



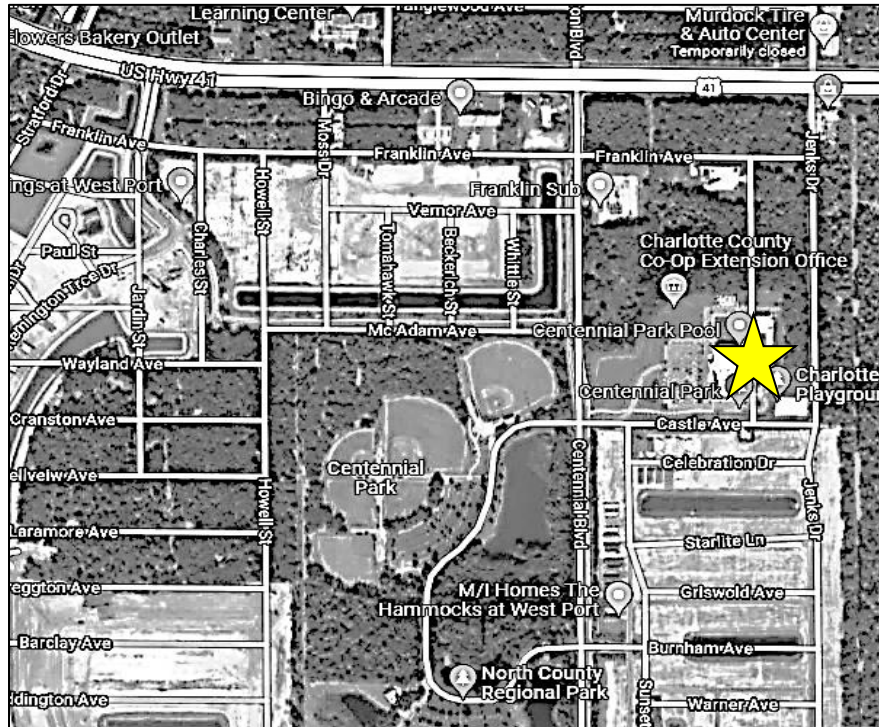
CHNEP Management Committee Meeting
Friday January 12th, 2024, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm
Charlotte County Centennial Park
Large Multipurpose Room
1120 Centennial Blvd., Port Charlotte, FL 33953

AGENDA

1. Call to Order and Introductions — Dave Hutchinson, Co-Chair
2. Agenda Additions or Deletions — Dave Hutchinson, Co-Chair
3. Public Comment on Agenda Items — Dave Hutchinson, Co-Chair
4. Management Committee September 8, 2023 Meeting Minutes — Dave Hutchinson, Co-Chair
5. TAC Report — Ernesto Lasso de la Vega, TAC Co-Chair
6. CAC Report — Harry Phillips, CAC Co-Chair
7. CHNEP Update — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP
8. Amended FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan & Budget — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP
9. Peace and Myakka Wild and Scenic Rivers Designation Opportunities — Jaime Doubek-Racine, U.S. National Park Service
10. Proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area — Kathleen Burchett, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
11. The Florida Wildlife Corridor — Jason Lauritsen, Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation
12. CHNEP Technical Projects Updates and New Tools — Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP
13. Management Committee Member Updates — Dave Hutchinson, Co-Chair
14. Public Comment — Dave Hutchinson, Co-Chair
15. Future Meeting Dates and Topics — Dave Hutchinson, Co-Chair
 - Upcoming Meetings: May 10, 2024, & September 6, 2024
16. Adjourn — Dave Hutchinson, 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

1. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

The CHNEP Management 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 Management 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 SEPTEMBER 8, 2023 MEETING MINUTES

This item is to review, offer any potential revisions, and approve final meeting minutes from the previous September 8, 2023 Management Committee meeting.

Recommendation: Approval of the minutes from September 8, 2023

Attachment: Draft September 8, 2023 Meeting Minutes

5. TAC REPORT

The CHNEP Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting was held on November 30, 2023, chaired by Ernesto Lasso de la Vega.

- The meeting started with routine committee business and the CHNEP Update by CHNEP Executive Director Jennifer Hecker.
- The first presentation was on the Implementation of a Research Plan to Guide Decisions on Place-Based Recreational Fishery Conservation in Charlotte Harbor, FL was given by Courtney Saari from the Florida Wildlife Research Institute. This presentation was on a large-scale collaborative project aimed at protecting the sportfish in Charlotte Harbor, involving “co-producing” science-based tools and plans for decision-making that preserves important sportfish habitat areas. It is being funded by the NOAA RESTORE Grant for Actionable Science. Project findings could be incorporated into state restoration plans including helping with identifying effective restoration design elements and site selection and prioritized locations for restoration and conservation. The project will span from 2023-2028, involving the CHNEP TAC with annual review workshops and the review of project output and products. Member questions were focused on stormwater infrastructure, and how it was currently impacting habitat for juvenile fish. Members asked project if recommendations would focus on redesign of existing areas or new development as well as the different habitats preferred by juvenile snook versus tarpon.
- Tom Reis of the EcoSphere Restoration Institute announced an FDEP Statewide Restoration Program to Restore Submerged Aquatic Vegetation. Mr. Reis went over how seagrass loss throughout the state between 2020 and 2022 has prompted this initiative. EcoSphere was awarded funds to replant 100 acres of seagrass statewide. Eight acres were installed in middle Tampa Bay, 4 acres are planned for lower Tampa Bay, 6 for Sarasota Bay and an undetermined number will be planted in Charlotte Harbor. This presentation was to solicit input from TAC members as what areas in the Charlotte Harbor area to focus on. Following discussion EcoSphere planned to set up a meeting with CHNEP, Sea Grant, FDEP Aquatic Preserves, FWC,

the City of Cape Coral, Charlotte, and Lee Counties, SWFWMD and any other interested members to map out specific recommended sites. Some members suggested picking locations that would provide the best success where the seagrass wouldn't get smothered by macroalgae or by focusing on areas where shellfish restoration is planned or occurring. There was discussion of how to plant within existing seagrass beds and work with the contours of the selected area for optimal light and sediment conditions. There are no success criteria required for the plantings, but EcoSphere and the State would like to know what is working and why - so will be monitoring progress throughout. The presenter added that USF is getting some of the funding to do a very rigorous study on a very small subset of the 100-acre project. A committee member asked whether there would be citizen scientist opportunities to be involved. The planting will be done by a contractor but there will be 100 extra plants for volunteers to plant nearby.

- The next presentation was on the Dona Bay Project Phase 6: Restoration and Monitoring given by Brooke Langston of Sarasota County. The primary purpose of the Dona Bay Restoration Program is to restore the natural volume and timing of freshwater inflows to Dona Bay, and to explore opportunities in designing green-gray infrastructure that could have integrated habitat features. The County is seeking input from the TAC on ideas for monitoring improvements post-construction, as phases 2 -5 wrap up and to gather input on where to focus restoration efforts once the hydrology is improved, as some areas may improve on their own, but others may need additional help. Members suggest that from a seagrass perspective, the expectation will be that as the watershed returns to its more historical size, an increase in seagrass should be seen but that may not be the case as there are also water quality and macroalgae issues. Therefore, it would be helpful to monitor and assess seagrass in Dona Bay post-construction. Another member mentioned it might be a good idea to consider augmenting 2-year seagrass aerial imaging with additional aerial photography with unmanned drones. The discussion concluded with TAC members being asked to submit further recommendations to the presenter directly.
- Then there was a presentation by Kevin Miller from the of the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, who is part of the Federal Interagency Taskforce working on recovery in the region post Hurricane Ian. The TAC was asked for their input on a Proposal to FEMA for Recovery Funding for Restoration Projects. The presenter posed two questions for committee discussion: 1) what would help southwest Florida communities become more sustainable and resilient in the face of climate change and increasing catastrophic storms, and 2) what systemic or institutional changes are needed to improve how ecological restoration is planned and implemented? Mr. Miller is working closely with the Southwest Florida Restoration Team to put together a proposal by the end of the year. In response to questions the presenter clarified that the proposal could include a few ideas for large scale projects such as the suggested regional wastewater infrastructure planning idea as well as smaller scale shovel-ready projects. FEMA is looking for ideas for both scales that will support long-term resiliency and 'natural infrastructure.' FEMA does not have a preconceived notion of how to make communities more resilient and is open to input from local stakeholders. The presenter explained that there does tend to be focus on the estuaries and asked what would be beneficial for the entire watershed which is why input from inland counties is being sought at the CHNEP TAC. Member discussion was focused on the interface between public policy and re-development decisions and infrastructure. Specifically, members discussed how to promote and regulate re-development with the lessons learned in mind. Committee members also expressed the need for watershed-scale restoration initiatives. The presenter asked for proposal ideas to submitted by TAC members in early December.
- The next presentation was given on Estimating the Nutrient and Carbon Storage Benefits of Restoring Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (specifically focusing on tape grass restoration areas in the Caloosahatchee Estuary) by Dr. James Douglass, from Florida Gulf Coast University. Dr. Douglass shared an overview of a paper that has been submitted for publication quantifying

carbon and nutrient storage in restored seagrass bed using both field measurements and other existing scientific literature to understand what is currently being stored by plants in the Caloosahatchee River and how that could be enhanced by large scale restoration efforts to bring seagrass acreage numbers closer to historic conditions. Members discussed potential expansions of the current study such as including measuring improvements to dissolved oxygen in the at restoration sites. The TAC also focused on the factors currently preventing recovery of SAV in the Caloosahatchee River such as salinity, herbivory, light limitations, and changes in sediment. Members also mentioned how this methodology could be adapted to calculate the nutrient removal benefits of submerged plants already present in freshwater ponds and canals and how additional further research could be useful to quantify stormwater benefits for municipalities.

- The final guest presentation as given by Mark Walton of the Southwest Florida Water Management District on Condition Assessment of Past SWFWMD Restoration Projects. The Surface Water Improvement & Management (SWIM) program has completed many projects in the past few years. The District assesses them after completion through conducting a conditions assessment and putting the data into a database, which can be used as a tool to go back and use in an adaptive management framework. The site assessments answer key questions such as how much of that is still restored? Were the plantings (or exotics removals) successful? Are they being maintained?. Some of the lessons learned were that some restoration will need a commitment of continuous management; there is a need to manage edge effects and encroachment; there is a need for project designs for changing climate and hydrologic regimes; qualitative monitoring can be effective; and it is also important to understand past intent of these projects. Going forward, this SWIM restoration geodatabase can be used to find consolidated project queries and analysis; doing a deep dive can lead to cost-effectiveness, the best designs, and the best plants. Members discussed whether conservation easements were required at restoration sites. One member commented that the US Army Corps of Engineers and the FDEP have recently included in their long-term management plan that they do 5-year updates from the baseline on that conservation easement, and that goes on until all the partners deem it not necessary – adding that this process has worked well for them.
- Finally, the TAC heard the Technical Project Update coming to the Management Committee today, as well as shared updates with each other on their respective counties and communities and natural resource related activities and projects. There were no recommendations formed by the TAC pertaining directly to Management Committee agenda items this cycle, and videos of the guest presentations are available at <https://www.chnep.org/technical-advisory-committee> for public viewing.

Ernesto Lasso de la Vega, TAC Co-Chair, will be presenting this item.

6. CAC REPORT

The Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting was held on December 13, 2023 as a virtual meeting, chaired by Harry Phillips.

- The two new CAC members, Church Roberts representing Hendry County and Tonya Bramlage, representing Charlotte County introduced themselves.
- The CHNEP Update was given by CHNEP Executive Director Jennifer Hecker, followed by a presentation and discussion item on the Citizen's Advisory Committee Member Responsibilities and Upcoming Spring Meeting and Co-Chair Election given by CHNEP Director of Research & Restoration, Nicole Iadevaia.
- Then the Committee heard a presentation on two New Conservation Grant Applications, one pertaining to a very small grant request to maintaining the Myakka River Coordinating Council

(MRCC) website. The recommendation was to fund with request that they make meeting agendas, minutes, and Council member contact information readily available on the updated site. The other application was submitted by the Heritage Oaks HOA for funding of littoral plantings for their stormwater lakes. The CAC concurred that though it was a worthy initiative, it was ineligible being improvements to private property without offering general public access or educational/scientific information.

- The Committee then heard an Update on Conservation Grant Projects by CHNEP staff and Church Roberts, who had prior to joining the Committee, received a grant to conduct a Caloosahatchee River Drone Wading Bird Nest Survey. He presented the video and findings of the survey. CHNEP staff presented outcomes from other recently completed Conservation Grant funded projects including Educational Signage and Habitat Restoration for Cape Coral Wildlife Trust properties, the Pedersen Preserve Pine Restoration Area Habitat Improvement project, and the 2023 Great American Clean-up and International Coastal Clean-up. Member discussion was focused on what type of projects the Conservation Grant Program can be applied to and increasing public awareness about the program in order to receive more diverse project applications.
- The Committee then heard a presentation from Kathy Burchett of the US Fish and Wildlife Service on Updates on the Proposed “Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area”. This presentation will also be presented to the Management Committee at this meeting. The Committee’s comments were focused on where to point landowners towards this new opportunity for funding, how much is funded and how to apply for federal assistance for acquisitions in the future. Members also discussed their role to on supporting and educating the public and policy members on the proposed conservation area.
- The final presentation and discussion item, which was in response to a CAC member’s request, was on CHNEP Resources for CAC Members and Communities. This item pertained to briefing the committee on upcoming or ongoing outreach resources that further the CHNEP Goal for Public Engagement: to “Create an informed, engaged public making choices and taking actions that increase the protection and restoration of estuaries and watersheds.” CAC members serve as CHNEP partners in various communities throughout Central and Southwest Florida and work together with CHNEP staff to continue to share educational items within their own organizations, the public, and with policy makers in the counties they are appointed to represent. CHNEP sent a resource packet to all the CAC members prior to the meeting and went through each item, explaining the resource and how it could be used to further educate and engage the public in conservation efforts. The packet included: a list of outreach items available for loan; a 2023-24 funding opportunities fact sheet; Hurricane Ian webpage; water quality, seagrass, and habitat restoration needs’ fact sheets by basin; economic valuation fact sheets by county; CHNEP CCMP brochure, Spanish and English versions; *Kid’s Activity Book*; and previous *Harbor Happenings* magazines. Committee members thanked CHNEP staff for providing the depth of diverse, quality resources and discussed opportunities to share and disseminate the information.
- Finally, the CAC also heard the CHNEP Program and Technical Project update presentations that are also coming before the Management Committee today and shared updates with each other on public outreach events within their counties as well as natural resource related activities and projects. There were no recommendations formed by the CAC pertaining directly to Management Committee agenda items this cycle, and videos of the guest and CHNEP Resources presentation are available at <https://www.chnep.org/citizens-advisory-committee> for public viewing.

Harry Phillips, CAC Co-Chair, will be presenting this item.

7. 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 the Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (8/10), Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (8/23), Management Committee Meeting (9/8) and Policy Committee Meeting (9/21), including lining up presenters, drafting agenda packets, creating PowerPoints, drafting minutes, etc.
- Hired and began training of CHNEP Administrative Specialist Ms. Keara Abel.
- Drafted project proposal and potential position description at the request of US EPA for the Hurricane Interagency Recovery Coordination Team, for providing support for long-term hurricane recovery from Hurricane Ian.
- Two new Citizens Advisory Committee members, representing Charlotte and Hendry Counties respectively, were appointed at 9/21/23 Policy Committee meeting. One new Technical Advisory Committee member, representing the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), was added to the CHNEP Management Conference Committee in October, with a new member packet mailed to them.
- Amended FY2024 Work Plan and Budget approval received at September Policy Meeting and have been implemented.
- Drafted a [Letter of Support](#) for the US FWS proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area, created a [CHNEP webpage](#) on the topic, as well as sent out two [social media blasts](#) and a mass email linking to webpage asking for public comments in support. Additionally, reviewed the US FWS draft plan and sent technical comments to US FWS staff.
- Drafted Interlocal Agreements for working with Central Florida Regional Planning Council that is being approved in November, as well as one for working with Lee County that is currently being reviewed by legal department.
- Conducted Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring Network (CCHMN) field audits for the FL Dept. of Environmental Protection, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission/Research Institute, Lee County, and City of Cape Coral.
- Finished gathering partner data for 2023 NEPORT Congressional Reporting Survey to report on their annual conservation, management, and restoration accomplishments. This was uploaded into the EPA portal by CHNEP staff in September and included over 100 habitat entries.
- Drafted and submitted a letter of support for the SWFWMD proposal for the Cape Haze Ecosystem Restoration Project for NOAA's Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Grant.

Finance and Grant Management

- Sent customized invoice letters and information packets to City & County partners who contribute to the CHNEP, providing an overview of what value and projects CHNEP provides to their areas. This is sent during the fall for FY24 CHNEP annual partner contributions that are approved by the Policy Committee.
- Updated CHNEP Conservation Grant Application and webpage for applications to be received for the first FY2024 cycle.
- Reached out to Conservation Grant Awardees to coordinate close out and payments for FY2023.

- Entered Purchase Requisitions for all FY2024 Annual Scopes managed under Interlocal Agreements (Upper and Lower CCHMN and Water Atlas). These FY2024 Purchase Orders were then subsequently issued.
- Drafted a change order to CHNEP Water Atlas FY2023 scope of work to remove Tasks 9 & 11 and to extend the timeline for Tasks 3-7 until May 31, 2024. The change order was sent to USF for full execution in October.
- Approved invoices for Myakka Headwaters and Water Atlas projects.
- Worked with Charlotte County staff to draft and release Request for Proposals for Charlotte County Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment.
- Drafted EPA Summary of Accomplishments and submitted.
- Created draft Interlocal Agreement with Central Florida Regional Planning Council and submitted to legal review by Charlotte County.
- Processed FY2024 EPA 320 Grant in County (CHNEP's fiscal hosts) for BOCC acceptance, which occurred at their October 24, 2023 meeting.
- Created FY2024 Budget Coding Tables with new acct. codes based on recently approved Sept. 2023 Amended FY24 Work Plan and Budget.
- Drafted and submitted EPA End-of-Year Reports for EPA FY2023 320 (EPA Financial Assistance Agreement: CE-02D41623-0) and EPA FY2022-23 BIL (EPA Financial Assistance Agreement: CE-02D42123-0) grants with financials.
- Submitted SWFWMD FY2023 Q4 report and invoices.
- Reviewed and selected abstracts for the 2024 Southwest Florida Climate Summit and 2024 Gulf of Mexico Conference (GOMCON).

Regional and multi-jurisdictional organizational meetings

- Central Florida Regional Planning Council Regular Meeting
- Central Florida Regional Planning Council Vulnerability Assessments Meeting
- CHNEP Water Atlas Monthly Meetings
- Collaboratory, SCCF, and CSWFL Meeting
- NOAA Climate Resiliency Challenge Meeting
- Charlotte County Vulnerability Assessment Meetings
- Myakka River Management Coordinating Council
- ANEP External Affairs Committee Meetings
- SWFWMD Optical Modeling Meeting
- SFWMD Resiliency Coordination Forum
- Polk County Vulnerability Assessment Meeting
- SFWMD Joint Working Group/Science Coordination Group Meeting
- Highlands County Vulnerability Assessment Meeting
- Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative (CHFI) Quarterly Meeting
- FLERA Water Resources Committee Quarterly Meeting
- High-Resolution Downscaling of Climate Projections for a Resilient Florida Meeting
- Florida NEP/CZMP Coordination Meeting
- GOMCON Session Chair Information Meeting
- Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring Network (CCHMN) 2023 Annual Partners Meeting
- Corridor Connect: Ecology + Economy for a Better Florida Conference
- NOAA Hydrographic Services Review Panel 2023 Public Meeting
- Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA) Wednesday Webinar – GOMOD Updates
- Florida Resilience Conference

- SWERT Steering Committee Meeting
- Regional Ambient Monitoring Program (RAMP) Meeting
- CCHMN Water Quality Field Data Management Discussion Meeting
- U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) Advisory Committee: Fall 2023 Meeting
- City of Sarasota and City of Venice Vulnerability Assessments Stakeholder Meeting
- CHNEP/SFWMD Chief Resiliency Officer Meeting
- NEPORT Discussion with TBEP
- NPS Partnership Wild and Scenic River Program Virtual Meeting
- CHNEP/Lee County Pine Island Flatwoods Preserve Project Meeting
- DEP 2022-2024 Biennial Assessment Draft Assessment Lists Public Meeting
- City of North Port Vulnerability Assessment Steering Committee Meeting
- Cyanobacteria Symposium 2023
- CHNEP and Lee County Vulnerability Assessment Discussion Meetings
- Volo Foundation/CHNEP 2024 Southwest Florida Climate Summit Planning Discussion
- FELQS QA Meeting
- Proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area Public Meetings
- SFWMD Water Resources Forum
- Central and Southern Florida (CSF) Section 216 Flood Resiliency Study – Evaluation Criteria Workshop
- Southwest Florida Regional Forum/Roundtable Discussion
- EcoSummit Estuaries Panel Planning Meeting
- NOAA Aquaculture Research Interview
- DEP Quarterly Resilience Forum
- CHNEP Water Quality Trend Analysis and Dashboard Project Meeting
- CHNEP/City of Punta Gorda Tiki Point Living Shoreline Project Meeting
- Coastal & Estuarine Research Federation (CERF) Conference

CHNEP staff presentations

- Presented at the 27th Biennial Coastal & Estuarine Research Federation (CERF) Conference and the Association of National Estuary Programs (ANEP) Conference on *Uniting Partners and Resources to Protect Central and Southwest Florida's Future Water, Wildlife, and Habitat*.
- Submitted a proposal to host a session at the upcoming Gulf of Mexico Conference (GOMCON) in 2024. This proposal was accepted and CHNEP will serve as co-chair along with Auburn University. Session Title: *Advancing coastal resiliency through watershed planning and hydrological restoration*.
- Presented at the 2023 Florida Resilience Conference in two sessions on: 1) *Building Resiliency through Hydrological Restoration* and 2) *Habitats Migrating in Response to Climate Change in Central and Southwest Florida*.
- Mainstage panel speaker at the Corridor Connect: Ecology + Economy for a Better Florida Conference Served on *Ecosystem Resilience is Economic Resilience*.
- Presented at the American Water Resources Association (AWRA) One Water Summit on a *Regional Approach to Watershed Management*.

Publications and Outreach Initiatives

- Worked with the designer and the printer to produce the final proof of the [2024 Nature Calendar](#), which is now being printed and will be mailed by end of November. Also, finalized the 2024 calendar mailing list regarding individuals, deliveries, and shipments to provide to the printer who is contracted to handle all aspects of distribution management.

- Produced updated Water Quality Fact Sheets by Basin, available on the CHNEP Water Quality Fact Sheets webpage <https://www.chnep.org/water-quality-fact-sheets>.
- Created 2023-24 Funding Opportunities Fact Sheet (<https://www.chnep.org/federal-funding>) to distribute to stakeholders, community members, and anyone who can benefit from current funding opportunities.
- Coordinated with Lemon Bay Conservancy for their Family Day Program focused on hydrology by providing Earth Echo water quality testing kits for volunteers to learn about hydrology, water testing and monitoring.
- Partnered with Lemon Bay Conservancy to distribute free informational brochures and educational materials at the Englewood Water Fest.
- Attended the Wildcat Tailgate in Wauchula hosting estuary trivia and distributing free, environmental education materials for children and adults.
- Partnered with Charlotte County to distribute free informational brochures and educational materials at the Charlotte County Climate Eco Fair.
- Shared the work of two conservation grant recipients on our Instagram and Facebook stories. Both organizations posted of their successful waterway and reef cleanup efforts following their cleanup events.
- Partnered with Charlotte County Sea Grant, UF/IFAS, and FWC to host Florida Horseshoe Crab Watch Training
- Attended the 7 Rivers Water Festival in Winter Haven: distributed free, environmental educational materials, seasonal publications, and kid's activity books to around 150 attendees and families.
- Celebrated and recognized #NationalEstuariesWeek with a series of posts on Facebook and Instagram highlighting estuaries and projects in CHNEP area.
- Hosted cleanup event in observance of International Coastal Cleanup Day in partnership with Keep Charlotte Beautiful and Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center. Volunteers picked up trash at Ponce De Leon Park, a park adopted by CHNEP, in Punta Gorda.
- Worked with designer to finalize 2024 Nature Calendar. This fall 25,000 copies will be printed and distributed to partners, stakeholders, and local libraries throughout the CHNEP 10-county area.
- Reached out to all partners and libraries receiving multiple copy shipments or deliveries of the Nature Calendar to confirm their contact info and finalize requested amounts to be sent.
- Sent new member welcome packets to 2 new Citizens Advisory Committee members, appointed at 9/21 Policy Committee meeting.
- Provided a letter of support and comments for the US FWS proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area at public meetings.
- Partnered with Keep Charlotte Beautiful to sponsor and invite CHNEP volunteers to participate in a [marine debris clean-up of mangroves](#) (impacted by Hurricane Ian this time last year) along the West Wall and Gasparilla Sound. 48 amazing volunteers collected over 2,800 lbs. of trash.
- Partnered with Lemon Bay Conservancy to contribute outreach materials for '[One Dock at a Time](#)' Oyster Gardening outreach initiative Contributed CHNEP outreach materials.
- Held planning calls with South and Southwest Florida Water Management Districts, Central Florida Regional Planning Council, Volo Foundation, and Resiliency Florida to coordinate sponsorship and panels for the 2024 for Southwest Florida Climate Summit. The call for abstracts closed on October 31.

Outreach analytics

- 6,041 subscribers for CHNEP educational mailings.
- 1,693 unique visitors and 1,023 page visits to CHNEP website.
- 22 new Instagram followers (550 total followers)- started this year
- 1,899 Facebook followers
- 3 new Facebook Likes (1,605 total likes)
- 8,395 YouTube Views/57 Subscribers

Media/Press

- [Tarpon and snook catch \\$1.2 million research grant | Boca Beacon](#)

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

Recommendation: For discussion only.

8. AMENDED FY2024 EPA 320 WORK PLAN & BUDGET

The FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget was originally reviewed by the Management Committee on May 12, 2023 and approved by the CHNEP Policy Committee on May 25, 2023. It is customary to update and amend the Work Plan and Budget with any changes given actual costs, needed adjustment to accommodate project or staffing change needs, etc. FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget amendments were approved on September 21, 2023. Below is a summary of amendments proposed this cycle - the most notable of which is the final FY23 EPA 320 carryover increasing from previous estimate of \$80,000 to actual closer estimate of \$175,000 (with still some FY23 expenses outstanding to be paid out). Those additional funds are being reappropriated into FY24 research projects through these amendments so that they can be expended in a timely manner.

Cover, Table of Contents, & Policy Committee Page

- Added “Amended January 25, 2024.”
- Updated Policy Committee Membership with new representatives from City of Venice and Village of Estero.

Table 1

- Updated Revenue for EPA FY23 Programmatic Funding Carryover from \$80,000 to \$175,000 (\$95,000 increase.)
- Updated Revenue Totals to reflect additional EPA FY23 Programmatic Funding Carryover.
- Update Expenditures to add additional \$95,000 from EPA FY23 Programmatic Funding Carryover to Research and Restoration Total.
- Updated Expenditure Totals to reflect additional EPA FY23 Programmatic Funding Carryover added to Research and Restoration Total.

Table 6

- Removed FY21 SWFWMD \$31,000 for the Myakka Headwaters Project from the table as the project has been successfully completed and closed out.
- Added new Water Quality Trend Analysis for \$60,000 (Task 3.9) funded from EPA 320 Programmatic Funding Carryover.
- Added remaining \$35,000 from EPA 320 Programmatic Funding Carryover to FY24 Research Project TBD.
- Changed Task 3.2 CHNEP Water Atlas Maintenance & Improvements for EPA FY24 BIL from \$95,000 to \$85,000 (\$10,000 decrease) to reflect changes to the project totals.

- Moved \$10,000 of EPA BIL FY24 from CHNEP Water Atlas Maintenance & Improvements to TBD Research/Restoration. This did not change the overall total for EPA FY24 BIL.
- Updated Totals for EPA 320 Total Research & Restoration Project Budget to reflect additional EPA FY23 Programmatic Funding Carryover added to Research and Restoration Projects Table. These changes were then carried through all the following corresponding task narratives.

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

Recommendation: Recommend Policy Committee Approval of Amended FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget

Attachments: Amended FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget

9. PEACE AND MYAKKA WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS DESIGNATION OPPORTUNITIES

The Peace and Myakka Rivers, large meandering rivers coursing through Central Florida down to Charlotte Harbor, has long been a haven for paddlers, anglers, and nature lovers. Discussions are unfolding about potentially federally designating them Wild and Scenic Rivers, which could elevate conservation efforts and assist securing the river's ecological integrity for generations to come.

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was established by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, authorizing Congress to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Congress has specified in some Wild and Scenic River designations, that rivers are to be administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the NPS in partnership with local governments, councils, watershed groups and non-governmental organizations, generally through the use of cooperative agreements. In these [Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers](#), communities protect their own outstanding rivers and river-related resources through a collaborative approach. This is the approach being entertained for the Peace and Myakka's designations. The designation process typically starts with a study conducted by the relevant federal, state, or local agency to determine if the river meets the eligibility criteria. After the study, a recommendation is made to Congress for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Congress then decides whether to designate the river based on the recommendation. The Myakka River already has a completed study, whereas the Peace River does not.

The 1984 Myakka River Study proposed the 12 miles of the Myakka River within the Myakka River State Park be included as a state administered component of the National Wild and Scenic River System, with the State of Florida continuing its current management practices to protect the natural and cultural qualities of the designated segment of the Myakka River within the Myakka River State Park. It also suggested additional segments of the Myakka River be designated as components of the National System if the state and local initiatives were put in place to provide permanent protection for the river corridor, as well as a "Myakka River Commission" established to coordinate efforts to conserve the Myakka River area. There now is such a body called the "Myakka River Management Coordinating Council" (their website is available at <http://www.myakkarivermanagement.org/>, and CHNEP is a participating member).

Designation safeguards the special character of these rivers, while also recognizing the potential for their appropriate use and development. It encourages river management that crosses political boundaries and promotes public participation in developing goals for river protection. Designation can potentially bring more federal conservation funding, as designated rivers may be eligible for additional federal funding and grants to support conservation, restoration, and sustainable management efforts. These funds can stimulate local economies through projects and employment

opportunities. Finally, designation can act as a catalyst to further engage and unite communities, agencies, and conservationists in the shared vision of preserving the Peace and Myakka Rivers.

Jaime Doubek-Racine of the U.S. National Park Service will be presenting this item.

Recommendation: Recommend Policy Committee support of 'Partnership' Wild and Scenic Rivers designation of the Peace and Myakka Rivers for the purposes of conducting a study of the Peace River as well as implementing the 1984 Myakka River's Study recommendation to designate at least the 12 miles of river within Myakka River State Park

Attachments: [1984 Myakka River Study](#)

10. PROPOSED EVERGLADES TO GULF CONSERVATION AREA

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has proposed the “Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area”, covering a large swath of Central and Southwest Florida. Creating a federal Conservation Area would allow the Service to engage with partners and local landowners to preserve wildlife corridors and working lands with rich cultural history and traditions for the benefit of all people. The proposal identifies a four-million-acre Conservation Area in which the Service would pursue less-than-fee-title (conservation easement) or fee-title acquisitions from willing sellers only.

Conservation easements would provide landowners the opportunity to maintain working lands in their current configuration with no further subdivision or development. The Service could acquire up to 10% of the Conservation Area, or 400,000 acres, in fee-title acquisitions where wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation, and opportunities for cultural, traditional, and medicinal uses would be available.

The Service began public scoping in Spring of 2023, receiving over 2,600 comments. The Service then used those comments to create a [Draft Land Protection Plan, Environmental Assessment, and Conceptual Management Plan](#). The CHNEP submitted a letter highlighting how this initiative would implement CHNEP's [Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan](#) and [Habitat Restoration Needs Plan](#) objectives. Since then, the Service has been working to finalize the Plan to bring the Director of the USFWS for their approval.

Overall, the proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area could bring additional federal resources to conserving exceptional natural resources and environmental lands in our region. Related protection and management actions could also support Florida's family farms and ranches, improve water quality, quantity, and water storage within the Greater Everglades and watersheds entering Charlotte Harbor.

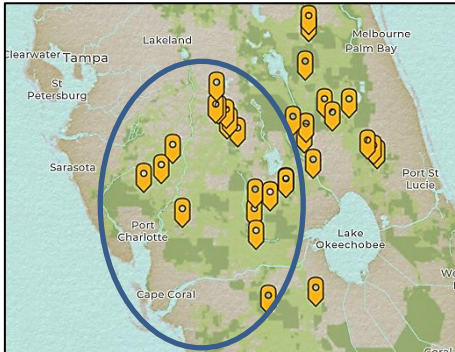
Kathleen Burchett of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be presenting on this item.

Recommendation: Recommend Policy Committee support of the approval of the Final Land Protection Plan for the proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area by the Director of the USFWS

Attachments: [Proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area Fact Sheet](#)
[Proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area FAQs](#)
[Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment](#)
[CHNEP's 10/6/2023 Letter of Support](#)

11. THE FLORIDA WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

After decades of work from conservationists, scientists, politicians, and many others, the [Florida Wildlife Corridor Act](#) was signed into law following unanimous bipartisan support by the Florida legislature on June 29, 2021. The Florida Wildlife Corridor comprises nearly 18 million acres of contiguous wilderness and working lands crucial to the survival of many of Florida's 131 imperiled animals. Recent studies have shown conserving this area would conserve numerous water resources and assist community resiliency in storing flood waters and preserving freshwater public supplies. The Florida legislature has budgeted nearly \$2 billion for protecting land in the Florida Wildlife Corridor since 2021, and 120,000 acres have been approved to date - including in the CHNEP area.



Left: Excerpt of Florida Wildlife Corridor conservation easements/purchases to date in the CHNEP and immediately adjacent areas.

Image Credit: <https://floridawildlifecorridor.org/about/about-the-corridor/>

Jason Lauritsen of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation will be presenting this item.

12. CHNEP TECHNICAL PROJECTS UPDATES

In addition to the items featured earlier on the agenda, other research and/or restoration projects (or phases of projects) in the program area are currently underway with CHNEP FY21-23 funds. A brief overview will be given on project progress since the previous Management Committee meeting. Project fact sheets are available on the CHNEP website: <https://www.chnep.org/chnep-fact-sheets>.

Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP Director of Research & Restoration, will be presenting this agenda item.

13. MANAGEMENT MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

Each member will have up to 5 minutes to update the Committee on projects currently being completed to protect and restore natural resource in the CHNEP program area. This time also serves as an opportunity for members to discuss topics of interest to the Committee members.

Dave Hutchinson, Management Committee Co-Chair, will be leading and facilitating this discussion.

14. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

15. FUTURE MEETING DATES AND TOPICS

Upcoming CHNEP Management Committee meetings in 2024 will be held on May 10, 2024 & September 6, 2024, in the same location as this meeting. Please hold these dates on your calendar, with other details including 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.

16. ADJOURN