

COASTAL & HEARTLAND NATIONAL ESTUARY PARTNERSHIP

Introduction to CHNEP for Potential Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) Members

The National Estuary Program was established in 1987 by an amendment to the Clean Water Act to identify, restore and protect estuaries along the coasts of the United States. There are now 28 “estuaries of national significance” within the National Estuary Program. In 1995, Florida Governor Lawton Chiles submitted an application to designate the estuarine system around Charlotte Harbor. The application was accepted by Congress and the CHNEP (formerly the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program) was formed.

In 1996, a decision-making team of local citizens, elected officials, resource managers and resource users, known as the Management Conference, set to work to develop a 20-year *Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan* (CCMP) that identifies the region’s common priority environmental issues and actions needed to solve them. The region of concern includes the Myakka, Peace and Caloosahatchee River watersheds, the water cannot be protected unless the land that drains into it is protected. The CCMP was accepted in 2001 and was substantially revised in 2019. The four priority actions identified by the CHNEP are water quality improvement, hydrologic restoration, fish, wildlife and habitat protection and public engagement.

The program’s Management Conference is composed of the Management, Policy, Technical Advisory and Citizens Advisory Committees and the Program Office. Each committee serves a specialized role in supporting the program goals and objectives. Many government agencies, counties and cities provide financial support to the CHNEP. Many of the outreach projects are also supported by local foundations, conservation organizations, and businesses.

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) members have a pivotal role in linking CHNEP to the county they are selected to represent. They represent public concerns and transfer information back to their local communities, including distributing educational information to the public. CAC members act as community leaders by funneling suggestions and ideas to the CHNEP as to how the organization can better serve the communities in their respective counties. CAC members also help the CHNEP locate projects, partners, and funding opportunities that implement the CCMP. Membership in the CAC is open to those who live or work in the CHNEP program area with a strong interest in furthering the objectives outlined in the CHNEP CCMP.

Although applicants may be members of various local organizations, clubs, or work which keeps them engaged in their community, as CAC members they will be approved as individuals (not as representatives of an organization) by the CHNEP Policy Committee. Presently, the CAC format has 2 regular and 1 alternate CAC member seats for each of the ten counties the CHNEP serves. The regular members have voting rights, with the alternates stepping in to vote when necessary. Individuals may apply as County Representatives for any county they live and/or work in, and are encouraged to apply for all counties they are qualified to serve in. To facilitate communication between County CAC and Policy Committee Members, applicants are asked to establish communication with their respective CHNEP Policy Members during the application process. Please follow the Policy Member Reference instructions to reach out to the CHNEP Policy Committee Members.

Approved CAC members are expected to attend 3 meetings per year. Members who have not attended 2 consecutive CAC meetings during the previous 12 months automatically lose their voting rights and must reapply. Member terms last 4 years, after which members are welcome to reapply. CHNEP meetings operate under Florida Government’s Sunshine Law.

Additional information about CHNEP is on its website at www.CHNEP.org or call us at (941)-833-6580.

POLICY MEMBER REFERENCE INSTRUCTIONS

As part of the Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership's (CHNEP) Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) application process, each applicant is requested to contact CHNEP Policy Committee Member(s) from all CHNEP counties and/or cities they live and/or work in that they wish to represent.

Below is a list of the existing CHNEP Local Govt. Policy Committee Members and their contact information:

CHARLOTTE COUNTY	Commissioner Ken Doherty	Ken.doherty@charlottecountyfl.gov	941-743-1300
DESOTO COUNTY	Commissioner Steve Hickox	s.hickox@desotobocc.com	863-933-4800
GLADES COUNTY	Chairman Tim Stanley	tstanley@myglades.com	863-946-6000
HARDEE COUNTY	Commissioner Tim Wells	Tim.wells@hardeecountyfl.gov	863-773-9430
HENDRY COUNTY	Commissioner Emory Howard	Bocc2@hendryfla.net	863-675-5220
HIGHLANDS COUNTY	Commissioner Scott Kirouac	skirouac@highlandsfl.gov	863-402-6500
LEE COUNTY	Commissioner Trish Petrosky	tpetrosky@leegov.com	239-533-2226
MANATEE COUNTY	Commissioner Tal Siddique	tal@mymanatee.org	941-398-4729
POLK COUNTY	Commissioner Bill Braswell	billbraswell@polkfl.gov	863-534-6050
SARASOTA COUNTY	Commissioner Mark Smith	mhsmith@scgov.net	941-861-5000
CITY OF ARCADIA	Councilmember Keith Keene	kkenne@arcadia-fl.gov	863-494-4114
CITY OF BARTOW	Commissioner Trish Pfeiffer	tpfeiffer@cityofbartow.net	863-640-1024
CITY OF CAPE CORAL	Councilmember Joe Kilraine	jkilraine@capecoral.gov	239-242-3230
CITY OF FORT MEADE	Commissioner Petrina McCutchen	pmccutchen@cityoffortmeade.com	863-285-1100
CITY OF FORT MYERS	Councilmember Diana Giraldo	dgiraldo@fortmyers.gov	239-321-7002
CITY OF LAKE LAND			
CITY OF NORTH PORT	Commissioner Demetrius Petrow	dpetrow@northportfl.gov	941-340-8442
CITY OF PUNTA GORDA	Councilmember Jeannine Polk	jpolk@cityofpuntafordafl.com	941-575-3383
CITY OF SANIBEL	Mayor Mike Miller	Mike.miller@mysanibel.com	239-472-3700
CITY OF VENICE	Councilmember Lloyd Weed	lweed@venicefl.gov	941-468-4188
CITY OF WINTER HAVEN	Commissioner Tracy Mercer	tmercer@mywinterhaven.com	863-289-2944
TOWN OF FORT MYERS BEACH	Councilmember John R. King	johnking@fmbgov.com	239-756-0202
VILLAGE OF ESTERO	Councilmember Jeff Hunt	hunt@estero-fl.gov	239-326-1590

Suggested talking points for phone call or email: Introduction of who you are including your occupation if presently employed, community organizations you are affiliated with, and any other relevant information you would like to share about yourself

- Explanation of your interest in the CHNEP and why you wish to serve on the CHNEP Citizens Advisory Committee

If you have attempted to contact your respective Policy Committee Member(s) but have not been able to make contact, please check yes on the application below anyhow to reflect that you attempted to make contact.

APPLICATION FOR CHNEP CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Name: **Courtney Darling**

Mailing Address: **15440 189th RD**

City, State and Zip: **McAlpin, FL, 32062**

Phone Number with Area Code: **(352) 410-9723**

Email Address: **cdarling@floridaconserve.org**

Please list all counties that you live and/or work in that you would like to be considered for:

<u>COUNTY REP SEAT APPLYING FOR</u>	<u>POLICY MEMBER CONTACTED</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Manatee County	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Sarasota County	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Charlotte County	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Lee County	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Glades County	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Hendry County	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Hardee County	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Highlands County	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Polk County	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> DeSoto County	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes

Please tell us the name of the organizations you affiliate with and how? If the organization may not be well known, please include a brief description. For example, "Peace River Audubon Society, active member since 2000".

Florida Conservation Group, employee since October 2023.

FCG is dedicated to protecting working agricultural lands primarily through conservation easements with programs such as FDACS Rural and Family Lands Protection Program and Florida Forever. Keeping farmers, ranchers, and timber owners in production helps protect land and safeguard clean water and wildlife habitat.

Why do you want to be a voting member of the Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership's Advisory Committee? What contributions do you feel like you can make to the CAC?

As a voting member of the committee, I would like to help facilitate partnerships between landowners and restoration initiatives. Allowing me to serve as a liaison between producers, conservation agencies, and community stakeholders would help integrate working lands conservation into estuary protection strategies to promote healthy headwaters and resilient coastal ecosystems. Contributions include strengthening agricultural representation in regional water quality and estuary restoration discussions, ensuring that working lands are recognized as part of watershed protection solutions, and provide insight to landowner needs and practical implementation challenges.

How will you help implement the *Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan*? (A copy of this plan can be found here: www.chnep.org/our-plan. Pages 186-195 provide an overview of our four priority actions: 1) Water Quality Improvement, 2) Hydrological Restoration, 3) Fish, Wildlife, & Habitat Restoration, and 4) Public Engagement.)

With a significant portion of the watershed being privately owned agricultural and timberland, as a Landowner Assistance Coordinator at Florida Conservation Group, I am uniquely positioned to connect private working lands with the goals of Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan.

- 1. Target conservation easements in recharge areas, floodplains, and along rivers that feed into the estuary. Help landowners address resource concerns that reduce nutrient and sediment runoff.**
- 2. Work with ranchers interested in restoring wetlands and encourage conservation efforts that maintain working lands while improving natural water storage and filtration.**
- 3. Encourage and help landowners to understand how habitat restoration can coexist with profitable production. Protect habitat connectivity and improve biodiversity across the watershed by prioritizing easements that protect wildlife conservation, riparian buffers, and upland habitats.**
- 4. Ensure trust and strong partnerships between agricultural producers and conservation stakeholders by providing input on landowner perspectives, barriers, and incentives for participation.**