



CHNEP Policy Committee Meeting
Thursday January 25th, 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 — Jennifer Carpenter, Co-Chair
2. Agenda Additions or Deletions — Jennifer Carpenter, Co-Chair
3. Public Comment on Agenda Items — Jennifer Carpenter, Co-Chair
4. Management Committee Report — Kali Spurgin, Management Committee Member
5. CHNEP Update — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP
6. Consent Agenda — Jennifer Carpenter, Co-Chair & Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP
 - a. Policy Committee September 21, 2023 Meeting Minutes
 - b. Amended FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan & Budget
7. Amended CHNEP Policy Committee Bylaws Discussion — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP and Jennifer Carpenter, Co-Chair
8. Amended Charlotte County Administrative Services MOU — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP and Jennifer Carpenter, Co-Chair
9. Peace and Myakka Wild and Scenic River Designation Opportunities — Jaime Doubek-Racine, U.S. National Park Service
10. Proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area — Julie Morris, Florida Conservation Group
11. The Florida Wildlife Corridor — Mallory Dimmitt, Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation
12. CHNEP Technical Projects Updates and New Tools — Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP
13. Policy Committee Member Updates — Jennifer Carpenter, Co-Chair
14. Public Comment — Jennifer Carpenter, Co-Chair
15. Future Meeting Dates and Topics — Jennifer Carpenter, Co-Chair
 - a. Upcoming Meetings: May 23, 2024, & September 20, 2024
16. Adjourn — Jennifer Carpenter, 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 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 CHNEP Management Committee meeting was held on January 12, 2024, chaired by Management Committee Co-Chair David Hutchinson. In addition to routine committee business agenda items, the Management Committee heard a report about the November 30, 2023 Technical Advisory Committee meeting by TAC Co-Chair Mark Walton, where he gave an overview of the TAC meeting presentations and member questions and comments in response. The first was on the Implementation of a Research Plan to Guide Decisions on Place-Based Recreational Fishery Conservation in Charlotte Harbor, FL by Courtney Saari from the Florida Wildlife Research Institute, which is 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. The next was presented by Tom Reis of the EcoSphere Restoration Institute on the FDEP Statewide Restoration Program to Restore Submerged Aquatic Vegetation, where EcoSphere has been awarded funds to replant 100 acres of seagrass statewide and is seeking input on what areas in the Charlotte Harbor region to focus on. The next presentation was on the Dona Bay Project Phase 6: Restoration and Monitoring given by Brooke Langston of Sarasota County, 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. This was followed by a presentation given by Kevin Miller from the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, who briefed the committee on a Proposal to FEMA for Recovery Funding for Restoration Projects and asked for committee ideas of potential projects or initiatives to submit. Then a 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 of Florida Gulf Coast University. Dr. Douglass shared research findings that quantify carbon and nutrient storage in restored seagrass beds to potentially be used in the future to award municipalities state Basin Management Action Plan credits for undertaking seagrass restoration. The final guest presentation was given by Mark Walton of the Southwest Florida Water Management District on Condition Assessment of Past SWFWMD Restoration Projects related to the Surface Water Improvement & Management (SWIM) program. He explained how the District goes back to assess prior projects, putting the data into a database to determine cost-effectiveness, the best designs, and the best plants to use in future restoration projects.

This was followed with an update on the Citizen’s Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting held on December 13, 2023 by CAC Co-Chair Harry Phillips. The meeting began with the introduction of

two new CAC members, Church Roberts representing Hendry County and Tonya Bramlage representing Charlotte County. As part of the regular committee business items, the Committee heard a presentation on two New Conservation Grant Applications, an Update on Conservation Grant Projects, and CHNEP Resources for CAC Members and Communities. The Committee also heard a presentation from Kathy Burchett of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Updates on the Proposed “Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area”, an item that is on this agenda as well. The Committee’s comments were focused on where to point landowners towards this new opportunity for funding, how much is being funded, and how to apply for federal assistance for acquisitions in the future. Members also discussed their role on supporting and educating the public and policy makers on the proposed conservation area.

The TAC meeting guest presentations are available at <https://www.chnep.org/technical-advisory-committee> for public viewing. Videos of the CAC guest and CHNEP Resources presentations are available at <https://www.chnep.org/citizens-advisory-committee>.

The Management Committee then went into its own business items, including regular committee business and CHNEP staff updates. The Committee went over the proposed Amended FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan & Budget. Comments included that the added Task related to Water Quality Trends Analysis updating would be a great enhancement of a wonderful tool. Another inquired if Water Atlas differentiated such tools from regulatory impairment, to which CHNEP staff stated it did and would be clearer on the new forthcoming version of the Atlas. Another member inquired about the SWFWMD FY21 Funding, to which CHNEP staff said almost all was expended but the few hundred dollars unused by the project would be lapsed in returning to the funder. A member then inquired about the TBD Research and Restoration funding, to which CHNEP staff responded that they were authorized to spend \$20,000-\$25,000 between cycles to help fund identified projects or new projects under those thresholds, but that any more than that would come in the following cycle as a named project in an amendment to Work Plan for approval by the Policy Committee prior to procuring services for that project. A member asked about the various Water Atlases and how they coordinate, to which CHNEP staff explained that they all use the same contractor (University of South Florida), they are using many of the same underlying water quality databases, and there are efforts to carry features developed by one onto others. The member inquired if they could be combined, to which staff explained they could not as they are funded separately and mostly cover different geographic regions of the state. Finally, a member asked about the proportionate split between research and restoration projects CHNEP funds and staff explained that it varies, differing from other national estuary programs which are predominantly urban whereas CHNEP is predominantly rural and suburban, etc. Another member who sits on the committees of three different national estuary programs concurred that there were differing factors that resulted in different proportionalities of research and restoration funding needs. At the conclusion of the discussion, the Management Committee unanimously voted to recommend to the Policy Committee that it approve the proposed Amended FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan & Budget.

The Management Committee had the same guest presentation topics on its agenda relating to this cycle’s theme: *State and Federal Landscape-Level Conservation and Funding Opportunities for the CHNEP Area*. The first presentation was given by Jaime Doubek-Racine of the U.S. National Park Service on the “Peace and Myakka Wild and Scenic Rivers Designation Opportunity”. Following the presentation, Management Committee members undertook a thorough discussion. A member inquired if these designations were to occur, whether it would add tasks to the CHNEP CCMP, to which staff responded that there is already a Myakka River Management Coordinating Council (which CHNEP is a member of) and a similar body could be formed for the Peace or CHNEP could function as that body to implement the plan associated with the designation of the Peace River if that were to occur. A member asked if tributaries could be included, to which the presenter responded

that they could be included but that would be up to local stakeholders as to which they want included or not. Another member asked who writes the plan and if it would have any regulatory impacts on state or regional water supply policies or other policies. The presenter responded that the local stakeholders write the plan, or the National Park Service writes the plan based on local stakeholder input. The plan would determine the implementing body and policies so it could be written to explicitly state that it will not impact state water supply policies etc. The presenter explained that in the case of the Wekiva River, they worked with another Water Management District until they reached consensus, and they would do the same with these to ensure there are no objections from any local stakeholder to any language in the final plan. CHNEP staff mentioned the Partnership model was being explored for designations of the Peace and Myakka, which is bottom up rather than top down. The benefits are extra federal funding and resource assistance, and the action today would potentially be to support the designation process for purposes of creating a study for the Peace and to implement the Myakka Study recommendation to designate the portion of the Myakka River in the state park. A member asked if the existing Myakka study would need to be updated, to which the presenter responded that it would not need to be updated and in fact, a study is not required first so the Peace for instance could move straight to designation – but that generally doing a study with local stakeholder input first is advisable. The presenter added that there is a possibility to add, amend or take away initial designated river miles in updating plans at a future date if desired. A member remarked that the recommendation being considered was conservative and motioned in favor of accepting with addition that it be noted that the designation supports implementation of the CHNEP Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). The Management Committee then voted to forward a recommendation that the Policy Committee “support the '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 Study recommendation to designate at least the 12 miles of river within Myakka River State Park, to support implementation of the CHNEP CCMP. It should be noted that the SWFWMD, SFWMD, City of North Port and the FWC abstained – with SWFWMD originally voting nay and then later clarifying at conclusion of meeting that they were abstaining.

The next item was on the “Proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area”, by Kathleen Burchett of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. CHNEP staff began the discussion by mentioning the letter of support and the technical comments that CHNEP offered during the public commenting phase of this process. CHNEP talked about how this proposed conservation area would provide large-scale economic benefits, supports rural farming and ranching communities, and supports state, regional and local conservation priorities including CHNEP’s own adopted Habitat Restoration Needs Plan. The presenter also mentioned that CHNEP supplied all of their GIS work and it was used in the draft Conservation Area plan and mapping effort. One member inquired about the similarities and differences between this plan and the Everglades Headwaters Plan, to which the presenter responded that their designations were more specific – with this plan giving them flexibility to purchase fee title from willing sellers anywhere within that existing boundary. This plan is almost twice in geographic size. Another member inquired about the letter of support that the CHNEP provided and how the recommendation under consideration for the Policy Committee to support approval of the Plan by the USFWS would be useful. CHNEP staff clarified the prior comments submitted were before the plan was available and pertained only to conceptual ideas, with this recommendation pertaining to the subsequent plan developed based on that and other stakeholder input. The local leader support of final plan approval is important because it shows that the local stakeholders are supportive of its approval by USFWS, which would result in bringing added federal resources to aid land easement and land conservation efforts in the CHNEP area. Upon conclusion of the discussion, the Management Committee voted to forward a recommendation that the Policy Committee “support the

approval of the Final Land Protection Plan for the proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area by the Director of the USFWS” with all voting in favor except for the SWFWMD who abstained. The final guest presentation was on the Florida Wildlife Corridor by Jason Lauritsen of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation, which was informational only. A member thanked Mr. Lauritsen and offered that it is always encouraging to hear what is possible and what is being done to conserve remaining environmentally sensitive lands. Another member said that when looking for restoration projects, oftentimes developers are much quicker and have acquired land long before groups have had the chance to identify and comprehend the value of these areas for restoration. They then asked if the Foundation has a process to figure out how to identify some of these areas before they are slated for development. The presenter responded that there are a number of tools to help identify some of the urgency and priority perspectives starting with 18-million-acre boundary – including a study the Foundation commissioned that identified the highest priority ecological areas that were slated to be lost potentially by 2030 (approximately 500,000 acres within the corridor) unless they are conserved. Another member inquired about wildlife crossings and whether or not the Foundation is partnering with local governments and entities to promote wildlife passes over roadways. The presenter replied that FDOT’s District 1 has done good job over the past decade at taking a close look at all of their structures, discovering what wildlife is using them, looking at the wildlife collision data, determining where the hotspots for wildlife mortality are and figuring out where the need for new crossings may be. As this item was informational rather than an action item, there was no recommendation forwarded. To review these Management Committee meeting guest presentations, please go to <https://www.chnep.org/management-committee> or the CHNEP YouTube channel.

Kali Spurgin, Management Committee Member representing the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, will be presenting this item.

5. CHNEP UPDATE

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

Program Administration

- Planned and executed the Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (11/30), Citizen’s Advisory Committee Meeting (12/13), and Management Committee Meeting (1/12), 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
- 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 2024 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.
- 20 new Instagram followers (548 total followers)- started this year
- 1,911 Facebook followers
- 3 new Facebook Likes (1,605 total likes)
- 8,939 YouTube Views/59 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.

6. CONSENT AGENDA

a. POLICY COMMITTEE SEPTEMBER 21, 2023 MEETING MINUTES

This Consent Agenda item is to offer any potential revisions to and approve final meeting minutes from the previous September 21, 2023 Policy Committee meeting.

b. AMENDED FY2024 EPA 320 WORK PLAN & BUDGET

This Consent Agenda item is to offer any potential revisions to and approve Amended FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget, which was unanimously recommended for approval by the CHNEP Management Committee after their recent review and discussion. The FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget was originally approved by the CHNEP Policy Committee on May 25, 2023, then

amended and approved on September 21, 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 being 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 of the following corresponding task narratives.

The Management Committee reviewed and discussed the proposed amendments. The Committee recommendation was to approve the Amended FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget.

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

Recommendation: To approve the Consent Agenda including the Policy Committee September 21, 2023 Meeting Minutes and the Amended FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget

Attachments: Policy Committee September 21, 2023 Meeting Minutes
Amended FY2024 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget

7. AMENDED CHNEP POLICY COMMITTEE BYLAWS DISCUSSION

The CHNEP Policy Committee is governed by bylaws, which are periodically updated through amendments. The Bylaws were last amended in May 2019, when CHNEP changed its name to Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership. Currently, several updates and clarifications are needed.

The proposed amendments address:

- Adding Highlands County, and replacing City of Bonita Springs with City of Fort Meade, to reflect current membership of the partnership.
- Meeting noticing simplified to be to appropriate governmental agencies and the public-at-large, in order to reflect the long-standing practice of announcing future meeting dates online and at meetings, as well as emailing and posting to web meeting materials one week in advance.
- Remove language regarding requiring Policy Committee approval in determining if another Policy Committee member can use “telephone or other interactive electronic technology”, in order to reflect common practice that if Policy Committee cannot physically attend but would like to participate virtually, they can directly request a virtual meeting link from CHNEP staff.
- Revise language regarding personnel policy and procedure matters, to be handled as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) the CHNEP has with its fiscal host. The Policy Committee, not the fiscal host, would be the one with authority to put CHNEP Executive Director on paid administrative leave or handle termination, since the CHNEP Executive Director reports solely to the Policy Committee (in order to preserve its organizational autonomy from its host).
- Added Amended this 25 day of January 2024 to record the proposed date of the adoption of these amendments.

Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP Executive Director, will present this item, with Co-Chair Jennifer Carpenter facilitating Committee discussion and voting on it.

Recommendation: Approve the Amended CHNEP Policy Committee Bylaws

Attachments: Amended CHNEP Policy Committee Bylaws

8. AMENDED CHARLOTTE COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES MOU

Charlotte County and CHNEP have an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to facilitate the County serving as CHNEP’s fiscal host and providing vital administrative services needed for its operation. This is necessary for CHNEP to operate as CHNEP is not a special district such as the other three National Estuary Programs in Florida are (Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay, and Indian River Lagoon). Special districts give separate legal status that allows NEPs to operate autonomously, hiring private entities to provide needed fiscal and administrative services. CHNEP has been hosted by Charlotte County for a little more than a year (since October 2022), in which time Charlotte County has served excellently in providing essential services to CHNEP to facilitate its operation. It was understood and expected from the onset that the MOU would need to be amended time to time to clarify respective roles and responsibilities, as well as to outline exceptions that would apply to the CHNEP (versus standard County policies). We are bringing forth the first set of proposed amendments that were drafted in conjunction between CHNEP staff and the County staff/attorney.

Amendments address clarifying:

- County’s role to “facilitate all legally permissible CHNEP operations support functions in a timely manner, including but not limited to, approving interlocal and legal agreements with CHNEP member and partner entities, grant applications and awards, etc.”

- CHNEP’s role to determine pay raises for its staff. [Note: CHNEP uses the raise percentage range that the County establishes, but not its bell curve approach to assign which percentage per staff person – as not appropriate for CHNEP due to its small size for being able to fairly compensate its employees based on their individual professional performance.]
- County’s role to vet Human Resource complaints against CHNEP staff to determine if they are credible and if so, to investigate (other than if pertains to CHNEP Executive Director). If pertains to CHNEP Executive Director, one of the CHNEP’s Policy Committee Co-Chair entity’s would be responsible to address the complaint since the Executive Director reports to the Policy Committee which is governed by the Policy Committee Co-Chairs. The County would still cooperate with any Policy Committee investigation, should the Committee Co-Chairs deem that an investigation is warranted. This is appropriate given other terms already outlined in the MOU and EPA guidance related to preserving NEP organizational autonomy in fiscal host arrangements, which CHNEP has always been applied through CHNEP Bylaws as the CHNEP Executive Director reporting to and being solely supervised by the entire CHNEP Policy Committee (which the fiscal host is one member of).
- CHNEP’s role to have one of the CHNEP Policy Committee Co-Chair entities provide legal services to the CHNEP and its staff should a conflict ever arise with the County doing so as part of the MOU services. This is necessary to ensure that CHNEP’s legal interests are always adequately addressed and preserved.

These proposed amendments strengthen the MOU in providing needed clarifications for the benefit of both parties.

Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP Executive Director, will present this item, with Co-Chair Jennifer Carpenter facilitating Committee discussion and voting on it.

Recommendation: Approve the Amended Charlotte County CHNEP Memorandum of Understanding for Administrative Services by and between Charlotte County and the Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership and authorize Policy Committee Co-Chair Jennifer Carpenter to sign on the Committee’s behalf

Attachments: Amended Charlotte County CHNEP Memorandum of Understanding for Administrative Services by and between Charlotte County and the Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership

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, have 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.

As outlined in the Management Committee report above, there was extensive discussion on this item. The Management Committee then voted to forward a recommendation that the Policy Committee “support the '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 Study recommendation to designate at least the 12 miles of river within Myakka River State Park, to support implementation of the CHNEP CCMP. It should be noted that the SWFWMD, SFWMD, City of North Port and the FFWCC abstained – with SWFWMD originally voting nay and then later clarifying at conclusion of meeting that they were abstaining.

Jaime Doubek-Racine of the U.S. National Park Service will be presenting this item, with Co-Chair Jennifer Carpenter facilitating Committee discussion and voting on it.

Recommendation: Approve provision of 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.

As outlined in the Management Committee report above, there was significant discussion on this item. The Management Committee voted to forward a recommendation that the Policy Committee "support the approval of the Final Land Protection Plan for the proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area by the Director of the USFWS" - with all voting in favor except for the SWFWMD who abstained.

Julie Morris of the Florida Conservation Group will be presenting on this item, with Co-Chair Jennifer Carpenter facilitating Committee discussion and voting on it.

Recommendation: Approve 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/>

As outlined in the Management Committee report above, there was some discussion on this item. As this item was informational rather than an action item, there was no recommendation forwarded.

Mallory Dimmitt 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 Policy 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. POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Each member will have up to 5 minutes to share updates relating to protect and restore natural resource in the CHNEP program area and discuss topics of interest to other Committee members.

Jennifer Carpenter, Policy 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 Policy Committee meetings in 2024 will be held on May 23, 2024 & September 20, 2024, in the same location as this meeting. Please hold these dates on your calendar, with other details including the agenda being sent via email at least one week in advance. If you have ideas for future meeting topics, please send to jhecker@chnep.org.

16. ADJOURN