



CHNEP Policy Committee Meeting
Friday May 28th 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 Introductions — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
2. Agenda Additions or Deletions — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
3. Public Comment on Agenda Items — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
4. Management Committee Report — Melynda Brown, Co-Chair
5. CHNEP Update — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP
6. Consent Agenda — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
 - a. Policy Committee January 22, 2026 Meeting Minutes
 - b. CHNEP Citizens Advisory Committee Applicant Ms. Courtney Darling
 - c. CHNEP Citizens Advisory Committee Bylaws Updates
7. CHNEP FY27 Work Plan and Budget — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP
8. Innovative Solutions in Water Supply — Kristine Morris, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
9. Leveraging Wetlands as a Multi-Benefit One Water Tool for Water Supply and Water Quality Enhancement — Allison Tritschler, Jacobs
10. Policy Committee Member Updates & Discussion — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
11. Public Comment — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
12. Future Meeting's Topics, Location and Date — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
 - a. Upcoming Meetings: September 17, 2026, January 21, 2027, May 20, 2027, & September 16, 2027
13. Adjourn — Elizabeth Sweigert, 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

In-person Policy Committee meetings have resumed.
*If you are unable to attend in person, please email Jennifer Hecker at jhecker@chnep.org
or call (941) 833-6580 a week or more in advance of the meeting so an alternate method
of participation or representative can be arranged to attend. Thank you.*

1. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

The CHNEP Policy Committee Co-Chair will call the meeting to order and then members will introduce themselves, followed by CHNEP staff and any members of the public who are participating.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

If any Policy Committee member would like to make an addition or deletion to the agenda, this item is the time to suggest such.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Each participating member of the public is afforded up to 3 minutes total to speak on agenda topics only at this point in the meeting.

4. MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

The Management Committee meeting was held on May 8th, 2026 and chaired by Committee Co-Chair Melynda Brown. The Management Committee first heard a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) report from TAC Co-Chair Mark Walton, who chaired the April 9th, 2026 TAC meeting. TAC Co-Chair elections were held, and the committee voted unanimously for Stefan Kaley from the City of North Port to serve as the new Co-Chair. TAC members heard a presentation from Betty Staugler, the NOAA Harmful Algae Bloom liaison from Florida Sea Grant, on the Nutrients & Red Tide State of the Science Symposium Highlights. The April 2025 symposium brought together experts from academia, government, and regional organizations to assess the current knowledge on nutrients and their role in Florida red tide events. The findings were compiled into a white paper outlining key insights, research priorities, and recommendations to guide strategic planning and decision making for Florida's Harmful Algae Bloom Task Force and related efforts. Members discussed coordination between federal and state HAB task forces, applying findings locally (such as with the Charlotte Harbor Algae working group and local governments), studying deep well injection inputs, and whether red tide prediction models are ready for emergency use.

Dr. Richard Whitman, the Chief Science Officer for Heal Our Harbor, presented on the Integrated Microbial Source Tracking and Hydrometeorologic Controls on Fecal Indicator Bacteria in Upper Charlotte Harbor Canal Systems. This study was conducted through a volunteer-driven water quality monitoring program in canal openings connected to Charlotte Harbor. Members discussed bird bacteria sources, the impact of rainfall on both bacteria levels and oyster populations, bacterial beach closures, and the Total Maximum Daily Load and Basin Management Action Plan processes that take natural background loads into account.

The next presentation was on the CHNEP Water Atlas New Features and Tools given by Sarina Barnard, CHNEP's Research & GIS Coordinator. Recent improvements include new map layers, updated design and content of volunteer monitoring pages, updates to the Lake Okeechobee (Lake O) & Caloosahatchee Estuary Tracker that reflects the new Lake Okeechobee Service Operating Manual lake management bands and ecological envelopes as well as distinguishes Lake Okeechobee discharge at S-77 from the combined basin discharge at S-79, new parameters including *Enterococcus* spp. and True Color on Water Quality Contour Maps, upgraded charts on waterbody pages, new map-based stream levels & flows tool with interactive charts displaying real-time level and flow data on river pages, and expanded Basin pages that include a plethora of data and information.

The Management Committee then heard a Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) report from CAC Co-Chair Aaron Zimmermann, who chaired the April 22nd, 2026 CAC meeting, and was nominated and re-elected to serve a second term as Co-Chair by a unanimous vote. The CAC members met a new CAC applicant to represent DeSoto County, Ms. Courtney Darling – whose application is before the Policy Committee for approval at this meeting. The CAC reviewed four Conservation Grant applications and agreed with staff recommendations to fully fund a Community-Based Water Quality Monitoring proposal from the Calusa Waterkeeper organization and partially fund the 21st Avenue Cul-de-Sac to Canal Restoration by Future Forestry. Two other applications were not funded due to the budgeted FY26 Conservation Grant funds now being fully expended and due to the fact that those projects are located on private property and not under a public conservation easement.

Next, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida's Senior Environmental Policy Advisor, Amber Crooks, presented *New Data Supporting Panther Conservation and Connectivity*. The presentation focused on coordinated efforts to protect Florida panthers and the large-scale contiguous habitat they depend upon by improving habitat connectivity and integrating corridors into transportation and land-use planning. The member discussion focused on the importance of collaboration in conservation planning, noting that wildlife crossings are effective and expressed their strong support for FDOT's leadership and the I-4 wildlife overpass. Additionally, there was discussion around the limitations of motion activated car lights and of outdated Florida panther population data that creates uncertainty around their long-term viability with continued habitat loss.

The CAC then heard a presentation given by Earth Tech Environmental's Church Roberts titled *Identifying Roadkill Hotspots and Reducing Roadkill Numbers at the Local Level*. This presentation highlighted that human road networks significantly harm wildlife by fragmenting habitats, disrupting movement, and causing frequent collisions with vehicles. Members discussed using roadkill tracking apps to improve data collection to understand where added mitigation measures are needed. The Committee then engaged in a Living with Wildlife CAC Discussion focused on improving public education and engagement to reduce human-wildlife conflict and support safer coexistence between people and wildlife. Members shared real-world challenges such as habitat loss from development, public misunderstandings about wildlife, and inconsistent access to prevention tools. Overall, the Committee expressed an interest in developing a rack card that would take people to a webpage where they could get further resources and information. In response, CHNEP staff will be developing some prototypes and mock-up to bring back to the Committee for further discussion in developing this joint educational campaign.

The Management Committee went on to hear the CHNEP and technical projects updates and the CHNEP FY27 Work Plan and Budget. After the FY27 Work Plan and Budget breakdown, members offered minor edits to the Work Plan, including to update FY26 to FY27 in Table 1, to remove SWFWMD as a funding contributor in the FY26 EPA 320 section of Table 7, and to correct the spelling of Aaron Zimmermann's name on page 5. A member asked whether there was need to put more funds to reserve given that it is at the one-year operations only minimum now (noting that other NEPs do not have that reserve amount) and inquired if those funds should instead go to projects. Ms. Hecker explained that given the continued funding uncertainties, climbing annual operations costs and other factors, that the current reserve amount and goal of having enough for one year operations only is insufficient to ensure operational stability long-term. She added that it takes more than a year to be able to pivot to go after, obtain, and be able to utilize new grant funding to make up for funding shortfalls. Other members were asked if they had any further comment on adding money to reserve, to which they indicated they did not - with the exception of the US EPA, who later commended CHNEP for having been able to put a year's worth of current operational funding into its reserve thus far. A member moved to recommend approval of the Draft

FY27 Work Plan and Budget for Policy Committee approval with the incorporation of the three minor edits suggested, and the recommendation passed unanimously by all of the Committee members. The revised FY27 Work Plan and Budget is coming before the Committee for consideration at this meeting.

The Management Committee heard from Ms. Kristine Morris from the Florida Department of Environment Protection on water demands in Florida and how those demands are met with traditional and non-traditional sources while still protecting natural resources – a presentation that Policy Committee will hear at this meeting. Members discussed the development of data centers and water use permits, regional water supply plans developed by the Water Management Districts, and methods for municipalities incorporate the Florida Water Star program into a land development code or requiring Florida Green Building Certification for new developments.

The Management Committee then heard from Allison Tritschler, from Jacobs Engineering, on *Leveraging Wetlands as a Multi-Benefit One Water Tool for Water Supply and Water Quality Enhancement* – a presentation that Policy Committee will also hear at this meeting. Members discussed groundwater recharge wetlands, the mechanisms that produce ammonia, and innovative technology to try to eliminate PFAS forever chemicals. Finally, the member updates were shared and the meeting was adjourned.

Management Committee Co-Chair Melynda Brown will be presenting this item.

5. CHNEP UPDATE

The following represents program activity highlights since the beginning of the Winter. The following represents organizational activities and technical project management highlights since the beginning of the previous Management Conference cycle to the beginning of this one.

Program Administration

- Planned and executed the Technical Advisory Committee meeting (12/4), Citizens Advisory Committee meeting and field trip (12/16), Management Committee meeting (1/9), and Policy Committee meeting (1/22) including coordinating with presenters, preparing materials and technical documents for committee review, drafting agenda packets, updating the Committee webpages, creating PowerPoint presentations, drafting minutes and summaries, uploading meeting recordings, and sending out follow-up emails.
- The Director of Research and Restoration was restructured to a Research & GIS Manager and the Research & GIS Coordinator to a Restoration Manager position with Policy Committee approval at their last meeting. Both positions are currently advertised (<https://www.governmentjobs.com/jobs/5210961-0/chnep-research-gis-manager> and <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/charlottecountyfl/jobs/5258940/restoration-manager>).
- Welcomed and sent on-boarding materials to four new Policy Committee members, Commissioner Trish Petrosky representing Lee County, Commissioner Tal Siddique representing Manatee County, Councilwoman Diana Giraldo representing the City of Fort Myers, and Commissioner Demetrius Petrow representing the City of North Port, one new Management Committee member, Boyd Lawrence, Planning Director for and representing the City of Punta Gorda, and three new Citizens Advisory Committee members: Ashley Cook, an alternate for Charlotte County, Suzanne Lindsey, a member for Polk County, and Steve Buczynski, a member for Hendry County. In addition, an application from Courtney Darling was received to join the Citizens Advisory Committee

- (CAC) as a representative of DeSoto County. She will attend the April meeting, with her application then going to Policy Committee for approval.
- Drafted Spring budget reminder letters to all CHNEP partners (counties and cities) to ensure consideration of respective dues' amount in their respective FY27 budgets.
 - The CHNEP Monitoring, Finance, and Communications & Outreach Strategy documents (support documents for CHNEP 2025 CCMP), were approved at the January 2026 Policy Committee meeting. The Monitoring Strategy was reviewed by the Technical Advisory Committee, the Communications Strategy by the Citizen's Advisory Committees, and the Finance Strategy by the Management Committee, with their input incorporated into the final drafts which were presented. After receiving final approval, the CHNEP Monitoring, Finance, and Communications & Outreach Strategy documents were submitted to US EPA.
 - The amended CHNEP – Charlotte County MOU, having previously been approved by the Policy Committee in January, was approved by the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners at their February Commission meeting. It now has been fully executed and is expected to be fully executed and recorded in March.
 - Updated all federal, state, county and city contact lists to reflect current elected leaders in CHNEP area, as well as their relevant staff. The new hardcopy CCMPs were mailed out to all federal legislators in the CHNEP area. Additionally, FY27 programmatic appropriations forms were submitted online to Congressmen Steube, Franklin, and Donalds, as well as Senator Scott and Moody's offices.
 - Attended ANEP Spring Meetings in Washington D.C. & virtual EPA/NEP Workshop. Met with all CHNEP federal legislative offices, with all CHNEP Congresspersons' supporting NEP funding. Four (Congressmen Buchanan, Donalds, Steube and Soto) signed onto the House funding sign on letter and Congressman Franklin (who sits on House Appropriations Committee) submitted our programmatic funding request.

Finance and Grants Management

- Updated the [funding opportunities fact sheet](#) and sent out historic funding opportunities notification to all CHNEP Committees about several special large state and federal funding opportunities of interest.
- Held FY25 Close Out Finance Meeting with County grants staff.
- Received the Notice of Award for the FY2026 EPA 320 funds which was approved by the Charlotte County BCC at their meeting in January.
- Prepared and submitted invoice, cover letter, and backup documentation for reimbursement for FY2025 CHNEP Staff Support Task, funded through SWFWMD Cooperative Agreement.
- Prepared and submitted invoice, cover letter, and backup documentation for reimbursement for FY2025 CCHMN Project Task, funded through SWFWMD Cooperative Agreement.
- Received FY26 grant agreement with SWFWMD approved by Charlotte County and fully executed.
- Received FY26 grant agreement with FDEP, which was approved by Charlotte County and fully executed.
- Submitted quarterly report and deliverables for FY26 FDEP grant for CHNEP Staff Support.
- Reviewed and approved quarterly invoice from Lee County for Lower Charlotte Harbor Water Quality Monitoring project.

- Processed Change Order to the Lee County Natural Resources agreement for the Lower CCHMN Water Quality Monitoring project to include full project and account string.
- Received, reviewed, and processed updated Quarter 1 invoices for CHNEP FY26 Water Atlas Maintenance and Improvements project.
- Reviewed and approved invoices for shipments and deliveries of CHNEP 2026 Nature Calendar.
- Received and processed all annual dues payments for member counties and cities.
- Processed all private donations through checks and PayPal and updated the FY26 tracking spreadsheet as needed.

Meetings

- 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)
- Manatee County-CHNEP Coordination Meetings (monthly)
- Glades County-CHNEP Coordination Meetings (monthly)
- 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)
- One Water Commission Monthly Meetings (multiple)
- Pine Island Flatwoods Project Meeting (CHNEP-Lee County) (multiple)
- CHNEP – City of North Port Warm Mineral Springs Habitat Restoration Project Meetings (multiple)
- Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners Meetings (multiple)
- Lee County SEASCAPES Project Team Meetings (multiple)
- Lee County Adaptation Action Plan Focus Areas 15 & 16 Meetings (multiple)
- Bivalve-Seagrass Restoration Consortium Meetings (multiple)
- CHNEP-Hendry County Pollywog Creek Stabilization Project Meetings (multiple)
- Post-Flooding Hazard Awareness Team Meetings (multiple)
- SFWMD Resiliency Coordination Forum (12/3)
- CCMP Printing Meeting (12/9)
- Back to Business: What's Next in Federal Policy Webinar (12/11)
- CHNEP 2026 Outreach Schedule Meeting (12/15)
- Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council Meeting (SWFRPC) (12/18)
- Environmental Advisory Committee Meeting (1/13)
- SE CASC Bridging the Gap: Steering Committee Meeting (1/23)
- Picayune Strand CERP Project Ribbon-cutting Event (1/28)
- Everglades Coalition Conference (1/28-1/30)
- FDEP Quarterly Resiliency Forum (2/4)
- CHNEP – Tampa Bay Estuary Program CAC Collaboration Meeting (2/5)
- CHNEP – Charlotte County MOU Meeting (2/9)

- CHNEP – Audubon WET Tool & Synergy Discussion Meeting (2/9)
- Heal Our Harbor – CHNEP Water Atlas Meeting (2/11)
- Peace River Counties Collaborative Discussion Meeting (2/17)
- CHNEP, Punta Gorda, Trust for Public Land and Big Waters Land Trust Meeting (2/17)
- SWERT Steering Committee Meeting (2/20)
- Water Quality Trends RFP Review & Revision Meeting (2/23)
- NEP Program Refresher Webinar Meeting (2/23)
- Peace River Collaborative Initiative Meeting (2/25)
- CHNEP – UF Sea Grant Meeting (2/27)
- CHNEP-EPA CCHMN and CHNEP Strategy Documents Meeting (3/2)
- CHNEP Data Sharing Discussion Meeting (3/6)
- CHNEP-FSSC Program Feedback Session (3/6)
- SE CASC Bridging the Gap Workshop (3/10-3/11)
- CHNEP-EPA CCHMN QAPP Meeting (3/23)
- Sport Fish Coastal Ponds Team Meeting (3/25-3/26)
- Charlotte County Check-In Meeting (3/27)
- FDEP SOPs for Water and Groundwater Sampling & Meter Testing Meeting (3/31)

Presentations

- Presented CHNEP-funded *Polk County Vulnerability Assessment Flooding Models and Visualization Tools* together with speakers from Polk County and the project consultant at the SFWMD Resiliency Coordination Forum.
- Presented the *CHNEP Water Atlas: An Interactive Estuaries Report Card* at the South Florida Water Management District's 2026 Visiting Scientist Webinar series.
- Presented *Leveraging Long-Term Water Quality Data and Partnerships for Assessment of Charlotte Harbor* at the University of Florida (UF) Water Institute Symposium in Gainesville, FL.
- Provided *CHNEP Water Atlas Training* to Heal Our Harbor's Charlotte Harbor Ambassador Training (CHAT) program.

Publications and Outreach Initiatives

- Sent out monthly Constant Contact emails to subscribers about relevant upcoming public engagement events in the CHNEP area.
- Created monthly newsletters, highlighting opportunities to celebrate, volunteer, and learn with our partners in environmental events and festivals throughout the CHNEP area. Updated the newsletter to now include links for directions to event locations so viewers can easily map the distance as they wish.
- Created multiple social media posts to share on Instagram and Facebook.
- Finalized the FY26 Outreach Event Calendar, ensuring that CHNEP staff will attend one outreach event in each of the 10 counties throughout the year. Began applying, registering, and contacting volunteers for upcoming outreach events.
- Reviewed all four Conservation Grant applications submitted by Dec. 1 deadline, drafted staff deliverable and funding recommendations for each project, which were brought to the Dec. 16th CAC meeting for review, comment, and any other suggestions, and sent award emails in January to the three applicants receiving Conservation Grant funding.
- Approved a funding amount of \$5,000.00 to Keep Lee County Beautiful to engage volunteers across Lee County to remove litter and debris from shorelines, waterways, parks, and neighborhoods.

- Approved an amount of \$3,315.00 to Sarasota Bay Watch to provide additional educational materials to an array of students attending the marine camps to learn more about marine stewardship with the help of engaging hands-on activities, at no cost to the students.
- Awarded an amount of \$8,971.54 to Calusa Land Trust to remove invasive plants/trees, trash, and debris to restore their newly acquired property to its native habitat to maintain the sensitive historical and ecological assets of the land.
- Attended the [Water, Wings, and Wild Things Festival](#) at Circle B Bar Reserve in Polk County. Over 180 second graders along with their chaperones visited the CHNEP booth to learn about bird diversity related to flight and wingspan. Also, compiled notes following the Water, Wings, and Wild Things and Wings Over Water Festivals to better improve upon educational delivery for the future and noted successes and shortcomings specific to each event.
- Attended the [Wings Over Water Festival](#) at Harns Marsh Preserve in Lee County. Over 150 kids and adults visited the CHNEP booth to test their knowledge of birds native to Florida. 2026 Nature Calendars and a birding checklist for the preserve were handed out, with CCMP brochures, Kids Activity Books, Harbor Happenings, and Lee County Vulnerability Fact Sheets made available to visitors as well.
- Attended the 39th Annual Civilian Conservation Corps Festival at Highlands Hammock State Park where we interacted with close to 100 visitors to test their bird knowledge and share information and resources about CHNEP projects occurring in Highlands County and the Peace River Basin related to water quality.
- Corresponded with organizers of the 24th Annual Burrowing Owl Festival to provide a \$500 sponsorship in lieu of attending the event.
- Continued to research and invite potential candidates for the Citizens Advisory Committee.
- Hosted the Annual Sustainable Kids Fishing Clinic at the Arcadia Rodeo. Over 30 kids traveled from station to station learning about stewardship, habitat and conservation, knot tying, and casting to receive a free Fish Florida rod & tackle box along with a CHNEP goodie bag.
- Compiled the following materials for distribution at the Everglades Coalition Conference: Caloosahatchee River Basin Water Quality Status Report, Seagrass in Caloosahatchee River Basin Factsheet, Lake Okeechobee Factsheet, CHNEP Water Atlas General Factsheet, CHNEP Water Atlas: Lake Okeechobee & Caloosahatchee Estuary Tracker QR Code, and more.
- Registered for the 2026 League of Environmental Educators in Florida (LEEF) Conference: *Wakulla Wild: From Springs to Shore*. It will be an opportunity to share best practices in PreK12 education, spark new ideas, network with other environmental educators, and discover exciting new research.
- Registered for CHNEP outreach staff to attend upcoming 2026 League of Environmental Educators in Florida Conference being held at Wakulla Environmental Institute.
- Continued to foster engagement with our work through social media campaigns and the sharing of events for [I Heart Estuaries](#), the [Great Backyard Bird Count](#), and [World Wetlands Day](#). We also highlighted the work [Calusa Land Trust](#) is actively completing with the help of funding from a CHNEP Conservation Grant.
- Final edits of the updated Communication & Outreach Strategy, based on feedback from the December CAC meeting, were approved at the January 2026 Policy Committee meeting.

- Presented final updates to the CHNEP CAC Bylaws at the December CAC meeting and all final revisions were then approved by the Committee.
- Printed out the “[CHNEP Resources Packet](#),” along with relevant factsheets, funding opportunities, a save the date for upcoming summits and more. CAC members had previously expressed the need for printed materials that they can easily distribute in their communities, so we ensured to provide these materials to them.
- Updated the Lake Okeechobee Fact Sheet to include the new and improved [Lake Okeechobee & Caloosahatchee Estuary Tracker](#) on the CHNEP Water Atlas, as well as created a flyer with information and a QR code to the Tracker to take to the Everglades Coalition Conference.
- Updated project factsheets related to county Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessments and Adaptation Action Area Plans for the following counties: DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Highlands, Manatee, and Sarasota. Navigate [here](#) and select the “Project Fact Sheets” tab to view the updated factsheets for the AAA’s and CVA’s.
- Drafted new project factsheets for upcoming research and restoration projects funded by EPA 320 and IJJA monies, including: Lee County Adaptation Plan Focus Areas 15&16, Yucca Pens Hydrological Restoration, Hendry County Pollywog Creek Stabilization, Lee County SEASCAPES Project, Sarasota County Warm Mineral Springs Habitat Restoration Initiative, Polk County Lake Idyl Sediment Inactivation Project, and Charlotte County Exceptional Ponds Initiative.

Digital Outreach Insights/Media

- Updated the [Conservation Grants](#) page with upcoming deadlines, information about how to apply, and updated the application form itself.
- Updated the mobile view of Committee pages to be more mobile-user friendly and navigable.
- Uploaded the updated Monitoring, Finance, and Communications & Outreach Strategy Documents to [The Plan that Guides Us page](#) following their final approval by CHNEP Policy Committee.
- Uploaded the final approved FY26 Master Work Plan and the 2026 Nature Calendar to the [Resources and Publications](#) page.
- Updated the [Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment pages](#) by adding new factsheets and changing the language to reflect which counties have moved onto the next step in the CVA process: Adaptation Action Area Plans.
- Created a [hidden logo page](#) that houses different CHNEP logo images that project partners can reference and utilize when developing signage or other publications.
- 5,452 subscribers for CHNEP educational mailings
- 2,466 unique visitors and 3,209 page views of CHNEP website since last cycle
- 10 new Instagram followers for a total of 649
- 25 new Facebook followers for a total of 2,078
- YouTube: 19,719 Views, 115 Subscribers, and 360 Videos

Technical Projects

- In addition to the items featured earlier on the agenda, other research and/or restoration projects (or phases of projects) recently completed or currently underway with CHNEP EPA IJJA FY22-25, EPA 320 FY22-25, and EPA 320 FY26 funds. A brief overview will be given on project progress since the previous meeting cycle. Project fact sheets are available on the CHNEP website: <https://www.chnep.org/resources>.

Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP Executive Director, will be presenting the CHNEP Update.

6. CONSENT AGENDA

a. POLICY COMMITTEE JANUARY 22, 2026 MEETING MINUTES

This Consent Agenda item is to offer any potential revisions and approve final meeting minutes from the previous January 22, 2026 Policy Committee meeting.

b. CHNEP CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE APPLICANT MS. COURTNEY DARLING

This Consent Agenda item is to approve a new Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) applicant Ms. Courtney Darling who has applied to serve as a representative for DeSoto County on the committee. Ms. Courtney Darling works in DeSoto County for the Florida Conservation Group (FCG), whom she has been an employee of 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. She would like to help facilitate partnerships between landowners and restoration initiatives. She believes that by allowing her to serve as a liaison between producers, conservation agencies, and community stakeholders, she could help integrate working lands conservation into estuary protection strategies to promote healthy headwaters and resilient coastal ecosystems. Contributions would also 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. Ms. Darling attended the April 22, 2026 CHNEP CAC meeting and has therefore, met the pre-requisite for her application to be considered for approval by the CHNEP Policy Committee this cycle.

c. CHNEP CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE BYLAWS UPDATES

This Consent Agenda item is to consider recent bylaws updates that staff recommended and the CHNEP Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) approved to their bylaws at their December 2025 meeting for approval. These changes are mainly to update name, service area, committee representation and committee processes to reflect current organization practice established and approved prior when the CAC was reformed several years back. These bylaw edits and additions will bring the bylaws up to date.

These specific changes include:

- Under Article I, updated name to Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership.
- Under Article II Section 1 Purpose: we updated description of CHNEP, added Highlands, Glades, and Hendry in the list of counties in the CHNEP area, updated the CHNEP name to Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership, removed making recommendations to CHNEP Policy and implementing the CCMP from CAC purpose and added “provide public input to the Management Conference on public education and participation activities” and “assist in the development and implementation of public outreach and engagement events.”
- Under Article II Section 2 Accomplishing the Purpose: we revised “host” to “participate” in CAC meeting and “recommend items” to “provide input for the Management and Policy Committee to consider. Revised “recommend, organize and facilitate grants” to “provide input into CHNEP Conservation Grant

applications, as well as disseminate and assist others to apply for them”. Also, removed “review and make recommendations for the CHNEP annual work plan” from this section.

- Under Article III Membership Section 1 CAC Composition: we streamlined language and added “two member representatives and one alternate who either live or work in the CHNEP Area will be selected from each of the 10 counties CHNEP serves.”
- Under Article III Section 2 Criteria for Membership: added “are willing to serve on the Committee for a four year period.” And removed “are willing to serve on a committee of the CAC”.
- Under Article III Section 3 Classes of Membership: added “ voting members are appointed by the Policy Committee with full voting rights. Nominations may be made by any voting member of the CAC. Applications to serve on the Committee will list each of the counties in the CHNEP that the applicant works or lives in, as well as a corresponding Policy Committee member reference for those counties. Applicants should reach out to establish communication with their corresponding Policy Committee member reference in advance.” Also modified second bullet to reach “Voting members who have not attended two consecutive regular meetings of the CAC (excepting extenuating circumstances)”. Finally in that section, added “the Policy Committee has the authority to remove any member of the CAC for failing to uphold the bylaws, including the Sunshine Law provision within” and removed “honorary members are recognized with this designation upon the recommendation of one member seconded by another member and by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the membership attending the Annual Meeting. Honorary membership may be conferred upon a past member whose long and meritorious service with the CAC or the Program Office is recognized by this designation.”
- Added Article III Section 4 Term Limits and “CAC membership terms are 4 years each, with ability to serve multiple terms if reselected by the Policy Committee to do so” underneath it.
- Under Article IV Section 1 Officers: modified language to “two Co-Chairs serving 2-year staggered terms (with either Co-Chair having the full responsibilities as Chair in the absence of the other Co-Chair).” And “elected by a majority vote of the members present at the election.”
- Under Article IV Section 2 Elections: added to take office at the Annual Meeting “they are elected in, which is the first meeting of the CAC each calendar year.” Removed “The Nominating Committee shall solicit nominations from the floor when it announces its slate of candidates. Any nominations shall be added to the slate of candidates prepared by the Nominating Committee. Officers shall be elected by written ballot of the full slate prepared prior to the meeting by the Nominating Committee.” Added “Nominations shall be submitted in writing at least two days in advance of the meeting. Elections shall be held annually on an alternating basis for each of the Co-Chair positions.”
- Removed Article IV Section 3 on Unfinished Terms
- Modified Article IV Section 4 Duties and Responsibilities of Co-Chairs throughout from “chair” to “co-chair”. Modified second bullet to “Reporting input of the CAC to the CHNEP Management Committee.” Removed next four bullets on communicating Policy Committee responses, defining CAC agendas, declaring

- quorum (which staff usually handle to ensure is met), and appointing all Committee Chairs and Co-Chairs, as well as final bullet on ex-officio members.
- Removed Article IV Section that had followed on Duties of Vice-Chair.
- Under Article V Section 1 on Meetings: modified to reflect elections at first calendar meeting in Spring.
- Removed Article VI on Committees of CAC section
- The Remaining Articles were renumbered to removal of above Article.

Policy Committee Co-Chair Elizabeth Sweigert will be leading and facilitating this discussion and vote.

Attachments: Draft January 22, 2026 Meeting Minutes
Ms. Courtney Darling CAC Application
Draft CAC Updated Bylaws

Recommendation: Approval of the Consent Agenda including the minutes from January 22, 2026, Ms. Courtney Darling’s CAC Application, and the Updated CAC Bylaws.

7. **FY27 WORK PLAN AND BUDGET**

For fiscal year 2027, CHNEP has prepared a Master Work Plan and Budget that outlines all of its income, expenses and projects anticipated in the coming fiscal year. This agenda item is to present this to the Management Committee for Committee members to provide any comments in its finalization and to make a recommendation to Policy as to their potential approval. Once this is approved by Policy, the final EPA320 Workplan and Budget will accompany the FY27 EPA application forms in Grants.gov by the June 1, 2026 grant application deadline.

Major changes from FY26 approved work plan and budget to proposed FY27 are as follows:

- Personnel budget last year decreased from \$669,810 to \$525,000 and two unfilled entry-level positions; a Finance and Grants Specialist and a Restoration Specialist were eliminated, decreasing authorized personnel from 7 positions to 5. This year, personnel was slightly increased to \$570,000 (+ 45,000) given receiving full FY26 320 funding as well as FY26 final Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding. With restructuring of the previous Director of Research and Restoration and Research & GIS Coordinator to a Research & GIS Manager and a Restoration Manager, the Finance and Grants Specialist could now be reincluded. This keeps the personnel costs sustainable, while providing adequate staffing for the huge influx of projects CHNEP is project managing in all ten counties it serves.
- Overhead Administrative Fees have slightly increased from \$246,120 to \$256,000 (+9,880) due to the increased authorized CHNEP positions and associated human resource, information technology, and other associated operational support costs.
- Public Outreach has increased from \$94,500 to \$109,500 to allow for printing of new and reprinting of existing small publications like our popular kid’s activity books.
- The FY26 IIJA award in the amount of \$909,800 was just received and will need to be approved by our host so we have these prior year funds ready for Research and Restoration. Additionally, we are using \$112,000 of the FY27 EPA 320 for the CHNEP Water Atlas Maintenance and Improvements, as well as \$20,000 of local funds for project contingency costs and \$15,000 for Lower Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring

Network water quality sampling. This results in a total FY27 Research and Restoration budget of an additional \$147,000.

- Policymaker education, our Association of National Estuary Program dues, rose from \$4,500 to \$9,500 with a majority vote of directors.
- \$32,000 of local funds will be put to our reserves to continue to build that for stability if future funding decreases do occur. We have built up one year (\$852,525.45) of staff salary and operating expenses in reserves already.
- The total revenue and expenses for FY27 will be \$1,124,000. This is reflective of our new post-IIJA funding level.

Management Committee unanimously voted to recommend approval of the Draft27 Work Plan and Budget (with three small edits incorporated as mentioned in Management Report).

Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP Executive Director, will present this item.

Attachments: Draft FY27 Master Work Plan and Budget

Recommendation: Policy Committee approval of the Draft FY27 Master Work Plan and Budget

8. INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS IN WATER SUPPLY

The presentation will provide an overview of water demands in Florida and how those demands are met with traditional and non-traditional sources. OneWater initiatives and cooperative partnerships have helped break new ground in ensuring we meet our water needs while protecting the natural resources. Nevertheless, water conservation also remains a critical component to any water supply strategy, especially in times of drought. Using new approaches in techniques in how we manage water in all its forms (i.e. stormwater, wastewater, drinking water, etc.) can help us meet expanding supply needs while ensuring we have enough to restore and maintain our natural ecosystems.

Kristine Morris, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Ecosystem Restoration for the Florida Department Of Environmental Protection, will be presenting this topic.

9. LEVERAGING WETLANDS AS A MULTI-BENEFIT ONE WATER TOOL FOR WATER SUPPLY AND WATER QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

This presentation will highlight how constructed and natural wetlands can be leveraged as powerful, multi-functional components of One Water and alternative water supply (AWS) strategies. Wetlands offer flexible pathways to enhance water supply reliability, improve water quality, and support regional recharge, whether the source water is reclaimed water, stormwater, or a blend of both. These systems can operate effectively in areas where infiltration is possible, as well as where geologic confinement limits traditional recharge approaches. In addition, wetlands provide an ancillary benefit of habitat creation and the opportunity for the public to connect with nature and learn about their local water resources.

Wetlands are a versatile One Water tool for both groundwater and surface water supplies, emphasizing four opportunity pathways: (1) Infiltration Wetlands for water quality polishing and natural recharge, (2) Wetlands followed by recharge wells provide recharge even in confined settings, while protecting water quality and public health, (3) Rehydration of natural wetlands to restore wetlands and repurpose reclaimed water, and (4) Wetlands for beneficial environmental flows, including those that provide public water supply. Together, these illustrate how wetlands

can expand alternative water supply capacity, enhance regional hydrologic and natural systems resilience, improve water quality, and support long-term water security across diverse hydrogeologic conditions.

Augmenting Groundwater Supply: Infiltration Wetlands for water quality improvement and natural recharge

Infiltration Wetlands is a term that has been coined to describe groundwater recharge wetlands or infiltration wetlands and uses constructed wetland systems to polish water and promote passive recharge through infiltration into the aquifer. These systems are particularly effective where hydrogeologic conditions allow percolation through surficial soils into target aquifers. The 4G Ranch Wetlands consists of 176 acres of Infiltration Wetlands on a working ranch that receives up to 5 mgd of reclaimed water in Central Pasco County for groundwater recharge, where both the surficial aquifer and Upper Floridan Aquifer had been depleted due to significant groundwater withdrawals. The Ocala Wetland Recharge Park recharges up to 5 mgd of combined reclaimed water and stormwater across 33 acres of Infiltration Wetlands, supporting the restoration of Silver Springs by reducing nutrient loads in the Silver Springs BMAP and augmenting spring flow as part of the recovery strategy for the Silver Springs Minimum Flow and Level (MFL). The wetland also serves as an award-winning valuable community park and is a Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail Site. Both projects have received multiple awards for contributions to water supply, water quality, and habitat creation.

Augmenting Groundwater Supply: Wetlands coupled with recharge wells

Because large areas, such as much of the southwest portion of Florida, have confining layers that prevent passive infiltration into the Floridan Aquifer System, wetlands can still be utilized in these settings by pairing them with recharge wells. Examples include the Flatford Swamp Groundwater Recharge Project which aims to recharge the Most Impacted Area of the Southern Water Use Caution Area and the Dona Bay Restoration Phase 3 Aquifer Recharge Project which integrates elements of the One Water philosophy to ensure a balance between water supply and nature. These demonstrate how wetland systems and recharge wells can work together to augment water supplies, increase operational reliability, and integrate reclaimed water as a sustainable resource, while protecting water quality and public health.

Augmenting Surface Waters: Rehydration of natural wetlands

In Florida, many wetlands have been hydrologically altered as a result of drainage, development, and water management practices, leading to degraded ecological function. Recognizing this, Florida Administrative Code Chapter 62 611 (Wetlands Application Rule) provides a regulatory framework that allows for the beneficial application of reclaimed water to hydrologically altered natural wetlands in order to enhance or restore wetland communities. The Boot Wetland Treatment System, a 115 acre cypress gum wetland, has received advanced secondary wastewater effluent since 1984 and serves as a long standing example of wetland restoration through reclaimed water rehydration. In addition, the Blacks Ford Swamp, a 230 acre wetland system operating since 1999, receives approximately 6 million gallons per day (mgd) of reclaimed water and provides both water quality improvement and ecological enhancement. Together, these case studies illustrate how the strategic use of reclaimed water can simultaneously support environmental restoration and societal water management goals.

Augmenting Surface Waters: Wetlands for beneficial environmental flows, including those that provide public water supply

Treated wastewater effluent is sometimes discharged to surface waters to provide beneficial environmental flows, particularly for waterbodies with established MFLs. Wetlands play a key role in improving the quality of this discharged effluent by naturally reducing nutrient loads.

With their ability to remove micropollutants, wetlands can also serve as an effective water quality buffer for indirect potable reuse. Examples of this are the Huie Wetlands in Clayton County, Georgia and the Arcadia Treatment Wetland in Arcadia, FL. The Huie Wetlands provide a leading example of this indirect potable reuse approach, where treated wastewater is polished in wetlands before entering drinking water reservoirs. Demonstrating the resilient nature of these systems, the utility’s general manager stated: “It’s raining every day in Clayton County because we’re putting right now about 10 million gallons back in our water supply.” (Georgia Wetlands Offer Cure for Drought : NPR). The Arcadia Treatment Wetland incorporates an innovative intensification technique that injects pure oxygen into the treatment marshes, dramatically improving the reduction of total nitrogen before discharge to a Peace River tributary. This project provides a beneficial environmental flow upstream of the Middle and Lower Peace River MFLs and reduces nutrient loads to the river and Charlotte Harbor. Currently under construction, the treatment wetland will also serve as a public park in the future.

In conclusion, the ancillary benefits of wetlands and wetland-based augmentation of groundwater and surface waters supports water supply reliability, water quality improvement, ecological restoration, system resilience, and integrated One Water solutions.

Allison Tritschler, Senior Technologist – Natural Treatment Systems with Jacobs Engineering, will be presenting on this topic.

10. POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

Each member will have time to update the Committee on efforts currently underway or recently completed by their municipality or agency to protect and restore natural resources in the CHNEP area. This time also serves as an opportunity for members to make announcements or discuss other topics of interest to the Committee members.

Policy Committee Co-Chair Elizabeth Sweigert will be leading and facilitating this discussion.

11. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

12. FUTURE MEETING’S TOPICS, LOCATION AND DATE

Please mark your calendar for upcoming in-person Policy Committee Meetings on September 17, 2026, January 21, 2027, May 20, 2027, & September 16, 2027.

13. ADJOURN