



## FINANCE STRATEGY

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An Appendix to the  
2025 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan  
of the Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership



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## INTRODUCTION

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The Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP) was created pursuant to Section 320 of the Clean Water Act as one of 28 National Estuary Programs (NEPs) in the country. As a Clean Water Act Program, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guides the NEPs and manages Section 320 funding annually distributed to NEPs. While EPA funding is one of the primary sources of revenue for its work, each year the CHNEP leverages cash and in-kind investments by state, regional, local, and private organizations through collaborative and strategic partnerships. The CHNEP's Finance Strategy seeks to develop dedicated and diverse sources of funding to implement its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). The CCMP addresses Water Quality Improvement, Hydrologic Restoration, Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Protection, and Public Engagement priorities identified by the Partnership and guides development of annual work plans and budgets. This Finance Strategy includes a) priorities for funding; b) current funding and other support; c) the varied funding needs for CCMP activities; and d) strategies to maintain and secure new resources for CCMP implementation and their timeframe. Refer to 2025 CCMP Action Plans for descriptions of resource management actions and their potential annual costs and funding sources.

## SOURCES OF FUNDING

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CHNEP has the partnerships and strategic alliances to identify and secure resources to implement its CCMP. Sources of funding include federal, state, and local partners; cash and in-kind contributions from public and private sectors; and grants. CHNEP currently receives \$850,000 of base program funding from the EPA under Section 320 of the Clean Water Act.

Under a Cooperative Agreement with EPA, the CHNEP must match this funding with non-federal dollars in a 1:1 ratio. A CHNEP member, the South Florida Water Management District, has provided an in-kind match with match documentation to meet CHNEP's federal match obligation. These are funds used for projects that implement actions or activities in the CHNEP CCMP and are reserved as match solely for CHNEP's grant (i.e. not used as match towards other grants).

Additionally, CHNEP has continued to receive financial cash contributions from non-federal sources, including from state and local governments, and private sources. For example, CHNEP is expecting to receive \$274,000 from local, regional, and state governmental entities in 2026 (Table 1 below).

**Table 1.** Annual financial support from state, regional, and local governmental partners in FY2026.

Non-Federal Cooperative Funding Sources	Amount
Sarasota County	\$25,000
Charlotte County	\$25,000
Lee County	\$25,000
Polk County	\$25,000
Manatee County	\$5,000
Hardee County	\$500
DeSoto County	\$500
City of Cape Coral	\$7,500
City of Fort Myers	\$5,000
City of Punta Gorda	\$5,000
City of Sanibel	\$2,500
City of Fort Myers Beach	\$2,500
City of Venice	\$2,500
City of North Port	\$1,000
City of Winter Haven	\$1,500
Village of Estero	\$5,000
City of Arcadia	\$500
City of Bartow	\$500
<b>Total Local Government</b>	<b>\$143,000</b>
FDEP	\$75,000
SWFWMD	\$ 56,000
<b>Total State and Regional Government</b>	<b>\$131,000</b>
<b>Total Non-Federal Annual Financial Support</b>	<b>\$274,000</b>

## FUNDING PRIORITIES

The CHNEP annual budget supports CHNEP office administration and CCMP planning and implementation to support the goals and objectives of the Partnership.

### CHNEP ADMINISTRATION

The annual budget provides resources for CHNEP staff to continue program planning, development, implementation, evaluation, and reporting (Workplan Task 1). The CHNEP administrative budget includes host fees, materials and supplies, travel, meeting support, and communication software and fees. Additionally, CHNEP administration includes personnel costs associated with carrying out the following activities:

- Organizational and logistical support for all Management Conference committees and their meetings;
- Preparation of EPA-required documents and reporting, including updated Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans; Finance, Monitoring, Communications and Outreach, and Habitat Restoration Plans; Program Evaluation documents; annual Work Plans and budgets, etc.;
- Development and administration of local, state, and federal grants and contracts to obtain and utilize funding for CCMP implementation, as well as administering a Conservation Grant award program;
- Research and Restoration project management, including scope development, procurement, technical input and deliverable review, and invoicing;
- Coordination and communication with user groups, professional groups, local, state, and federal agencies, and other groups relevant to CCMP development and implementation; and
- Development of public environmental education and engagement events and materials as well as maintenance of two websites, three social media platforms, and other outreach activities to support CCMP implementation.

## PARTNER PROJECT SUPPORT

Partnering cities, counties, states, non-profits, businesses, and industries implement many projects specifically included or conceptually described in the CCMP. The CHNEP office supports CCMP implementation by its partners through several activities, including:

- Funding or technical project support services to partners for project implementation;
- Partnership CCMP implementation tracking and reporting to Congress as required for continued federal funding; and
- Joint watershed planning efforts including organizing and facilitating Partnership meetings, regional Watershed and Resiliency Summits, and other joint events.

In 2024, CHNEP leveraged an additional \$72.37 million in partner-funded projects related to CCMP implementation (NEPORT 2024). CHNEP assists and facilitates partners in securing grants for CCMP related projects, including writing letters of support for partner grant applications. Assisting a partner to capture funding for activities that support CCMP implementation is as effective as securing funding directly for CHNEP. CHNEP also provides Conservation Grants that request in-kind or financial contributions from community partners to help accomplish CCMP objectives through leveraged projects.

## THE VARIED FUNDING NEEDS FOR CCMP ACTIVITIES

The Management Conference identified priority 2025-2030 CCMP Actions for funding in the 2025 CCMP. Due to the large scale, complexity, and cost of these Actions, most are multi-

partner, multi-phase, and multi-year. Each of these Actions are broken into Activities and then those Activities are translated into specific projects outlined in CHNEP's annual Work Plans and Budgets. Those projects typically require one to three years to initiate and complete. Therefore, varied funding strategies are needed in order to execute all of the actions and activities outlined in the CCMP.

## DIVERSIFYING AND AUGMENTING FEDERAL FUNDING

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CHNEP continually works toward diversifying and augmenting funding sources with a plan that includes goals, responsibilities, and milestones. CHNEP has identified the following potential strategies for diversifying and increasing CHNEP and CCMP funding support:

### STATE/REGIONAL FUNDING

- Continue working with the Florida Estuaries Alliance on a dedicated recurring State appropriation for Florida's four NEPs
- Identify and engage new state and regional government partners
- Continue to seek state funding and grant agreements for CHNEP member projects and initiatives

### CITY/COUNTY FUNDING

- Identify and engage new County and Municipal government partners
- Set up interlocal agreements with city and county governments for providing and receiving financial resources
- Request counties and cities annual to consider increasing their contributions to CHNEP

### GRANTS, DONATIONS, AND IN-KIND FUNDING

- Seek grants, sponsorship, and donations from external funders
- Identify and nurture relationships with potential donors
- Continue to investigate grant opportunities for CHNEP and our partners and post appropriate partner grant opportunities on the CHNEP website
- Continue to provide letters of support for partner grant applications

## GOALS & MILESTONES FOR FUNDING DEVELOPMENT

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CHNEP attracts and secures funding and support through strategic partnerships and alliances and has leveraged the support provided by partners to implement high-value projects and programs identified in the CCMP. Maintaining and expanding these strategic partnerships is critical to the ability of CHNEP to sustain support for the current budget and for additional growth over the coming years. Below are the goals and milestones for funding development:



## DEDICATED RECURRENT STATE FUNDING

CHNEP staff will routinely engage CHNEP-area state legislators to inform them about CCMP implementation funding needs. Specific actions and related milestones include:

- State legislative priorities formed and brought to CHNEP Policy Board Members to annually approve and share within their organizations and with their legislative staff;
- Approved state legislative priorities, with invitation to meet personally to discuss CHNEP and CCMP implementation needs, mailed to every CHNEP-area state legislative office annually; and
- In-person presentations at state legislative delegation meetings as opportunities allow.

## DEDICATED RECURRENT FEDERAL FUNDING

CHNEP staff will routinely engage CHNEP-area federal Congresspersons and Congressional staff to educate them about CCMP implementation funding needs. The specific action and related milestone are:

- Federal legislative priorities formed and brought to CHNEP Policy Board Members to annually approve and share within their organizations and with their legislative staff;
- Approved federal legislative priorities, with invitation to meet personally to discuss CHNEP and CCMP implementation needs, mailed to every CHNEP-area federal legislative office annually; and
- In-person meetings with federal legislators in D.C. annually.

## INCREASED AND EXPANDED LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING AGREEMENTS

CHNEP staff will routinely engage CHNEP-area local governments to inform them about CCMP implementation funding needs. Specific actions and related milestones include:

- Presentations to local governments as requested;
- Annual invoices to local government partners timed to their respective budget process timelines, asking them to consider contributing at a higher level;
- Annual invoices to local governments will be cc'd to their respective Policy Board members who can voice their support during the budget process; and
- Annual project fact sheets provided to local government boards and administrator to educate on the beneficial work of CHNEP and the leveraging of partnership funds.

## PRIVATE SECTOR AND INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS

CHNEP staff will routinely engage the private sector to educate them about CCMP implementation funding needs. Specific actions and related milestones include:

- Continue to promote donations online through website and social media platforms, as well as through publications such as the CHNEP magazine and annual calendar, thanking and publishing donor information per their wishes; and
- Continue to pursue sponsorships for CHNEP Summits and events.

This Finance Strategy provides a framework for funding implementation of the CHNEP CCMP to protect and restore the natural lands and waters of Central and Southwest Florida. These investments help sustain the health of ecological and human communities by producing real value in improved environmental quality and enhancements in the region's economy and quality of life.