

CHARLOTTE HARBOR NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM
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January 14, 2019

Governor Ron DeSantis
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

RE: Executive Order 19-12 (Achieving More Now for Florida's Environment)

Dear Governor DeSantis:

I am writing to convey the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program's (CHNEP) strong support and offer of assistance for the initiatives outlined in your Executive Order. The Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program is a non-regulatory collaborative partnership of 40+ entities working to protect and restore resources from Venice to Bonita Springs to Winter Haven, FL. We are comprised of local, state and federal govt. representatives, as well as private industry and non-governmental organizations, which come together to find consensus on solutions grounded in the best available science. Because of our ability to work with the private sector and with community organizations and volunteers, we are able to significantly stretch the limited governmental funds we receive – achieving \$19 of restoration for every dollar of federal funding support. Below are some of the specific ways we can help advance the goals and efforts outlined in your Executive Order.

Everglades Restoration

The CHNEP was a participant and proud sponsor of the recent 34th Everglades Coalition Conference, as we encompass the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary and serve as an Everglades Science Coordination Group Member on the interagency team working on Everglades Restoration. The CHNEP strategic plan for restoring water resources and fish and wildlife habitat in our region, which was formed by our governing body of local, state and federal governmental officials, specifically enumerates working on Everglades Restoration as a priority.

As such, we have specifically supported the construction of the C-43 Reservoir for many years and this past year, pressed the South Florida Water Management District leadership to permit us to plan and facilitate a community workshop with top scientists to identify and discuss opportunities for water quality enhancements and projects relating to ensuring water coming into and thru the Reservoir is sufficiently cleansed. We have the capacity to be a trusted neutral party to successfully implement this much needed step towards moving that effort forward.

Community Resiliency

The CHNEP has been engaged in issues relating to responding to climate stressors such as sea level rise for over a decade. Our work on community adaptation planning and resiliency resulting in the City of Punta Gorda Adaptation Plan adopted in 2009, which we now assist in the implementation of. We have done extensive studies to inventory the best available science on what changes in sea level, temperature, precipitation, increased storms, and other factors are likely to occur and how our communities can better prepare for the future.

This past year, we contracted technical experts to take agreed upon scientific data to model projected habitat and vegetation changes, to create a forward-looking conservation vision – saving time and money with regards to restoration by directing it to where it will be most likely to be successful given future conditions, and outlining additional opportunities for protection and restoration to aid habitat migration. These maps are also important to our local governmental members in helping them anticipate areas of inundation for their transportation and water infrastructure planning. Please know that we are a knowledgeable resource and agent by which coastal resiliency efforts can be strengthened in Southwest Florida.

Water Quality

The CHNEP is very active in the water quality and hydrological restoration arena. We conduct water quality sampling, consolidate all data onto a publicly available database and website, as well as do a number of projects that cleanse and move water from where it is harmful to where it is beneficial. Additionally, as a former member of the FDEP Statewide Stormwater Technical Advisory Committee and having worked on state and federal water policy for more than a decade, I have had the opportunity to work on a variety of good water quality proposals but could have a substantial impact in improving water quality if they were finalized and adopted – such as updated stormwater treatment minimum standards.

The CHNEP routinely uses our consensus approach to providing valuable input and assistance to the State on water quality improvement initiatives, such as prioritization of pollutant limit and clean-up plan development for the most pressing Outstanding Florida Waters in our area that are no longer meeting state water quality standards and which the community recognizes as degraded due to controllable factors. With additional resources, we can develop Reasonable Assurance clean-up plans for these waters, based on the best available science and with the buy-in and agreement of the stakeholders in the region.

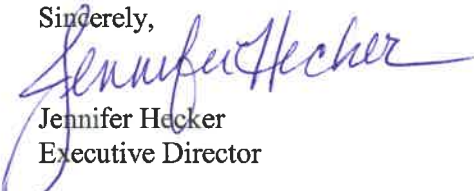
Harmful Algae Blooms

The CHNEP has identified combatting harmful algae blooms (HABs) as a priority for the collective partnership, especially given the severe red tide and blue-green algae blooms we have seen in recent years in our region. Not only are we working with our partners to create a comprehensive water quality monitoring plan, but also have partnered with research entities like Florida Gulf Coast University to test new technologies to more rapidly respond, contain and remediate them. Additionally, we are using natural-system approaches such as seagrasses plantings and created oyster reefs to filter the water and reduce the nutrient pollution that can fuel such algae outbreaks. We also have established successful processes and plans to expand this effort with additional funding support.

In closing, estuary restoration, just as with restoration efforts of the Everglades and the springs, involves planning and executing multi-year projects. Similarly, timely progress cannot be made and sustained without recurrent dedicated state funding support. Relying on annual appropriations, as we currently do for estuary restoration, results in inefficiencies and delays. We request your support to provide a source of consistent recurring funding to Florida's four National Estuary Programs, so we can leverage those funds to obtain private contributions and more efficiently and quickly implement estuary restoration projects. We eagerly look forward to working with you to protect and restore these critical water resources.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these comments, and please do not hesitate to contact me at 941-575-3392 or jhecker@chnep.org to discuss further.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Hecker
Executive Director

Cc Secretary Noah Valenstien, Florida Department of Environmental Protection