



**Draft Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
December 18, 2024**

Members Present:

Tonya Bramlage	Charlotte County
Linda Waters	DeSoto County
Danika Fornear (virtual)	Glades County
Kayton Nedza	Hardee County
Nicole Johnson	Lee County
Harry Phillips	Lee County
Aaron Zimmermann	Sarasota County

Others Present:

Jennifer Hecker	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
Nicole Iadevaia	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
Sarina Weiss	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
Andrea Vale	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
Keara Abel	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
Cheryl Cook	Public – CAC Applicant
Zach Franco	Public – CAC Applicant
Brooke Langston	Public – CAC Applicant
Russell Ringland	Future Forestry
Jennifer Shafer	Shafer Consulting

Agenda Item #1 – Call to Order and Introductions — Aaron Zimmermann, CAC Co-Chair

Aaron Zimmermann called the meeting to order at 9:07AM. Introductions were then made by existing members.

Agenda Item #2 – Agenda Additions or Deletions — Aaron Zimmermann, CAC Co-Chair

No additions or deletions were made to the agenda.

HARRY PHILLIPS MOVED, SECONDED BY KAYTON NEDZA TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS AS PRESENTED. THE MOTION WAS CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION.

Agenda Item #3 – Public Comments on Agenda Items — Aaron Zimmermann, CAC Co-Chair

No public comments on agenda items were made.

Agenda Item #4 – Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) August 21st, 2024 Meeting Minutes — Aaron Zimmermann, CAC Co-Chair

No changes were made to the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) August 21st, 2024 meeting minutes.

KAYTON NEDZA MOVED, SECONDED BY TONYA BRAMLAGE TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED. THE MOTION WAS CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION.

Agenda Item #5 – Introduction of New Applicants — Aaron Zimmermann, CAC Co-Chair

A brief description was given by Aaron Zimmermann, CAC Co-Chair, on CAC membership duties and there was encouragement to the present CAC committee to seek out eager and motivated members for application. Brooke Langston, an applicant, and prospective member from Manatee County, gave a brief introduction of herself. Ms. Langston is the Director of Land Protection for Big Waters Land Trust (formerly Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast). She has previously worked for Sarasota County for 7 to 8 years in the Natural Areas Division and the Stormwater Division, during which time she was on CHNEP's Technical Advisory Committee. Originally from Fort Myers, she has also worked for Corkscrew Swamp. From Sarasota County, Cheryl Cook, originally from Miami, who previously served on the Policy Committee for CHNEP. She has also served on the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority as well as on the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council. She was involved in starting the process to preserve Orange Hammock in the City of North Port, working closely with the Conservation Foundation. The environment and outreach are things that Ms. Cook is passionate about. From Highlands County, Zach Franco, originally from the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, is the Conservation Partnerships Coordinator for the Archbold Biological Station and works at Buck Island Ranch. Archbold, located at the headwaters of the Everglades, is aiming to grow in the way that they do conservation and are applying the science and research as a non-profit to protecting and understanding the rarest and most endangered species. Located in Lake Wales Ridge, which is the backbone of Central Florida, the mission is to sustain grasslands, connecting large landscapes and wildlife corridors and addressing climate change.

The next step in process is to bring Ms. Langston's, Ms. Cook's, and Mr. Franco's applications to the upcoming Policy Committee meeting (1/23/25) for Committee approval.

Agenda Item #6 – CHNEP Update — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP

CHNEP's Executive Director, Ms. Jennifer Hecker, presented on programmatic activity occurring since the last Citizen's Advisory Committee meeting. Highlights are as follows:

CHNEP planned and executed the Fall Committee meetings; prepared Amended FY25 Work Plans and Budgets for EPA 320 and EPA BIL grants for the Management and Policy Committee meetings, which were approved at the Policy Committee meeting (9/20); sent Committee member packets to newly appointed members on Policy, Management, Citizen's Advisory, and Technical Advisory Committees; and sent out notifications to all CHNEP Committees regarding large state and federal funding opportunities while continuing to update the funding opportunities fact sheet. For the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) update, final edits from August and September Management Conference Committee meetings were incorporated; the draft was sent to the EPA for comments in September; EPA comments were addressed, and final approval was received from EPA Region 4 and HQ in November.

For finance and grants, CHNEP received the EPA 320 FY25 funding award and the acceptance process is underway though administrative host Charlotte County; CHNEP submitted significant program accomplishments for all FY24 EPA grants (320, BIL, Novated); CHNEP also submitted the FY24 EPA annual End-of-Year report for both EPA 320 and EPA BIL grants; FDEP FY25 Agreement was drafted and is under review by CHNEP administrative host Charlotte County; the SWFWMD FY25 agreement was received and it was reviewed by administrative host Charlotte County; the FY24 Q3 & Q4 reports and deliverables for SWFWMD FY24 agreement were submitted; CHNEP received Q3 and Q4 reports for FY24 Water Atlas project and processed the related invoices; the revised final report for FY23 Water

Atlas project was received and the final invoice was processed; CHNEP received Q3 and Q4 reports for FY24 Upper and Lower Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring Network (CCHMN) projects and invoices and invoices were processed for reimbursement; CHNEP drafted and finalized FY25 Water Atlas SOW and the purchase order to USF for FY25 Water Atlas Project issued; CHNEP also drafted and finalized FY25 Upper and Lower CCHMN Field Sampling Projects SOW (Sample of Work) and purchase orders were issued to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Lee County to undertake services; CHNEP staff held several trainings with County fiscal staff to onboard the CHNEP team to use new financial management software for processing invoices, check requests and purchasing; the Sarasota County draft interlocal agreement information was sent for processing in order to move forward with collaboration and funding on future projects; CHNEP provided additional information for 2024 NEPORT Congressional Reporting Survey entries that were requested by the Regional and HQ EPA review teams; the FY24 Conservation Grants were closed out and all completed projects were paid out; CHNEP drafted award emails for FY25 Conservation Grant applications received and considered by the CAC to date; and the agreements with the Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) for development of Adaptation Action Areas that will serve as 'phase II' for Vulnerability Assessments for Hardee, Highlands, DeSoto, and Polk Counties were finalized and the purchase order was issued.

CHNEP staff attended several partnership meetings since last cycle including:

- CHNEP Water Atlas Monthly Management Meetings (multiple)
- Charlotte County Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment Meetings (multiple)
- Hardee County Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment Meetings (multiple)
- Polk County Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment Meetings (multiple)
- Desoto County Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment Meetings (multiple)
- Heartland Counties Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment Meeting (8/1)
- Corkscrew Watershed Initiative Meeting (8/2)
- Heartland Resiliency Summit (8/6)
- Southwest Florida Regional Ambient Monitoring Program (SWF RAMP) Harmful Algal Blooms Subcommittee Meeting (8/6)
- Charlotte Harbor Harmful Algal Blooms Working Group Meeting (8/8)
- Southwest FL Estuarine Restoration Team (SWERT) Shellfish Restoration Mtg (8/14)
- DinoShield Workshop Meeting (8/15)
- CCHMN District Funding Meeting (8/16)
- CHNEP/CFRPC Coordination Meeting (8/19)
- Florida Sea Grant Advisory Committee Meeting (8/20)
- ANEP External Communications & Legislative Activities Committee Meetings
- SERDP & ESTCP Development of Assessment Tools
- for Downscaled Global Climate Models (8/22)
- VOLO Foundation 2025 Climate Summit Sponsorship
- Meeting (8/26)
- Florida Water Quality Summit (8/27)
- Florida WCA Recent Advances in Lake Okeechobee
- Science: Insights for Restoration and Climate Adaptation (8/27)
- EPA Recovery – CHNEP Meeting (8/28)
- CCHMN Annual Meeting (8/28)
- SFWMD Resiliency Coordination Forum Meeting (9/4)

- Tampa Bay Times Trend Analysis Discussion (9/6 & 9/17)
- GOMA Data & Monitoring Quarterly All Team (9/9)
- Triennial Review of State Surface Water Quality
- Standards Public Workshop (9/10)
- North Port Vulnerability Assessment Steering Committee Meeting (9/10)
- Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative Quarterly Meeting (9/11)
- COASTWISE/Gulf Futures Challenge Meetings (9/11 & 9/18)
- Myakka River Management Coordinating Council Meeting (9/20)
- RESTORE Coastal Sportfish Ponds Team Meeting & Site Visit (9/23 & 9/24)
- Lee County Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment Meeting (10/2)
- LAMSID Project Finding Meeting (10/3)
- Florida Resiliency Conference Meeting (10/3)
- Restore America's Estuaries Coastal & Estuarine Summit (10/6-10/10)
- Post-Hurricane Milton Water Quality Sampling Coordination Meeting (10/14)
- EPA Hurricanes Helene & Milton Impact Meeting (10/14)
- EPA/CHNEP Post-Hurricane Meeting with Mr. Tom McGill (10/15)
- West Florida Estuary Water Quality Coordination Meetings (10/21, 10/28 & 11/4)
- SFWMD Water Resources Forum Meeting (10/22)
- UF/IFAS Meeting on Harmful Algal Blooms (10/23)
- SWFWMD/CHNEP Leadership Meeting (10/24)
- Sunseeker Marina Meeting (10/25)
- Charlotte 580 Land Acquisition to Support Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative Objectives Meeting (10/28)
- Water Atlas Sponsor Annual Workshop Meeting (10/29)
- Joint SFERTF Working Group/Science Coordination Group Meeting (10/30)
- Charlotte County Vulnerability Assessment Public Meeting (11/6)
- Association of National Estuary Programs Tech Transfer Meeting (11/13-11/15)
- One Water Summit (11/18)
- Nutrients & Red Tide Symposium Steering Committee Meeting (11/18)
- Hardee & DeSoto County CVA Kick-Off Meetings (11/19)
- Charlotte County CVA Meeting (11/20)

For presentations, CHNEP presented on the *CHNEP Oyster Habitat Restoration Plan & Other Resources* (including Clam Habitat Suitability and other Maps on the CHNEP Water Atlas) at the Southwest Florida Ecosystem Restoration Team (SWERT) meeting; presented on *Advancing Climate Resiliency in Florida's Heartland* at the Central Florida Regional Planning Council's Heartland Resiliency Summit; and presented *Lessons Learned from Large Scale Restoration and Watershed Planning* as well as *The CHNEP Water Atlas: An Interactive Estuaries and Habitat Report Card* at Restore America's Estuaries (RAE) 2024 Coastal & Estuarine Summit in Washington, D.C. CHNEP also coordinated and hosted the Kids Fishing Clinic at the Arcadia Rodeo with the help of volunteers where over 50 kids received Fish Florida rods and tackle boxes after completing four educational stations focused on stewardship, habitat, knot tying, and casting. For outreach events, CHNEP staff attended an evening workshop at the Florida Lake Management Society Annual Technical Symposium, an event that received sponsorship support from CHNEP, at which staff attended to lead audience input session; attended the Wildcat Tailgate in Wauchula, where CHNEP shared resources with over 150

visitors; coordinated speaking engagements for 2025 with partner organizations including Peace River Audubon and Manatee Park; assisted with post-hurricane volunteer cleanups at Laishley Park in Punta Gorda and Coral Creek in Placida with Keep Charlotte Beautiful, providing supplies for heavy debris removal; partnered on a volunteer planting event at Myakka Headwaters Preserve restoration site; and attended Alligator Creek Fest and did habitat restoration activities with 160 visitors. For social media and publications, CHNEP added an accessibility statement to CHNEP website and continued making updates, including the creation of a new management system for publications and other files; sent out monthly Constant Contact newsletter with information on events, conferences, and volunteer opportunities in the CHNEP area; participated in National Estuaries Week across our social media, a collaborative effort led by the National Estuarine Research Reserves, Restore America's Estuaries, National Estuary Programs, and National Environmental Education Foundation; and finalized the 2025 nature calendar design with printer with calendars mailed out in early December. CHNEP also provided Letters of Support for SCCF's continued and enhanced monitoring and prediction work for Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) events in the lower Pine Island Sound and Caloosahatchee estuary and for the FGCU project to improve understanding of "Impacts of estuarine discharges on water quality and benthic infauna on the West Florida Shelf." CHNEP staff conducted interviews with the Boca Beacon and Fox4Now on Water Quality following Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton, contributed to the Hearld Tribune article on SBEP/CHNEP Caloosahatchee River study, which was presented at fall Management Conference meetings, and CHNEP was featured in The Ledger article on Lake Hancock. CHNEP has 44 new Facebook followers for a total of 1,996 with 7 new "likes" (1,700 total likes), 5,881 subscribers for the educational mailings, 5,065 unique visitors and 8,980 page visits to the CHNEP website, 12,001 YouTube views with 78 subscribers and 307 videos, and 22 new Instagram followers for a total of 618 total followers.

One member commented on the amount of work that the CHNEP staff does and is involved with. Another member asked that since the EPA has given the CCMP update its stamp of approval, he was wondering when that would be printed. Ms. Hecker said after the holidays, it would be going into procurement, and it depends on how quickly the County processes this, then it goes out to bids, so it will take a couple of months.

Agenda Item #7 – CHNEP 2024 Storm Season Update — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP

Ms. Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP Director of Research & Restoration, provided the committee with a brief update on the 2024 Storm Season in relation to the efforts after Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton. Highlights are as follows:

CHNEP staff attended post-event water quality monitoring meetings with partners including NEPs, University of Florida, Water Management Districts, Counties and NGO groups following Hurricanes Helene and Milton; and CHNEP also created a coordination document for post-event monitoring (who, when, and what data they are collecting by region) so that duplication of efforts could be avoided, and gaps could be identified more quickly. Additional work is underway with partners to add pre-selected sites of interest for each region for use in the next storm event. CHNEP also assisted with funding and field data collection. In addition to resources on CHNEP's Water Atlas, CHNEP website landing pages were created for accessing storm data and recovery information and resources will be added as those become available – [Hurricanes Milton and Helene](#). An online survey was created to gather community data input on high-water marks. CHNEP also assisted partners in impacted areas with organizing, purchasing supplies, and conducting community and waterway clean-ups which quantify debris collected. (Small grants are available for community clean-up efforts.) CHNEP reached out to EPA to request support from federal mobile water quality labs to assist with lab analysis of surface water

samples, particularly of bacteria for public health and safety. CHNEP also requested recovery funding for community technical assistance specialists to aid local governments with accessing additional federal grant resources to assist short- and long-term recovery and contacted federal partners for assistance and support for installation and long-term maintenance of tidal gauge in Charlotte Harbor proper. Data is important for more accurate flood forecasting, as well as for flood victim assistance. Data could potentially be made available to local partners on CHNEP's Water Atlas real-time data map.

One member asked if there would be a written report generated which encompasses all the information that was collected so that the public would be able to better understand the data. Ms. Hecker said the response page on the CHNEP website is the best place for people to disseminate the data. Another asked that in relation to the CVAs and the need to increase capacity, how does CHNEP take the assessments from drafting to action and Ms. Hecker responded that this is where CHNEP's money goes. The State requires that vulnerabilities be identified and CHNEP uses these assessments to generate adaptation action planning.

Agenda Item #8 – New Conservation Grant Applications — Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP

CHNEP's goal for Public Engagement is to increase the proportion of the population that supports and participates in actions to protect and restore estuaries and watersheds. These grants are designed to stimulate grassroots community natural resource protection and restoration as well as non-profit partnerships. Preference is given to underserved communities or new applicants and projects. Conservation grants are now given in the \$500 to \$9,999 range (and are reimbursement-based). Ineligible projects or activities are events or services with an admission fee or charge (though CHNEP will consider need-based scholarships); restoration or improvements on private property; projects that personally financially benefit the applicant; political action or legislative advocacy; fundraising activities; projects completed prior to the award of the grant; items that will be sold by the grant recipient; reprinting of existing material unless part of a larger educational program; and capital improvement or endowment funds or usual operating costs. Ms. Iadevaia briefed the CAC on recently completed conservation grants as well as new grant applications.

The first new conservation grant application title is "Myakka River Management Coordinating Council (MRMCC) Website." The amount requested is \$220. This grant would support the domain registration and hosting of the mentioned website which is an educational resource about the watershed. It also supports the CHNEP mission. The staff recommends to fully fund the project with the following terms: continue to keep meeting notices, agendas, and minutes up to date on the website and continue to keep member names and contacts up to date on the website as well.

The second new conservation grant application title is "Citizen's Pond Survey." The amount requested is \$1,000. This grant involves improving a survey tool to evaluate and collect data from storm water ponds by Pond Watch volunteers and citizens in Florida. The staff recommends to fully fund the project with the following terms: include number of volunteers using the updated tool and which area/counties the tool is used, include attendee numbers for Pond Watch Workshop when the final product is presented, and offer a presentation on this tool at a future CAC meeting.

The third new conservation grant application title is "Wildlife Conservation and Protection in an Audubon Certified Community." The amount requested is \$9,500. This grant involves the removal of invasive plants and the installation of a microforest. The microforest is a process following the Miyawaki procedure and involves Florida-friendly plants in a dense configuration that includes ground cover, sub-canopy, and canopy species to attract bird diversity and other wildlife to the community.

The location is a 5,000 linear feet distance along the boundaries of Heritage Oaks and Sarasota County property that includes a public sidewalk. The staff recommendation is to not fund this grant because it does not meet the criteria as it is on private property.

One member said that the Myakka website grant is a good use of the money and the same for the second one as well. He also that the third one with the HOA would need some adjustments and Ms. Hecker said that maybe they should consider working with Future Forestry.

There was CAC consensus to support staff recommendations.

Agenda Item #9 – Overview of the Draft CHNEP Comprehensive Conservation Management Update — Jennifer Shafer, PhD, Shafer Consulting

Shafer Consulting was tasked with making the major revisions to the CCMP based on the input from Management Conference committee members from the last meeting cycle as well as with additional input from CHNEP staff. Dr. Shafer provided the CAC with an overview of the updates made to the CCMP. Highlights are as follows:

Updating the CCMP is important for several reasons. It guides CHNEP funding and staff time; it enables continued federal funding for resource protection in the CHNEP area, some of which is distributed to CHNEP member municipalities/agencies and partner organizations; it is intended to capture the latest science and consensus on the direction of the partnership’s collective work in order to further water quality and habitat goals for the region; and while these updates do not obligate partners to action, they can be used to guide how the National Estuary Program (NEP) can provide programmatic or funding support for research, restoration and public engagement efforts that are outlined.

In accordance with the CCMP Update timeline, after the draft was submitted to the EPA for review and public comment, the draft was approved by the EPA with some comments that needed to be addressed. This next step in the timeline is to provide an update the Management Conference in December 2024 and January 2025. Some of the new updates include Strategic Framing which consists of nature-based solutions, resilient systems, climate change, bioindicators, and environmental justice. Also newly included to the update are Emerging Interests and Concerns such as PFAs, ocean acidification, macroalgae blooms, mitigation of HABs, clam restoration, coordinated large-scale land conservation, post-disaster coordination, and Water Atlas 2.0. There are also 5 new activities: WQ-5 Harmful algal blooms – 5.2 Support methods for early detection and mitigation of HABs; HR-3 Natural flow regimes – 3.3 Support climate vulnerability assessments and adaptation plan recommendations; FW-1 Estuarine habitat – 1.3 Monitor mangrove and salt marsh shorelines, and track changes due to SLR and hardening; FW-2 Critical lands and waterways – 2.3 Implement Habitat Restoration Needs Plan; and PE-3 Partner collaboration – 3.2 Coordinate disaster response and recovery. As for the EPA comments, one was addressed by adding an Appendix to summarize the changes to “Activities” from 2019 to 2025. Another addition was to update the Appendix with revised graphics to highlight the “Action Plans at a Glance.” A third addition was to identify “Leads” or “Co-Leads” for 12 of the activities. The fourth was to identify “Activities” that specifically addressed climate adaptation, such as in the Water Quality Action Plan – “Coordinate and adapt water quality sampling data and tools to changing climate” (WQ-1.2, WQ-1.3) and “Consider climate vulnerabilities when planning and retrofitting wastewater infrastructure” (WQ-4.1). In the Hydrologic Restoration Action Plan – Consider changes in climate, sea level, and groundwater levels when developing hydrologic models (HR-1.1, HR-1.2), “Use a resilient systems approach with nature-based solutions when designing restoration projects” (HR3.1, HR-3.2), and “Address vulnerabilities identified in climate vulnerability

assessments with projects that increase resiliency for flooding, water quality, and hydrology” (HR-3.3). For Fish, Wildlife & Habitat Protection Action Plan – “Protect habitat migration corridors vulnerable to sea level rise as identified in the Habitat Restoration Needs Plan” (FW-1.3, FW-2.1, FW-2.3, FW-3.1) and “Promote living shorelines in addition to or as an alternative to hardened seawalls” (FW-1.3). Lastly, for Public Engagement Action Plan – “Continue hosting public events focused on regional climate science and resilience solutions, such as the annual Southwest Florida Climate Summit (PE-1.1, PE-3.1, PE-4.1) and “Coordinate partners to gather and share resources in response to extreme weather and other climate-driven episodic events” (PE-3.2).

Now that the EPA has approved the collaborative update to the CCMP, the next step is implementation. This means that the partnership is the vehicle for moving initiatives forward. This may include bringing topics of interest or research back to the Management Conference, collaborating on funding proposals or projects (such as Southwest Florida Estuarine Restoration Team (SWERT), an oyster working group, fisheries co-production, Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative, etc.) and letters of support.

One member asked with the upcoming change of administration if the EPA could come back and say that the CCMP update need to be redone. Ms. Hecker said that this is not likely to happen. More of the focus will be on meeting with members of the appropriations committees to guarantee overall funding for the CHNEP.

Agenda Item #10 – Update on Recently Completed Conservation Grants including “Estero Community Park Shoreline Improvement Project” — Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP & Russell Ringland, Future Forestry

Ms. Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP’s Director of Research & Restoration, and Mr. Russell Ringland of Future Forestry, provided an overview of Conservation Grant projects that have been underway this year, preliminary results, and outcomes from those that have been completed. Highlights are as follows:

Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center received CHNEP grant funding that involved Lemon Bay Aquatic Conservation. The students measured water samples and conducted a bird count in November and March near Cedar Point Environmental Park. In April, students conducted a marine organism count in the seagrass beds off the Park dock. No excess nutrients were detected in the water; bird sightings were submitted to E-bird and more species were present during peak migration season; a greater number of pipefish and seahorse specimens were found in this single wading trip than in the last two years of wading trips at Cedar Point. Another recipient of a CHNEP grant was UF/IFAS Natural Resources Extension – Polk. This grant was for Supplemental Wildlife Habitat in Urban Areas of Polk County. During the 6 nestbox workshops, 63 attendees built 50 nestboxes for screech owls and wood ducks to be installed at their homes. Each Fall, the nestbox host family will be surveyed regarding the nestbox condition, nesting pairs present, and an estimate of the number of young that were fledged. Nestbox placement data was also added to an online map via ArcGIS.

The third grant showcased was for Cape Coral Dry Retention Ponds Improvement – a project requested and completed by Future Forestry. It involved reconfiguring and planting a dry retention pond to collect and filter the runoff that is part of the Veteran’s Memorial Parkway. Future Forestry came about because in the 1960s and 1970s Cape Coral was cleared of most of the natural tree canopy for the development of residential lots. The process of digging canals, which was intended to raise the average elevation, disrupted the area’s natural foundation and soil. Future Forestry’s mission was and is to rebuild the forest canopy and, in the process, clean the air and water as well as make a great home for native plants and animals.

Agenda Item #11 – CHNEP Technical Projects and New Tools — Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP

Ms. Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP Director of Research & Restoration, provided the committee with a brief overview on project progress since the previous TAC meeting. Highlights are as follows:

The CHNEP Water Atlas is a publicly accessible online tool providing regional water resource data and information about the historical and current conditions of our watersheds and ecosystems and it has recently completed a big overhaul – Water Atlas 2.0. CHNEP worked with the contractor to redo the whole website to make it more complete, accurate, and user-friendly. The data is grouped by waterbody, basin, and watershed. The pages are presented with the associated FDEP WBIDs, appropriate impairment status and water quality criteria. There are interactive mappers for Water Quality, Hydrology, Wildlife/Habitat, and Climate Change. These are displayed to give a comprehensive overview of conditions. Partners and the public are encouraged to visit the CHNEP Water Atlas for data and mapping relevant to their work/areas. CHNEP partners are encouraged to share their data.

The Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring Network (CCHMN) is a regional partnership of agencies that collects monthly surface water quality data. CHNEP funds the sampling, coordinates the Network, conducts field sampling audits, and uploads data into the CHNEP Water Atlas. The annual audits have been completed and the findings were summarized and presented at CCHMN partner meeting in August. The annual CCHMN all-partners meeting to discuss outcomes of the 2024 field audits, instrumentation, methodology, SOPs, improved data collection and QA/QC, partner updates and next steps was held. Also, the Q4 data was collected and the Upper Charlotte Harbor partners who are working on data management/optimization created an electronic field entry form to streamline field data entry; final field trials were completed in November. In October and November, CCHMN partners collected additional samples as a part of the post-event emergency monitoring.

For County Vulnerability Assessments (CVAs), the Polk CVA's purchase order was issued to the Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) who will lead the CHNEP-funded component of the project with each county and will also manage the subcontractors (a kick-off meeting is scheduled for January). The project will develop a component of Polk County's CVA conducting additional extreme rainfall flood modeling throughout the County to include the 200-year, 500-year, and compound flooding events as well as create a visual interpretation of the flooding events. This work will include public outreach and stakeholder engagement. For the Charlotte County CVA, a purchase order was issued to the selected firm in August. Kick-off and monthly meetings are being held to discuss overall project management plan, schedule, and deliverables. CHNEP attended the U.S. Army Corps Of Engineers (USACE) Coastal Risk Management Study for Charlotte County Charrette to share and request resources between the two projects happening in tandem. An initial Public Outreach Meeting for residents to share input on how the County can better prepare for the impacts of climate change was held and the County received and reviewed the Model Sufficiency Analysis technical memo and draft letter to FDEP and sent feedback to contractor. For Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto County CVAs, a purchase order was issued to CFRPC who will lead CHNEP-funded component of projects with each county and manage sub-contractors. Projects will identify Adaptation Action Areas for each county based on data gathered for vulnerability assessments. Adaptation plans will be developed for the top 3 priority areas in each county with project lists (gathering and incorporating both county staff and community input) which the counties can use to seek funding for projects. Kick-off meetings with the CFRPC and each of the respective counties were held in November.

For Restoration Projects, CHNEP is working with FWC (as well as WMDs and USFWS) to manage the Yucca Pens Hydrological Restoration Planning Project. CHNEP met with project partners to discuss the use of additional funding, logistics, and a letter of support for potential land acquisitions that are related to recommendations for the project. CHNEP then began drafting project descriptions and purchase documents, to be reviewed and sent to purchasing to engage a qualified contractor. For the Tiki Point Harborwalk Living Shoreline Project, CHNEP held discussions with Charlotte County and City of Punta Gorda on potentially having CHNEP lead procurement and contractor management to assist the City. For the Pine Island Flatwoods Habitat Restoration, Lee County contracted an engineering firm to assist with development of bid documents for construction and oversight of hydrologic restoration. Lee County has sent final bid documents to CHNEP for review and is drafting a scope of work to be finalized in January, to set up a funding pathway for CHNEP to reimburse the County for project tasks and close the funding gap.

Following the discussion at the TAC meeting, CHNEP has created a landing page for sharing post-event resources from partners in our region, lessons learned, and potential next steps - <https://www.chnep.org/what-we-do/event-response>. Also, the Florida Conservation Group has received more than \$21 million in funding through a Regional Conservation Partnership Program project funded by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) pledged a local match through the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program. Florida Forever will also provide a match of \$5 million. Funding will likely be used to buy conservation easements rather than outright purchases of property. The Florida Conservation Group, currently working on an additional 8000 acres in conservation easements, recently closed on 5700 acres in DeSoto and 2700 acres in Hardee Counties. There is a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant to assist landowners with grazing plans/land management. Also, CHNEP has finished gathering partner data for the 2024 NEPORT Congressional Reporting Survey to report on annual conservation, management, and restoration accomplishments. This was uploaded into the EPA portal by CHNEP staff and included 100 habitat entries totaling 66,635 acres.

Agenda Item #12 – CAC Updates & Roundtable Discussion on Topics of Interest — Aaron Zimmermann, CAC Co-Chair

Tonya Bramlage (Charlotte): I have a platform through the Englewood Review where I write a column, "Noticing Nature." It focuses on Southwest Florida, highlighting issues that are brought to my attention, through research, nature walks, talk, etc. I use public engagement as a conduit to bring people together. In order to do that, I put out general information that people may or may not know is available. I am always looking for new topics to expound upon. I have 700 words and I try to incorporate all of the topics and information that I get from the CAC meetings. There are parallel lines through the counties as well as consensus on wet land gardening using willows and the advantages, especially to people who have gardening interests in our area or who are newly located here. This is a platform for education and outreach, but we can take it one step further.

Nicole Johnson (Lee): Earlier this month, the Conservancy hosted a very successful symposium on nature-based and hybrid solutions for resilience. Nicole (Iadevaia) did a wonderful presentation there and there were about 100 people in person and virtually. The goal was to provide decision makers and the public with options for what nature-based solutions look like. What we are finding is that there are 2 ends of the spectrum – images of shoreline hardening, gates, and walls – the public and policy makers do not want to see that – especially on the coast of Collier County but they also knew that just placing sand on the beach – beach renourishment – was not a good option for resilience. They did not understand what the middle ground was. So, the symposium brought together presenters from around

the State of Florida, even a presenter from California who spoke about urban tree planting and a lot of great content was shared. All the information is or will be on our webpage in a few days and the content will be edited to be more user-friendly. There are concerning development projects east of Lee County and east Collier County. Brand new towns and villages that are being proposed that are massive – 10,000 homes a piece with traffic and impact to panthers and other species. Many of these projects are going through the federal 404 permitting process. If you have concerns, reach out to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. There is an action alert page on the Conservancy website and agencies do take notice. Every voice counts.

Aaron Zimmerman (Sarasota): For Sarasota County, in July, there was the Sarasota County Conservation Easement Acquisition where 656 acres were acquired through Sarasota County's Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program which was added to the 41,000 acres that Sarasota County has preserved over the last 24 years through that program. The land connects to the Florida Wildlife Corridor, and it further increased the number of protected lands across the State of Florida. Alligator Creek Fest was held at the end of November, and it brought together community members in the Venice area to have some community fun and learning about their stormwater impacts particularly along Alligator Creek which has a TMDL for nutrient impairment. It brought together community members to think of and explore different ways to reduce their stormwater impacts, whether it be through irrigating, fertilizing, using alternative methods of travel such as e-bikes, electric lawn equipment, etc. It was a good event attended by a couple of hundred community members. Looking towards the future opportunities in Sarasota, there is going to be a neighborhood Healthy Ponds Workshop on January 31st. It is to allow neighborhood members across many communities to come and share experiences. This was last held about 2 years ago and brought together lots of people from HOAs to share experiences, what's working, what's not working, etc., when it comes to their community ponds, shoreline stabilization, having "no mow" zones, littoral planting – all of the things that can make communities greener to live in and increase the environmental benefits to these communities. Also, the 2nd Annual Bay Fest will take place in March 2025. It will show the community the benefits of marine habitats around seagrass and all the other critters that utilize those, the economic importance, as well as have lots of other groups share their programs and offer environmental education.

Kayton Nedza (Hardee):

Harry Phillips (Lee):

Agenda Item #13 – General Public Comment — Aaron Zimmermann, CAC Co-Chair

Brooke Langston:

Zach Franco:

Cheryl Cook:

Agenda Item #14 – Future Meetings: Topics, Location and Dates— Aaron Zimmermann, CAC Co-Chair

➤ Upcoming dates for 2025: 4/23/25, 8/20/25, 12/17/25.

Agenda Item #15 – Adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:13 PM.