fund the project with the added terms:

- Provide a final report which includes: volunteer attendance numbers and hours, weight of collected debris/other data as collected, photos from events, signage with CHNEP logo, and documentation related to obtaining permits, preparing materials, supplies, and cleanup site
- Provide event dates and locations of cleanups of at least 3 events at least a month in advance
- Tag CHNEP in social media posts

CAC members agreed with the staff recommendations but asked some clarifying questions. One member asked if the project was hosting 40 different events or 40 different locations. Although CHNEP staff were unsure, another member explained he has partnered with this group before and that they usually host many different sites, so in regard to this project it’s likely 1 event with 40 separate cleanup locations. He suggested to support the project but to get clarification from the applicant to understand the vastness of the project. Another member asked where the \$34.79/hour for volunteer hours value came from and CHNEP staff explained that this is a nationwide value estimated by Independent Sector and that we provide this value to applicants so they can estimate their cash-match/in-kind time. Staff also explained it is a hotlink that applicants can click on to view the most up to date value of volunteer time.

The second conservation grant title is “Expansion of Youth Leadership and Marine Camp”, requesting \$3,315 to provide additional educational materials to an array of students attending the marine camps to learn more about the marine stewardship with the help of engaging hands-on activities, at no cost to the students. CHNEP staff recommend to fully fund the project with the added terms:

- Produce a final report with: volunteer attendance numbers and hours, number of students attending free of charge, dates and times of all camps, including additional ones in expansion, description of how educational resources/tools were used with the students, and post camp surveys
- Share photos from camps, tag CHNEP in social media posts
- CHNEP recommends (but doesn’t require) adding pretest to measure learning success against post-test

One member asked how the process works, if they send a final report with an invoice. Ms. Hecker explained that grants are deliverable-based and that we pay based on the final report with associated deliverables. We don’t require them to keep every receipt but rather fund based on the final product bundled into the report. Another member asked why the pre-test is only a recommendation and not a requirement, especially because the group is already putting forth so much effort to create a learning opportunity, why wouldn’t a pretest/evaluation of success of the program be necessary. CHNEP staff explained that we don’t want to push them if it’s something they cannot handle on top of the rest of the camp. The whole goal of the camp is for the kids to learn something so we don’t want to require anything that would jeopardize the success of the camp. Another member added that a program they hold, they require a pre and post test in a Google Form, which has streamlined the process as they get results immediately and they can track the number of kids gaining education and completing the program. CHNEP staff asked the member if

they would be able to provide an example of the pre-test so that CHNEP could provide to the above applicant as an example to encourage and aid them to follow-through with a pre-test.

The third conservation grant is titled “Restoration of the Chipley Sand Patch”, requesting \$9,999 to remove invasive plants/trees, trash, and debris to restore the property to its native habitat to maintain the sensitive historical and ecological assets of the land. CHNEP staff recommend funding a total of \$8,971.54, excluding funding the mulching task as there could be time constraints on project completion by the deadline due to the severity of clean-up required. Staff also require the added terms:

- Produce a final report with volunteer attendance numbers and hours, weight of collected debris/other data as collected, share photos from clearing and trash removal events, before and after aerial images, before and after fixed point photos, and photo of signage with CHNEP logo
- Tag CHNEP in social media posts

One member asked for clarification on which deliverables CHNEP is not funding, where staff explained to exclude deliverable 4, the forestry mulching, to allow them the best opportunity to complete the project within the timeframe to get reimbursed by CHNEP. CAC members agreed to the staff recommendations, with one commenting: “I can imagine what the property looks like and how much time it’s going to take given that it hasn’t been inhabited since the 60s.”

The final conservation grant is titled “City of Cape Coral Water Ways Science Festival”, requesting \$9,999 to expand resources for the annual Water Ways Science Festival to accommodate for 2500+ attendees. CHNEP staff find that this application is better suited for a sponsorship from CHNEP, where the applicant will provide sponsorship levels and staff will review to decide the most appropriate level, note that CHNEP sponsorship will not exceed \$1,000 total based on benefits provided to the organization. Also note, this project has already been initiated prior to the application date, rendering it ineligible for funding based on CHNEP restrictions. CAC members agreed to the CHNEP staff recommendation, with one member asking for clarity on the \$1,000 maximum for sponsorships. Ms. Hecker explained that this is customary to how we handle all sponsorships for festivals. Ms. McGill added that another deciding factor to not fully fund the project is because CHNEP only has a total of \$30,000 dedicated to conservation grants for FY26, meaning that we expect to see more applications come in next cycle, especially after the grant portal was closed for so long due to funding uncertainties. So anticipating more projects that come in can help CHNEP more equitably distribute funds across the entire area. One member asked how much all the grants are together, Ms. McGill estimated around \$17,000, which is about half of the total amount of funding allocated to conservation grants. Another member asked if there were more applications this round or if this was all of them, to which CHNEP staff explained this was it, but to anticipate more for the next cycle.

### **Agenda Item #11 – CHNEP Technical Projects & New Tools — Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP**

Ms. Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP Director of Research & Restoration, provided the committee with a brief overview on project progress since the previous TAC meeting. Highlights are as follows:

For the CHNEP Water Atlas, a comprehensive analysis of water quality trends for 17 parameters has been completed for 2025. The Suncoast Waterkeeper's enterococci data has been incorporated

into the Coastal Conditions Map. Waterbody pages now showcase an updated design that includes a 5-year chart which presents a 6-month moving average, annual mean, and established thresholds for each water quality parameter. As for the CCHMN, the Q4 data collection for FY25 was completed and the Q1 data collection for FY26 has been initiated. An annual audit and meeting took place in August to review the program's progress. A fact sheet and infographics were developed to present findings from a trend analysis published in the Estuaries and Coast journal, focusing on water quality and eutrophication in the Greater Charlotte Harbor System. All data and related documents from the CCHMN will be accessible online through the CHNEP Water Atlas and SEACAR platforms.

For the Charlotte County Vulnerability Assessment, Charlotte County is collaborating to finalize a baseline Vulnerability Assessment (VA) by mapping critical assets and standardizing metadata according to FDEP requirements. They have modeled flood exposure and conducted risk analysis for these assets across various flood scenarios. County departments are currently reviewing this flood exposure data. The next steps include identifying key areas for adaptation planning and presenting the final report and recommendations at the upcoming Public Meeting #2 and to the Charlotte Board of County Commissioners for approval, followed by submitting the final data and report to FDEP. For the Polk County Vulnerability Assessment, the Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) and Polk County are collaborating to model various rainfall flood scenarios using the HEC-RAS model, which includes assessments for 200-year, 500-year, and compounded flooding events. This effort led to the development of additional chapters and recommendations specifically for Polk County, aimed at identifying priority areas for flood risk. Visual representations of the flooding events were created for community outreach and shared with the Polk STAC. The next steps involve presenting the final report and recommendations to the Polk BCC for approval and submitting the completed data and report to the FDEP. For Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto County Vulnerability Assessments, CFRPC and local counties are collaborating to identify Adaptation Action Areas (AAAs) based on vulnerability assessments. They are drafting plans that include engineering designs and cost estimates for the top three AAAs in each county. A methodology for prioritizing critical assets has been established and approved, with flood exposure analyses for a 100-year rainfall event completed; results for 200- and 500-year events are expected in January. The next phase involves creating appendix reports for each county's Vulnerability Assessment, detailing the top three AAAs along with associated projects, designs, and costs.

CHNEP has updated its seagrass maps and charts, which are accessible on the CHNEP Water Atlas website. Additionally, new fact sheets are available on the CHNEP website, covering topics like basin water quality, seagrass health, and funding opportunities for state and federal research and restoration projects.

A new applicant asked Nicole about the guidance and technical assistance CHNEP provides to counties to help them figure out “what they need to do”. Nicole went on to explain that it depends on the county but highlighted that CHNEP holds project meetings with each of the counties and the contractors for their projects. Technical assistance is provided to each of the projects, just in different ways, reflective of the needs of the county and its project, what data they already have, their methodologies and more. There is not a one size fits all approach when it comes to CHNEP working on projects, so staff pivot their technical assistance and expertise depending on each individual project need.

### **Agenda Item #12 – CAC Updates — Harry Phillips, Co-Chair**

Harry Phillips (Lee County): A number of mangrove restoration projects have been completed in Cape Coral with the goal of planting over 3,000 in the area. The city also acquired an abandoned

golf course with the goal of converting it to a passive park with a stormwater component, but explained the limitations on acreage in the area. Wild for Wildlife Festival was hosted with the friends of wildlife and provided a kids activity book. He announced upcoming events for 2026 including the Water Ways Festival and Burrowing Owl Festival.

Aaron Zimmerman (Sarasota County): He announced that Sarasota County is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Environmental Lands Protection Program. Over 42,000 acres have been protected and it recently achieved its 100<sup>th</sup> land acquisition of a camp and RV resort near Snook Haven. A North Port Land Acquisition Program was recently approved and established, gaining \$2.5 million in funding for targeted land acquisition. It will be funded as funding is available, coming out of the North Port Environmental Protection Fund. It will use scoring criteria which include weight factors such as protected species utilization, heritage tree canopy presence, neighborhood green space needs, location within the floodplain, and connectivity to other conservation lands. The program will allow the city to work more closely with local environmental groups. The city also gained \$45,000 in funding from FDACS for hurricane recovery efforts and they are planning to use the funds to replace 85 street trees damaged during the last hurricane season.

Church Roberts (Hendry County): He expressed how over time the federal and state wetland lines have dramatically changed because of changes to WOTUS. The water management district is now requiring consultants on projects related to endangered species presence and wetland delineations to fill previous gaps. He also explained that USFWS no longer defines habitat as a surrogate for “take”, which will ultimately result in much less mitigation as habitat is a quantifiable way to assess impacts.

Tonya Bramlage (Charlotte County): She has been working on two projects, one providing consulting to Lemon Bay Conservancy and Peace River Audubon on Burrowing Owls. The second, the Florida Monarch Project, where she is working to see if there will be a continuation for the project. She just finished editing a book and is ready for the holiday season!

Linda Waters (DeSoto County): Explained the revitalization of the Garden Club in recent years, which has helped introduced native plants and education into the area. Welcomed a new Parks and Recreation Director and is excited to see what activities they choose to pursue. The library is working on an Arts and Ag program which will merge art activities with agriculture and land use, with two events in January, being family painting events.

Ashley Cook (Prospective Charlotte County Alternate): CHEC is an environmental center located on a 46,000-acre state preserve with many different ecosystems and habitat types which lends to unique educational opportunities. For example, they provide free field trips to all second and fourth graders in Charlotte County and they recently received a grant to upgrade and improve the facilities that thousands of kids use. She also highlighted a corresponding book she wrote for the Animal Neighbors program, giving people a physical copy of everything they learned so that they can refer back to and better retain the information. Recently received funding for the mangrove education and restoration project to expand to other areas in the region, including vertical oyster gardens as well.

Steve Buczynski (Prospective Hendry County Member): Currently in Christmas Bird Count mode as it is a busy time of year for them, and he noted the adjustment they’ve had to make as

the number of birds and species of birds they see has greatly changed throughout the years. These shifts in datasets are modeled on Audubon and Cornell's websites.

Suzanne Lindsey (Prospective Polk County Member): A toll road is being proposed along Lake Walls Ridge, which is destroying habitat, farmlands, and homelands. Working with the Florida Native Plant Society and other groups to educate on better growth management.

Cheryl Cook (Sarasota County): As a board member of Control Growth and a member of SCAN, voiced concerned about the overdevelopment happening within the county. Tallahassee also just approved a toll road, reaching throughout the middle of the state, which is discouraging as pushback is little. Following the multiple lawsuits from SB-180 to see if they can use the legislative language to change the course of the approved toll road.

### **Agenda Item #13 – General Public Comment — Harry Phillips, Co-Chair**

No public comments were made.

### **Agenda Item #14 – Future Meetings: Topics, Location and Date – Harry Phillips, Co-Chair**

Upcoming dates for 2026: 4/22/26, 8/19/26, and 12/16/26. Ms. Hecker suggested to the CAC members that if there is a topic, related to the CCMP, that they would like to present on to contact the CHNEP CAC liaison, Nicole Iadevaia. As members of the CAC, they can bring issues, concerns, ideas, projects, etc. from their respective counties to present on and to be an effective voice and representative of their communities. She gave examples of possible discussion topics, such as the incorporation of AI data centers in areas and how they are increasing water supply demand and decreasing wildlife habitat. A member asked if converting sewage to drinking water could be a possible, appropriate topic for future presentations. Ms. Hecker explained it could be a possible topic and gave input as to where the issue currently stands in the community in terms of consideration and implementation. Another member prompted further discussion of the role of AI in the environmental field, in environmental policy, and in water supply. Ms. Iadevaia closed out the future meeting discussion by making note of the presentations that were slotted for the meeting that had to be pushed due to the addition of a field trip. She appreciated the flexibility of deferring the presentations and that the theme of wildlife interactions and corridors could possibly be shifted to the next meeting in April, though she did note the other theme ideas discussed during the meeting could be considered for the April meeting as well, in addition to Water Atlas tutorials. Ms. Hecker pointed out that the Water Atlas tutorial should happen sooner rather than later to accommodate for Sarina before her last day with CHNEP. Lastly, she reminded the CAC that the next meeting will hold elections for one of the co-chair seats and gave the reminder that co-chairs can be elected again if they so wish to continue to serve.

### **Agenda Item #15 – Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 PM.