



CHNEP Policy Committee Meeting
Thursday January 22nd, 2026, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm
Charlotte County Centennial Park
Large Multipurpose Room
1120 Centennial Blvd., Port Charlotte, FL 33953

AGENDA

1. Call to Order and Member Roll Call — Craig Hesterlee, Co-Chair
2. Agenda Additions and Deletions — Craig Hesterlee, Co-Chair
3. Public Comment on Agenda Items — Craig Hesterlee, Co-Chair
4. Management Committee Report — Melynda Brown, Management Committee Co-Chair
5. CHNEP Update — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP
6. Consent Agenda — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP & Craig Hesterlee, Co-Chair
 - a. Policy Committee September 25, 2025 Meeting Minutes
 - b. New CHNEP CAC Applicants
 - c. Updated CHNEP Monitoring Strategy
 - d. Updated CHNEP Communications and Outreach Strategy
 - e. Updated CHNEP Finance Strategy
 - f. CHNEP Amended FY26 Master Work Plan and Budget
 - g. Amended CHNEP Charlotte County MOU
7. Blue Green Mitigation Strategies and Technologies — Barry Rosen, PhD, Florida Gulf Coast University
8. Red Tide and Lake Okeechobee Management — Lenny Landau, P.E.
9. Policy Committee Member Updates — Craig Hesterlee, Co-Chair
10. Public Comment — Craig Hesterlee, Co-Chair
11. Future Meeting Dates and Topics — Craig Hesterlee, Co-Chair
 - Upcoming Meetings: May 28, 2026, & September 17, 2026
12. Adjourn — Craig Hesterlee, Co-Chair

DIRECTIONS TO OUR MEETING LOCATION

1120 Centennial Blvd, Port Charlotte, Fl 33953



Coming from the North:

1. Take I-75 S to Sumter Blvd (exit 182) in North Port.
2. Follow Sumter Blvd for 8 miles to US Hwy 41 S, then Turn left onto US Hwy 41 S
3. Follow US Hwy 41 S for 4 miles to Centennial Blvd., then Turn right onto Centennial Blvd.
4. Follow Centennial Blvd. ½ mile down, turn **LEFT** into Centennial Park/Pool Parking Lot.
5. Check in at Front Desk and they will direct you to the Large Multipurpose Room

Coming from the South:

1. Take I-75 N to Kings Hwy in Charlotte County (exit 170)
2. Use the left 2 lanes to turn left onto Kings Hwy (signs for Port Charlotte/Charlotte Sports Pk)
3. Follow for ½ mile, then Use the right 2 lanes to turn right onto Veterans Blvd.
4. Follow for 7 miles, the Turn right onto US Hwy 41 N
5. Follow for 2 miles, then Turn left onto Centennial Blvd.
6. Follow Centennial Blvd. ½ mile down, turn **LEFT** into Centennial Park/Pool Parking Lot.
7. Check in at Front Desk and they will direct you to the Large Multipurpose Room

Policy Committee meetings are in-person. If you are unable to attend in person but can participate virtually, please email Jennifer Hecker at jhecker@chnep.org or call (941) 833-6580 for us to send you a personal virtual link. If you are unable to participate in-person or virtually, please arrange or call CHNEP to help arrange an alternate to attend on your behalf (preferably a fellow elected leader or agency policymaker).

a. CALL TO ORDER AND MEMBER ROLL CALL

CHNEP Policy Committee Co-Chair will call the meeting to order and then conduct a roll call of the Policy Committee members, followed by quick introductions from CHNEP staff and any members of the public who are participating.

b. AGENDA ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

CHNEP Policy Committee Co-Chair will see if there is any Policy Committee member suggested changes to the agenda. Members will be asked to vote to approve the final meeting agenda.

c. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

CHNEP Policy Committee Co-Chair will ask if there are any persons of the public wishing to make a comment on the agenda items. If so, each person is afforded up to 3 minutes to do so.

4. MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

The Management Committee meeting was held on January 9th, 2026 and chaired by Committee Co-Chair Melynda Brown.

The Management Committee first heard a report on the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) December 4th meeting from TAC Co-Chair Arielle Taylor-Manges. TAC members were briefed by staff on and approved updates to the Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring Network's Standard Operating Procedures and Quality Assurance Protection Plan. The Committee then heard a staff presentation on the updated EPA-required CHNEP Monitoring Strategy, which was revised to align with the updated 2025 CHNEP Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan. TAC members offered some minor edits to the updated CHNEP Monitoring Strategy before reaching consensus to advise of their support of Policy Committee approval with those edits incorporated.

TAC members then heard guest speaker presentations starting with one on the *Loss of Seagrass in Matlacha Pass and the Distribution and Abundance of Macroalgae* by Dr. Eric Milbrandt of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation. Members made comments about seasonal changes of macroalgae and the need for monitoring of ammonia, which Dr. Milbrandt indicated is planned. Dr. Rachel Rotz from Florida Gulf Coast University then presented on *Understanding Nutrient Loading in the Peace River Watershed*. Members commented how these issues underscore the importance of collaboration, and the need for effective communication of the study's results to support public funding for reducing nutrient pollution and improving water quality in the region. The final guest presentation was from S. Carter Oleckna on behalf of Charlotte County and the University of Florida on *Tracking Nutrient Dynamics and Habitat Change: The Role of Participatory Science in Florida's Seagrass Meadows*. Members discussed the complexities of monitoring different algae species and the variations in data collected both from Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserve and Eyes on Seagrass monitoring programs, and the significance of timing of data collection and the potential for improved data consistency when collecting samples simultaneously. Videos of these presentations are available on the CHNEP.org TAC webpage for those interested in viewing.

The Management Committee then heard a report from Citizen's Advisory Committee Co-Chair Harry Phillips, who chaired their December 16th CAC meeting. Three new CAC applicants attended the meeting and introduced themselves to the Committee members. CAC Members were then briefed by staff on updated CHNEP Citizen's Advisory Committee Bylaws, offering minor final edits and then unanimously supported its approval at a future Policy Committee Meeting.

Staff presented the updated CHNEP Communications and Outreach Strategy with revisions to align it to the 2025 CCMP, as well as provided other clarifications and language to describe updated outreach tools and examples, improved descriptions of community partnerships, and added budget and Conservation Grant information. Members offered a minor edit and CAC members were in consensus to support Policy Committee approval of the updated CHNEP Communications and Outreach Strategy with the edit incorporated. Finally, CAC members had previously requested staff to prepare a Resource Guide document to outline all the outreach and educational resources CHNEP offers. CHNEP staff gave CAC members a copy of the new Guide and went over it with them. Staff also brought copies of many of the printed resources, which CAC members expressed appreciation for in order to share within their communities. The CAC then reviewed four Conservation Grant applications and agreed with staff recommendations to approve three for funding - as well as the staff recommendation to redirect the fourth applicant to instead apply for CHNEP event sponsorship given the nature of that request for festival funding support.

The Management Committee then went into their Committee-business agenda items, hearing the CHNEP update, the CHNEP FY26 Call for Projects and Amended FY26 Master Work Plan, and the CHNEP Finance Strategy Updates. Management Committee posed several questions about the Work Plan amendments and, once hearing staff's responses, were satisfied and unanimously voted to recommend that Policy approve the newly amended version. With regards to the updated CHNEP Finance Strategy, members agreed with staff recommended edits and made suggestions to remove "long-term" and "short-term" strategy language throughout given the varied funding needs of different projects, and to add language under State/Regional Funding about continuing to seek state funding and grant agreements. The Management Committee voted unanimously to recommend that Policy Committee approve the updated Finance Strategy with these edits. The edited versions of both the Amended FY26 Master Work Plan and CHNEP's Updated Finance Strategy are coming to this Policy Committee meeting for approval.

The Management Committee heard from Dr. Dail Laughinghouse from the University of Florida on *Blue Green Mitigation Strategies and Technologies*, the same topic as a presentation coming before the Policy Committee today. Members had no questions or comments. The Management Committee then heard from Lenny Landau on *Red Tide and Lake Okeechobee Management*, also being presented by Mr. Landau to the Policy Committee. Members discussed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) water management practices before and after Hurricane Ian and prior to implementation of LOSOM, how hydrological restoration aims to move toward more natural water management, which can improve water quality, reduce nutrient loading, and potentially lessen harmful algal blooms, and how nutrient pollution in the Caloosahatchee River has contributed to water quality problems. A member raised concerns about Lake Okeechobee being too low right now, and it needs to be treated not a reservoir but an ecosystem that supports wildlife such as snail kites. CHNEP staff highlighted that the Lake Okeechobee Tracker on CHNEP's Water Atlas is a valuable resource for tracking Lake levels and River discharge rates. Also, the Red Tide Task Force member present commented that they are working to identify gaps in scientific knowledge related to nutrients and *Karenia brevis* and are planning to issue a request for proposals to address those gaps, pending continued state funding. Technical project and member updates were then covered, and afterwards, the meeting adjourned.

This presentation will be given by Melynda Brown, Management Committee Co-Chair.

5. CHNEP UPDATE

The following represents program activity highlights since the beginning of the last Management Conference cycle to the beginning of this one.

Program Administration

- Planned and executed both the Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (8/7), Citizens Advisory Committee meeting (8/20), Management Committee meeting (9/5), and Policy Committee meeting (9/25) including lining up presenters, drafting agenda packet, updating Committee webpage, creating PowerPoints, drafting minutes, etc.
- Sent on-boarding materials to new Policy Committee member/co-chair, Craig Hesterlee, representing the EPA (new Policy Committee member), Commissioner Petrina McCutchen representing the City of Fort Meade (new Policy Committee member), Rebekah Harp representing the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council (new Management Committee member), County Manager Paul Carlisle representing Glades County (returning Management Committee), Christina Rimes representing the City of Venice (new Technical Advisory Committee member), Kris Ramon representing Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority (new Technical Advisory Committee member), Thomas Behlmer representing South Florida Water Management District (new Technical Advisory Committee member), and Ryan Ellis representing Polk County (new Technical Advisory Committee member).
- Reviewed Draft [Program Evaluation](#) Letter, providing feedback responses as requested, and received [Final Program Evaluation Letter](#) indicating CHNEP is “proficient” and will continue to be eligible to receive federal funding.
- Drafted 2026 Amended Master Work Plan and Budget, 2025 ED Annual Evaluation with combined Policy Committee Responses, and CHNEP Legislative Priorities, which were approved by CHNEP Policy Committee at 9/25 meeting.
- Welcomed new team member- Conservation Specialist, Michelle McGill who will lead on planning and representing CHNEP at outreach event. Held HR and CHNEP onboarding meetings on start date of 9/10. CHNEP updated outreach onboarding and resource documents in preparation.
- Completed annual staff appraisals and held appraisal meetings with all CHNEP staff.
- Sent fall FY26 invoice letters to CHNEP member counties and cities with the appropriate project and informational fact sheets relevant to their community.

Finance and Grants Management

- Updated the [funding opportunities fact sheet](#) and sent out historic funding opportunities notification to all CHNEP Committees about a number of special large state and federal funding opportunities of interest.
- Prepared and submitted FY25 annual End-of-Year reports for both EPA 320 and EPA IIJA grants.
- Did FDEP final report and reimbursement request, closing out FY25 grant and receiving full \$75,000 payment.
- Finalized edits to Amended FY2026 CHNEP Work Plan & Budget, these were approved by CHNEP Policy Committee at 9/25 meeting.
- FY26 Agreement for annual programmatic support funds from Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) received CHNEP's host board approval with partial execution on 10/28/25. It was then sent to SWFWMD for full execution.
- Provided Charlotte County grants and finance staff with summary of project expenses remaining for FY2025 annual projects to assist with fiscal year close out.
- Prepared and submitted Q4 Report and deliverables for FY25 Agreement for annual programmatic and project support from SWFWMD.
- FY2026 Agreement for annual programmatic support funds from Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection was finalized.

- Reviewed and approved FY25 Conservation Grant deliverables and processed final invoices.
- Letters of acknowledgement provided for the NEP Coastal Watersheds Grant opportunity for Bonefish & Tarpon Trust, Polk County, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, and Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC) and J.N. ‘Ding’ Darling National Wildlife Refuge.
- Drafted requested Letters of support for University of Central Florida, Florida Atlantic University, and Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation for EPA Region 4 Grant Funding, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation RECON and West Florida Coastal Ocean Model (WFCOM) for GCOOS and SECOORA funding, USDA Forest Service Trust for Public Land’s Florida Forest Service’s 2027 Forest Legacy grant funding for *Peace River Longleaf Pinelands* land acquisition project, and for Florida legislative funding for the Glades County NE Service Area Wastewater Treatment Plant Facility Feasibility Study.

CHNEP staff participated in the following meetings between the beginning of last CHNEP Committee cycle to the beginning of this one (8/7/25 – 12/4/25):

- ANEP External Affairs Meetings (multiple)
- ANEP Director’s Meetings (multiple)
- ANEP Communications Working Group Meetings (multiple)
- Hardee County-CHNEP Coordination Meetings (multiple)
- DeSoto County-CHNEP Coordination Meetings (multiple)
- Highlands County-CHNEP Coordination Meetings (multiple)
- Polk County-CHNEP Coordination Meetings (multiple)
- CHNEP-Central Florida Regional Planning Council Meetings (multiple)
- Charlotte County Vulnerability Assessment Monthly Meetings (multiple)
- Science & Environmental Council (SEC) Meetings (multiple)
- CHNEP Water Atlas Monthly Meetings (multiple)
- Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative Meetings (multiple)
- GOAA and Gulf Estuaries Collaboration Meetings (multiple)
- One Water Commission Monthly Meetings (multiple)
- Southwest Florida Regional Ambient Monitoring Program (RAMP) Meetings (multiple)
- WQ Monitoring Project (CCHMN) Field Audits (multiple)
- Lemon Bay Community Workshop Meetings (multiple)
- Southwest FL Estuary Restoration Team (SWERT) Meetings (multiple)
- SW FL Regional Planning Council Meetings (multiple)
- Tiki Point Project Meetings with City of Punta Gorda and FDEP (multiple)
- Silver Jackets Post-Flood Hazard Awareness Project Meetings (multiple)
- Suncoast Waterkeeper Meeting (7/3)
- CHNEP- Hendry County Vulnerability Assessment Project Meeting (8/8)
- CHNEP Meeting with Lee County Commissioner Brian Hamman (8/8)
- Myakka River Management Coordination Council (MRMCC) Meeting (8/8)
- FLERA Water Resources Committee Meeting (8/12)
- Charlotte County Finance Quarterly Business Meeting (8/22)
- Corkscrew Watershed Initiative Meeting (8/27)
- Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring Network (CCHMN) Annual Meeting (8/29)
- Florida Sea Grant Advisory & Algae Working Group Meeting (9/2)
- SFWMD Resiliency Coordination Forum (9/3)

- NEPORT IIJA Reporting Webinar Meeting (9/3)
- Resilient Florida Rulemaking Workshop Meeting (9/5)
- Florida Wildlife Corridor: Mind the Gaps Workshop Meeting (9/10)
- Hosted 2025 Southwest Florida Resiliency Summit (9/16-9/17)
- Florida Resiliency Conference (9/17-9/19)
- HOBO Data Loggers Meeting (9/18)
- Water Quality Trend Analysis Meeting (9/22)
- FY26 Technical Projects Planning Meeting (10/6)
- Wildlife in Resiliency Plans with Peace River Audubon (10/7)
- CHNEP – Cummins Cederberg Meeting (10/8)
- Bivalve-Seagrass Restoration Consortium Quarter 3 Meeting (10/10)
- SE CASC Bridging the Gap: Steering Committee Meeting (10/10)
- FDEP Acquisition and Restoration Council Meeting (10/10)
- Pine Island Flatwoods Reserve Restoration Project Meeting (10/16)
- Lake Hicpochee Project Phase II Groundbreaking Event (10/21)
- Water Atlas Partners Meeting (10/21)
- Punta Gorda City Council Meeting (presentation) (10/22)
- City of Lakeland & Polk County Coordination Meeting (10/22)
- Southwest Florida Regional Forum Meeting (10/24)
- Data & Monitoring Midyear Meeting (10/29)
- Big Waters Land Trust-Volo Foundation Reporting Meeting (10/28)
- 2025 Living Shorelines Tech Transfer Workshop (10/29-10/30)
- C-43 Water Quality Treatment & Testing Facility Project Site Visit (10/29)
- 2025 Florida One Water Summit Meeting (10/30-10/31)

CHNEP Staff Presentations

- Presented on the *CHNEP* and *CHNEP Water Atlas* to the Suncoast Reef Rovers.
- Presented on *Leveraging conventional partnerships with novel tools for holistic water quality and ecosystem management* at the 28th Biennial Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation (CERF) Conference in Richmond, VA.
- CHNEP was the Event Host for the 2025 Southwest Florida Resiliency Summit and staff presented on: *Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessments to Protect Critical Community Assets*, in SESSION 6: New Community Resiliency Initiatives in the Region.
- Presented on the work of CHNEP and co-funded project at the 10/22/25 City of Punta Gorda Council meeting.

Publications and Outreach Initiatives

- As a follow up to the 2025 Resiliency Summit in September, CHNEP shared the Summit [playlist on YouTube](#) and the updated [Southwest Florida Resiliency page](#) which now features resources from all past summits, including agendas, speaker biographies, and videos organized by tags for easier public access.
- Sent out monthly Constant Contact emails to subscribers about relevant upcoming public engagement events in the CHNEP area.
- Created a new [speaker request form](#) for those interested in having CHNEP present under a host-preferred software.
- Worked with CHNEP volunteers to host an educational outreach booth at the Wildcat Tailgate Festival, a community event held to kick off the school year in Hardee County.

- Shared educational materials with over 80 families.
- Held the Photo Contest Voting Meeting with members of the CAC to gather input on selections for the calendar, selecting final photos for the 2026 Calendar design.
- The CHNEP Citizens Advisory Committee meeting included a committee workshop that CHNEP staff planned and facilitated. The workshop was to gather member input on the Role of the CAC, CHNEP Outreach Resources, and to review proposed updates to the CAC Bylaws and the CHNEP ‘Communication and Outreach Strategy’ Documents. CHNEP followed up with members to share resources and coordinate upcoming outreach assistance with committee members.
- Hosted and organized the [2025 Southwest Florida Resiliency Summit](#) held Sept. 16th-17th, 2025.
 - Approximately 150 attendees, including members of the public, scientists, experts from industry, academia, and government with information and ideas on building increased resiliency in Central and Southwest Florida.
 - Created and facilitated interactive question and answer sessions after each panel for audience to interact with the presenters.
 - Advertised through NGOs, WGCU radio ads, and other partners leading up to the event. [Made social media posts before, during and after event](#).
 - Sent out personalized invitations to all city and county councils/commissions and managers/administrators, as well as federal and state senators and representatives.
 - Coordinated to provide Continuing Education Hours (CEHs) to professional engineers and geologists who attended the Summit. CHNEP created and filled out certificates for each of the attendees who signed up to earn CEHs and sent certificates out to those individuals to self-report their hours to the Florida Board of Professional Engineers or Florida Board of Professional Geologists.
 - News coverage: [Conferences: Safety in communities tomorrow relies on building resiliency today](#)
- Participated in [National Estuaries Week](#) across CHNEP social media, a collaborative effort led by the National Estuarine Reserves, Restore America’s Estuaries, National Estuary Programs, and National Environmental Education Foundation.
- Provided educational content at a booth at the Miakka Hootenanny in Sarasota County, FL. Over 50 kids and adults stopped by the booth to play games and learn about different fish species adapted for different environments, how to properly measure a fish, and how objects can break down into microplastics.
- Designed new educational activity involving sorting different types of everyday items into the types of microplastics they break down into to be used at future outreach events. Microplastics are a common water quality pollutant in the CHNEP area based on prior CHNEP microplastic sampling, so working to enhance education on the topic to advance our CCMP goal to improve water quality.
- Provided CHNEP educational materials, including estuary and seagrass informational posters, to Gasparilla Island State Park staff to be placed in their parking lot of the park for interpretive purposes.
- Edited and finalized CHNEP 2026 Nature Calendar design with designer. Met with printer to review scope of the project. Reviewed and approved electronic and hard-copy proofs in advance of printing and mailing.
- Refreshed and reposted CHNEP project factsheets with updated language, organizations, funding sources, and activities as outlined in the new 2025 CCMP.

Digital Outreach Insights

- 5,809 subscribers for CHNEP educational mailings
- 3,551 unique visitors and 4,742 page views of CHNEP website since last cycle
- 19 new Instagram followers for a total of 637
- 14 new Facebook followers for a total of 2,055
- YouTube: 18,090 Views (+2.1k), 107 Subscribers (+6), 368 Videos (+17)

Media/Press

- [Conferences: Safety in communities tomorrow relies on building resiliency today | WGCU PBS & NPR for Southwest Florida](#)
- [Nicole Iadevaia believes 'Water connects everything' - NewsBreak](#)
- [Opportunities for Resilience of Southwest Florida's Salt Marsh Ecosystem | US EPA](#)

This update will be given by Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP Executive Director.

6. CONSENT AGENDA

a. POLICY COMMITTEE SEPTEMBER 25, 2025 MEETING MINUTES

Review and approval of previous September 25th, 2025 Policy Committee meeting minutes.

b. NEW CHNEP CAC APPLICANTS

The CHNEP Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) is continuing to seek new applicants to fill vacancies to reach the desired equal representation across CHNEP's 10-county service area. This cycle, three applicants have applied and attended the December 16th CAC meeting (a pre-requisite to their appointment. They include Ashley Cook (Charlotte County alternate), Suzanne Lindsey (Polk County), and Steve Buczynski (Hendry County). All have completed initial application steps, and their applications are on the agenda of this Policy Committee meeting for approval.

c. UPDATED CHNEP MONITORING STRATEGY

Updates to the Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan (CCMP) were made in CHNEP committees throughout 2023-2024 meetings and the final 2025 CCMP was subsequently approved by the Policy Committee and US EPA. The US EPA indicated in its approval letter and verbally that it wanted the associated Monitoring, Communications and Outreach, and Finance Strategy appendices to be reviewed and updated as needed over the next following year. The Monitoring Strategy specifically addresses technical aspects and guidance for how partners are engaging in monitoring and data collection and analysis, as well as covers application of that data to guide management within the CHNEP area. With TAC previous input on new science and partner programs, and new technical supporting documents, CHNEP staff prepared a proposed updated Monitoring Strategy. TAC members reviewed staff edits and agreed with those already made, which included references to new studies or best management practices as well as adjustments to responsible entities overseeing various projects. Committee members proposed and came to consensus on several additional edits and then unanimously expressed their support that Policy Committee approve with those edits incorporated (the clean copy before Policy this meeting).

d. UPDATED CHNEP COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH STRATEGY

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. Audiences include all general community members throughout the 10 counties, policymakers, scientists and agency or municipality technical staff, universities, and NGOs. The CAC then went over previously reviewed edits made to the document to align with

2025 Updates to the CHNEP CCMP as well as new edits made to carry consensus items discussed at their previous CAC August Workshop throughout the document. The CAC came to consensus on several additional edits and unanimously supported Policy Committee approval of the updated CHNEP Communications and Outreach with those edits incorporated (the clean copy before Policy this meeting).

e. UPDATED CHNEP FINANCE STRATEGY

The Finance Strategy outlines the CHNEP organizational strategies for securing funding for CHNEP operations and CCMP implementation. Updates were made to align the Strategy with current best practices, the 2025 CCMP, and to reflect the varied funding needs of CCMP projects. Members agreed with staff recommended edits and added editorial suggestions to remove “long-term” and “short-term” strategy language throughout given the varied funding needs of different projects, and to add language under State/Regional Funding regarding continuing to seek state funding and grant agreements. The Management Committee then voted unanimously to recommend that Policy Committee approve the updated Finance Strategy with those edits incorporated (the clean copy before Policy this meeting).

f. CHNEP AMENDED FY26 MASTER WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

CHNEP received its FY26 federal 320 funds and also has some unspent carryover 320 funds that were not needed in their original FY25 budgeted category so are now available for projects. As a result, CHNEP issued a call for projects, mailing out to CHNEP members and County administrators. CHNEP received 19 proposed projects from 6 different counties, created evaluation criteria, and undertook an in-depth staff evaluation to prioritize the projects with regards to breadth of CCMP implementation, logistics, ability to complete in funding timeframe, etc. Based on the amount of unbudgeted FY26 320 funds budgeted and now awarded (\$703,000), as well as the previous carryover 320 funding (\$330,368), there is a total of \$1,033,368 available for new projects.

Additionally, Hendry County Vulnerability Assessment project is delayed (due to baseline VA data still being gathered and analyzed) so the \$200,000 previously budgeted for that is available to be allocated to the Pollywog Creek Stabilization Phase I Project in Hendry County. Similarly, the \$200,000 for the budgeted Lee County Vulnerability Assessment Enhancement project (that has been delayed) is available to apply to a related Lee County resiliency project to do Adaptation Plan Focus Areas 15 & 16 Stormwater Drainage Improvements and Water Quality Enhancement Projects (proposed award \$200,000).

This would accommodate CHNEP to be able to use the unbudgeted 320 funds to fund all or the vast majority of the top ranked projects from each of the six counties who submitted [SEASCAPES (Lee, proposed award of \$100,000), Warm Mineral Springs (Sarasota, proposed award of \$230,000), Lake Idyl (Polk, proposed award of \$230,000), Exceptional Ponds (Charlotte, proposed award of \$230,000), and Lakes Park (Hardee, proposed award of \$240,000)] such that each of the six counties would have a new project funded this fiscal year. [Note: naming projects in a Work Plan does not guarantee project funding but rather authorizes staff to begin conversations with those partners to explore the details of logistics, procurement, project management and other factors more thoroughly. Should issues arise with those aspects that preclude the project from meeting CHNEP funding requirements, CHNEP would bring amendments to redirect those funds to the next highest scoring project in the same county. Also, if and when the FY26 IIJA funding award comes in, this would provide \$530,800 of added funds in addition to projected IIJA carryover of \$3,869, \$368 of the remaining unallocated 320 carryover, and FY26 Programmatic Funding TBD funds still available in amount of \$3,000 for a total of \$538,037 of additional project funding to fund some of the additional submitted project proposals.]

These proposed projects are being carried into the CHNEP FY26 Master EPA320 Work Plan and Budget as named projects in lieu of the previous Clean Water Research & Restoration TBD Project(s).

Below is a list of all of the amendments being proposed this cycle in addition to adding new amendment date to cover and updating the Table of Contents based on changed section titles and new added sections.

- Updated Table 1 to include the EPA 320 and IIJA Carryover [FY25 EPA 320 (\$330,368) and IIJA (\$3,869) Carryover Funding] in Revenue section and applied that funding to Personnel and the Research and Restoration rows [making the new total FY26 revenue and expenses \$3,049,978].
- Updated Table 6 to change CHNEP Publications from \$50,000 to \$40,000 (based on actual calendar costs from this year), resulting in total changing from \$104,500 to \$94,500.
- Updated Table 7 to incorporate above described project and project funding changes, including:
 - Changed Lee County Vulnerability Assessment to Lee County Adaptation Plan Focus Areas 15 & 16 Stormwater Planning,
 - Added \$11,550 of 2024 IIJA funds to Pine Island Restoration Project and removed that same amount from Water Quality Trend Assessment and Dashboard Tool – resulting in that going from \$70,667 to \$59,117,
 - Changed Hendry County Vulnerability Assessment to Hendry County Pollywog Creek Stabilization Project in both places mentioned with funding kept the same,
 - Changed CHNEP Water Atlas Maintenance from \$87,821 to \$78,720,
 - Added Lee County SEASCAPES project in amount of \$100,000, Sarasota County Warm Mineral Springs (WMS) Habitat Restoration initiative in amount of \$230,000 and Clean Water Research & Restoration TBD in amount of \$368 to use EPA 320 FY22-25 carryover funds,
 - Added Clean Water Research & Restoration TBD funded with EPA IIJA FY22-25 carryover funding in amount of \$3,869,
 - Changed CHNEP Water Atlas Improvements from \$50,000 to \$31,697
 - Added Polk County Lake Idyl Sediment Inactivation Project in amount of \$230,000, Charlotte County Exceptional Ponds Initiative in amount of \$230,000, and Hardee Lakes Habitat Enhancement Conservation Initiative in amount of \$240,000, making new FY26 EPA 320, SWFWMD, & Local FY26 Total \$754,697 and the new FY26 Total Research & Restoration Project Budget total \$1,664,497.
- These changes were then carried through the following narrative task sections accordingly.

Management Committee thoroughly reviewed the amendments to the Work Plan and unanimously voted to recommend its approval by Policy. Note: one section was further amended subsequent to Management Committee to adjust CHNEP's organizational chart and staff position descriptions to modify the Director of Research & Restoration to a Research & GIS Manager and the Research & GIS Coordinator to a Restoration Manager to better serve the needs of the organization in managing and distributing a current tripled technical project management workload with its limited staff with two mid-level professional project managers.

g. AMENDED CHNEP CHARLOTTE COUNTY MOU

Amendments drafted collaboratively by CHNEP Executive Director and Charlotte County's Legal Department are being proposed that involve editorial revisions, as well as clarification to language throughout pertaining to ability for CHNEP and County to negotiate (on any non-legal requirements or issues that arise where there are differences between CHNEP operational needs

and standard County policies) that it is the CHNEP Executive Director that is authorized to negotiate with County on CHNEP's behalf and the County Administrator who is authorized to negotiate with CHNEP on the County's behalf. This supports the original intent of the previous approved MOU while giving the added legal clarity now determined to be needed. Additionally, language was added that Federal Financial Reports that the County was preparing will now be prepared annually to meet EPA's current requirements.

The Consent Agenda is a Policy Committee voting item, and its approval will approve all the documents and actions therein.

This presentation will be given by Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP Executive Director.

Attachments: September 25th, 2025 Policy Committee meeting minutes
CAC Applications from Ashley Cook, Suzanne Lindsey, and
Steve Buczynski
Updated CHNEP Monitoring Strategy
Updated CHNEP Communications and Outreach Strategy
Updated CHNEP Finance Strategy
CHNEP Amended FY26 Master Work Plan and Budget
Amended CHNEP Charlotte County MOU

7. BLUE GREEN MITIGATION STRATEGIES AND TECHNOLOGIES

Cyanobacteria (also called blue-green algae) are plant-like organisms that primarily live in freshwater bodies such as lakes and rivers but can also live in marine waters as well. They can quickly grow out of control, or "bloom." Some of these algal blooms can produce toxins (poisons) that make people and animals sick; thus, are called 'harmful algal blooms' (HABs). Central and Southwest Florida has been afflicted periodically with such blue green algae blooms and in response, Governor DeSantis created a [Blue Green Algae Task Force](#) of experts who met 19 times between June 2019 and June 2024 – forming [Consensus Recommendations](#). Of note from this document, it concludes "Increased delivery of nutrients to Florida's water bodies is widely recognized as the primary driver of algal proliferation and subsequent degradation of aquatic ecosystems. Major sources of nutrients include, but are not limited to, agricultural operations, wastewater treatment plants, onsite sewage disposal systems and urban storm water runoff. Legacy nutrients, i.e. nitrogen and phosphorus sequestered in soils, groundwater and sediments, contribute also to excessive nutrient loading of surface waters throughout the state. Nutrient effects, as they relate to the formation, magnitude and persistence of blue-green algae blooms in Florida's waters, are expected to be exacerbated by regional changes in land-use, associated alterations in hydrology as well as climate change, specifically increases in temperature and pronounced variability in precipitation patterns." While most of the recommendations focused on proactive strategies to prevent the increased delivery of nutrients from human sources, there was also an acknowledgement on the broad suite of promising "innovative technologies that could aid in the cleanup and mitigation of harmful algae blooms" with a recommendation to invest in a "diverse portfolio" of them that are "cost-effective, environmentally-safe, and scalable."

The CHNEP Policy Committee added a new activity to the 2025 [CHNEP Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan](#) (CCMP): Water Quality 5.2 to "Reduce Harmful Algal Blooms – Support development of methods for early identification of HABs, as well as best practices and technologies to reduce or mitigate their harmful environmental, social, and economic impacts." This presentation will be sharing some of the latest research findings regarding cyanobacteria mitigation techniques, including what has been found to work, not work, and some

technologies that are promising but need more research to ensure they are effective at controlling blue green algae as well as to ensure them being cost-effective, environmentally-safe, and scalable.

This presentation will be given by Dr. Barry Rosen, Professor in the Department of Ecology & Environmental Studies at Florida Gulf Coast University who is an expert in blue-green algae blooms.

8. RED TIDE AND LAKE OKEECHOBEE MANAGEMENT

Karenia brevis is a microscopic dinoflagellate alga that commonly causes red tide harmful algae blooms on the Gulf Coast of Florida. These algae can produce brevetoxins, which often harm marine life, kill fish and release airborne aerosols that irritate human respiratory systems. The red tide event that lasted from October 2017 to January 2019 had a huge economic toll on the region, with an [economic study](#) putting the losses at \$2.7 billion total. As mentioned above, CHNEP members have added Water Quality 5.2 to “Reduce Harmful Algal Blooms – Support development of methods for early identification of HABs, as well as best practices and technologies to reduce or mitigate their harmful environmental, social, and economic impacts” to the 2025 CHNEP CCMP.

Lake Okeechobee discharges/releases to the Caloosahatchee River are governed by *the Lake Okeechobee Service Operating Manual (LOSOM)*. A recent published [scientific journal article](#) co-authored by the presenter Lenny Landau, CHNEP staff, and others demonstrated that the loading (pollutant concentration and volume of water) from the Caloosahatchee into the Gulf is the highest of area rivers and has been found to have contributed to longer, more severe red tide events. It underscored how increased Nitrogen contributes to Red Tide and how inversely, decreased Nitrogen reduces red tide (see [article fact sheet](#)). This presentation is to share updated research findings related to the recently adopted and implemented LOSOM protocols and possible benefits to reducing conditions favorable for long, severe red tide events.

This presentation will be given by Lenny Landau, a retired engineer and data analysis guru working to find solutions for improving water quality and reducing harmful algae blooms.

9. POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Each member will have time to update the Committee on projects and issues pertaining to the protection and restoration of natural resources in the CHNEP area. This time also serves as an opportunity for members to make general announcements or discuss other topics of interest to Committee members.

Policy Committee Co-Chair Craig Hesterlee will be leading and facilitating this discussion.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT

Each participating member of the public is afforded up to 3 minutes total to speak at this time.

11. FUTURE MEETING DATES AND TOPICS

Upcoming CHNEP Policy Committee meetings in 2026 will be held on May 28, 2026 & September 17, 2026, in the same location as this meeting. Please hold these dates on your calendar, with other details including the agenda being sent via email at least one week in advance. If you have ideas for future meeting topics, please send to jhecker@chnep.org.

12. ADJOURN