

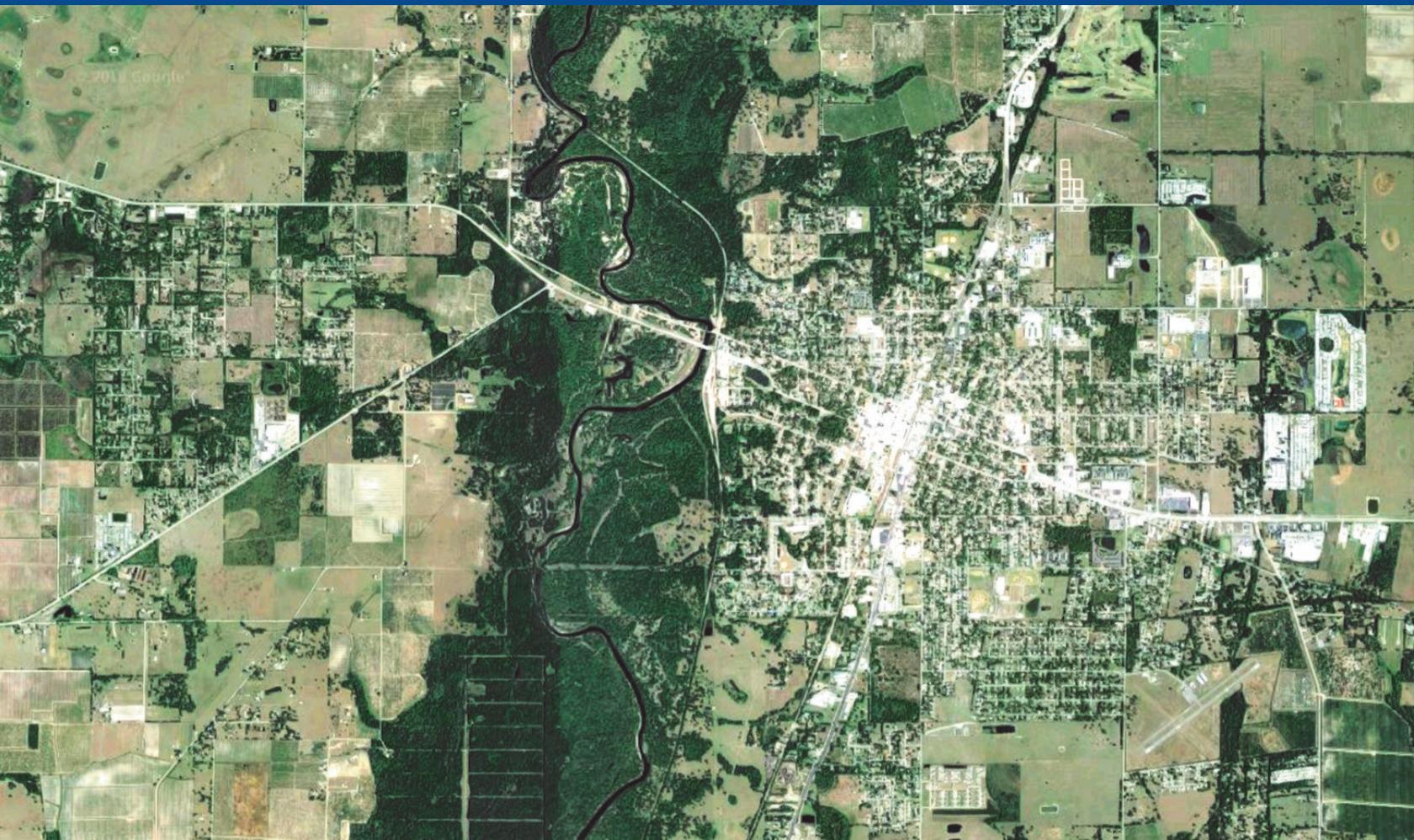
HARBOR HAPPENINGS

Working together to protect the natural environment from Venice to Bonita Springs to Winter Haven

Winter 2019: Volume 23, Issue 1

Protecting Headwaters and Habitat Areas in the Heartland of Florida

Florida is beaches and bays, but it also is large swaths of agricultural land and numerous inland communities centered around ranching and farming. Often these “heartlands” provide important wildlife habitat, water retention and groundwater recharge, and other environmental benefits. Learn how CHNEP is working with these communities to ensure those benefits are protected for current and future generations.



The Peace River winding past agricultural areas and the rural community of Arcadia, FL in the CHNEP area.



Executive Director Update

Jennifer Hecker



As we embark on our 24th year, the CHNEP is growing and evolving to expand our partnerships and work, in response to the current water quality challenges we face. Part of this involves changing our boundary to capture the upstream freshwater portions of the Caloosahatchee River — consistent with the other rivers in our program area, and in response to one of the top stakeholder requests coming out of a public organizational retreat held several years ago. Encompassing the upstream portion will enable us to not only improve those waters, but to also better manage and restore water resources downstream in the Caloosahatchee estuary and Gulf of Mexico.

Expanding also will include two additional inland counties, Glades and Hendry, in the CHNEP service area. CHNEP is somewhat unique in the National Estuary Program in that it is comprised of more inland counties than coastal ones. This is due to those counties being part of the same watershed (having waters that feed into downstream rivers, bays and beach areas) as the estuaries included in the CHNEP. As such, these “heartland” communities play a pivotal role in protecting habitat and water resources.

We are excited to do more work in Florida’s heartland. Reflecting CHNEP’s inclusive collaborative approach in working with these communities as partners, we are modifying our name to the *Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership*. The name modification is being formally approved with the 2019 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, which charts the priority actions and activities of the organization for the next five years. Keeping the same

CHNEP acronym and logo design (depicted above) means we’ll still be easily found on the same web, Facebook, and email addresses. We anticipated these changes to go into effect this coming summer, and look forward to the opportunities to strengthen and broaden our partnerships as a result.

In this issue, you will read about challenges and project CHNEP is working on in the Heartland. One large project that the CHNEP obtained funding for is a shoreline restoration along Lake Hancock at the Circle B Bar Reserve. This project up in the northernmost reach of the CHNEP area in Polk County is an example of the powerful partnerships we cultivate to get turn-dirt restoration results on the ground.

We hope you will take advantage of the cooler weather these next few months to go explore interior Florida at amazing places like Circle B Bar Reserve. These special places hold much of the future for our water, wildlife, and other exceptional natural resources.

Thank you for your support, *Jennifer Hecker*



Black-bellied whistling ducks at Circle B Bar Reserve. Photo by Steve Griffin.

Formation of a New Estuary Restoration Fund?

The upcoming state legislative session will be starting in March and one of the top identified legislative priorities for 2019 is water resource restoration—in response to the water crisis we experienced this past year.

Estuary restoration, just as with restoration efforts of the Everglades and the Springs, involves planning and executing multi-year projects. Similarly, timely progress cannot be made and sustained without recurrent dedicated state funding support. Relying on annual state appropriations, can result in inefficiencies and delays. Consistent recurring funding to Florida's four National Estuary Programs (NEPs) would allow us to leverage those funds to obtain private contributions and more quickly and efficiently implement larger multi-year estuary restoration projects.

Currently, there are appropriations bills that propose multi-year funding for Florida's National Estuary Programs – including the CHNEP. Conveying your thoughts to your legislators on this will weigh in on whether they allocate those resources. Let's make 2019 the year of cleaner water!

2019 CHNEP Public Outreach Grants

Recently, the CHNEP received 7 Public Outreach Grant applications. CHNEP awards these grants annually, up to a maximum of \$3,000 with a 50% match. The following projects were selected for full or partial funding this year: “Post-Restoration Monitoring of Juvenile Tarpon and Snook at Coral Creek Preserve” submitted by the Bonefish Tarpon Trust, ; “Filamentous Algae: Multimodel Biological Control With Native Florida Fish at East Village Community” submitted by Stocking Savvy and Beautiful Ponds; “The Last Straw” campaign to promote biodegradable disposables to restaurants in Punta Gorda submitted by the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association; and “Encouraging the Non-Use of Fertilizers Year-Round” submitted by the City of North Port. CHNEP also provided sponsorships in relation to two other applications for environmental events: “The Lemon Bay Conference & Workshop” submitted by Lemon Bay Conservancy and the “7 Rivers Water Festival” submitted by Polk County Utilities.

If you have a great project to further the implementation of the CHNEP Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, there is still an opportunity to get funding this year! Micro-Grants are being funded in the range of \$500 to \$1,000 and applications are accepted year-round for projects that can be completed by August 31. To learn more, go to <https://www.chnep.org/partner-grants>.



Harbor Happenings, Winter 2019: Volume 23, Issue 1

CHNEP publishes this free educational magazine on recycled paper. Photographs and story ideas are welcome. Sign up for a free subscription on our website — www.CHNEP.org



Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program
326 West Marion Ave.
Punta Gorda, FL 33950-4416

CHNEP ready to assist Governor's Environmental Agenda

Below are some of the specific ways the CHNEP is ready to help advance the goals and efforts outlined in Governor DeSantis' Executive Order 19-12 (*Achieving More Now for Florida's Environment*).

EVERGLADES RESTORATION

The CHNEP was a participant and proud sponsor of the recent 34th Everglades Coalition Conference, as we encompass the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary and serve as an Everglades Science Coordination Group member on the interagency team working on Everglades Restoration. The CHNEP strategic plan for restoring water resources and fish and wildlife habitat in our region, which was formed by our governing body of local, state, and federal governmental officials, specifically enumerates working on Everglades Restoration as a priority. As such, we have supported the construction of the C-43 Reservoir for many years and are planning a community workshop with top scientists to identify and discuss opportunities for water quality enhancements and projects to ensure water coming into and thru the Reservoir is sufficiently cleansed.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

The CHNEP has been engaged in issues relating to responding to climate stressors such as sea level rise for over a decade. Our work on community adaptation planning and resiliency assisted the City of Punta Gorda adopting an Adaptation Plan in 2009, which we now assist in the implementation of. We have also inventoried the best available science on what changes in sea level, temperature, precipitation, increased storms, and other factors are likely to occur and how our communities can better prepare for the future. This past year, we contracted technical experts to use scientific data to model projected habitat and vegetation changes — creating a forward-looking habitat conservation vision map. This saves restoration time and money by directing it to where it will be most likely to be successful given future conditions, outlining additional opportunities for protection and restoration to aid habitat migration, and assisting local governments to anticipate areas of inundation for their transportation and water infrastructure planning. We are a knowledgeable resource and agent by which coastal resiliency efforts can be further strengthened in our area.

WATER QUALITY

The CHNEP is also very active in the water quality and hydrological restoration arena. We conduct monthly water quality sampling, consolidate all data onto a publicly available database and website, as well as do a number of projects that cleanse and move water from where it is harmful to where it is beneficial. The CHNEP routinely uses our consensus approach to providing valuable input and assistance to the State on water quality improvement initiatives, such as prioritization of pollutant limit and clean-up plan development for the most pressing Outstanding Florida Waters in our area that are no longer meeting state water quality standards and which the community recognizes as degraded due to controllable factors. With additional resources, we can expand water quality sampling and develop Reasonable Assurance clean-up plans for these waters.

HARMFUL ALGAE BLOOMS

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

We eagerly look forward to working with the new administration to protect and restore our water resources.



Restoring the Shoreline of Lake Hancock

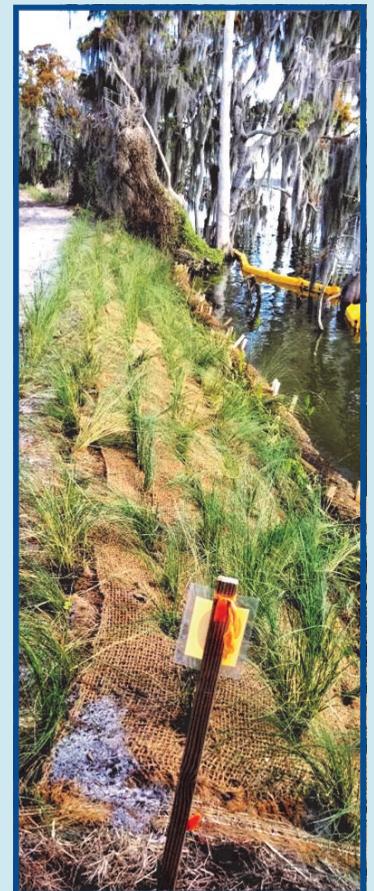
After Hurricane Irma came barreling through Florida a little more than a year ago, it left devastation in many areas of the CHNEP service area. One such area was the Circle B Bar Reserve in Polk County.

Visitors travel from near and far to Circle B to view its plentiful wildlife and its scenic natural beauty. Hurricane Irma severely eroded portions of the Lake's banks, causing sediment to wash into the water and loss of recreational use of a primary trail that overlaid the area. This berm also preserves hydrological separation of Lake Hancock from the Banana Creek Marsh (see photo above). Stabilizing and restoring the shoreline became environmental and public access priorities.

The CHNEP obtained public and private funding to implement the shoreline restoration project. We worked with our partners to assist in installation of erosion control barriers and native plants (photo right). The trail is now reopened in time for the thousands of residents and visitors to enjoy.

CHNEP is working to create and restore "living shorelines" in other parts of our service area as well. These areas can buffer wave action, reduce erosion, provide important habitat, as well as improve water quality, wherever they exist.

To see this project and visit the Reserve, go to 4399 Winter Lake Road, Lakeland, FL.



19th Annual Nature Festival



The Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program was pleased to once again organize and host a free annual Nature Festival for our communities in Central and Southwest Florida. This event is to educate and engage the public in learning about how to protect and restore our water resources and the environment, as well as the organizations that do so in our area that they can volunteer with or support.

This past year's event was held in November at Laishley Park in Punta Gorda, FL. Over 40 exhibitors provided information to the more than 1,500 attendees at the event, providing nature walks, interactive games, and many other fun activities. Children earned free fishing poles and tackle boxes at the fishing clinic, were able to touch live animals, and take part in a learning scavenger hunt to win free binoculars. Additionally, food trucks and live music combined with wonderful weather made for an enjoyable day.





All of the physical expenses and supplies were underwritten by our fantastic sponsors:

- Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program
- Charlotte County
- City of Punta Gorda
- Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast
- Lemon Bay Conservancy
- Peace River Audubon Society
- The Mosaic Company
- Waste Management
- WGCU Media

We thank our sponsors, exhibitors, and volunteers for their incredible support of this fantastic event. If you are interested in participating or sponsoring next year's event, please contact us through CHNEP.org.



SAVE THE DATE
 2019 Nature Festival
 Saturday, November 16, 2019
 Laishley Park, Punta Gorda

Water-friendly Farming & Ranching

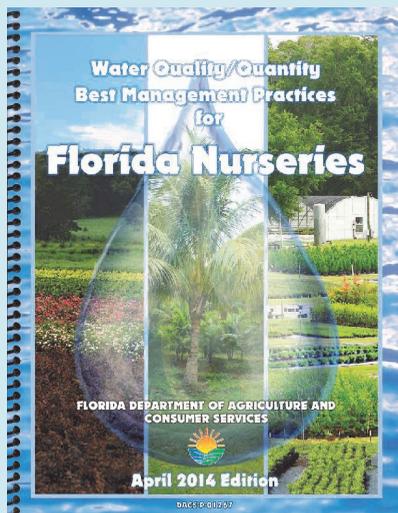
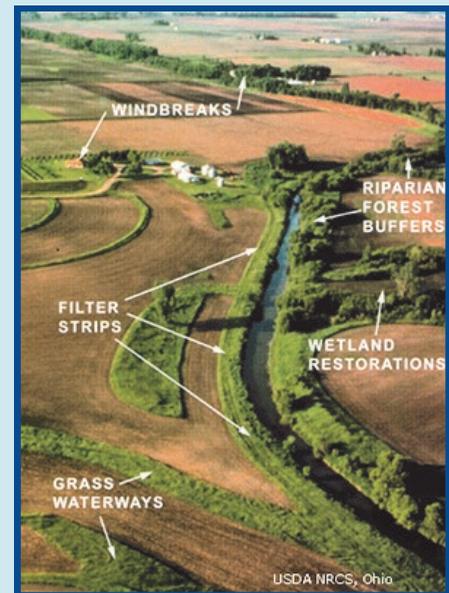
Florida has 9.5 million acres of farmland and is one of the United States' leading producers of crops and livestock. These working landscapes not only produce the food we eat, but also can be important wildlife habitat and groundwater recharge areas.

Agriculture also has a role to play in surface water protection. Surface water pollution can come from the combination of a wide variety of sources, including stormwater, wastewater, and industrial/agricultural runoff. When water quality sampling indicates that a waterbody is routinely no longer meeting state water quality standards for its intended use (such as drinking, shellfish harvesting, or fishing and swimming), the Florida Department of Environmental Protection may designate it as "impaired."

Once a waterbody is designated as impaired, the state can develop a waterbody-specific pollutant limit around restoring the waterbody to be safe again for its intended use—called a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). Then, the state or other entities can develop a clean-up plan on who and how much pollution should be reduced to meet that new limit—called a Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP).

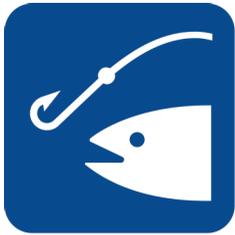
If the drainage area to the impaired water includes agriculture, often the BMAP will include an associated overall pollution reduction target for it. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is then responsible to working with local agricultural producers to meet that target.

Farmers, ranchers, nursery owners, and other agricultural entities can implement water quality/quantity Best Management Practices (BMPs) to improve protection of downstream water resources. Agricultural BMPs are practical measures producers can take that reduce the amount of fertilizer, pesticides, animal waste, and other pollutants while maintaining agricultural productivity (see photo right).



In committing to undertake BMP implementation, the producer is compliant in meeting their responsibility with regards to the pollutant limit and does not have to undertake the expensive water quality testing otherwise required. There are also programs that can help defray some of the added costs from BMP implementation.

If you are interested in learning more about Agricultural Best Management Practices, visit www.freshfromflorida.com/Business-Services/Best-Management-Practices-BMPs/Agricultural-Best-Management-Practices. Additionally, more information is available at www.epa.gov/agriculture.



Catching on to Sustainable Freshwater Fishing Practices

SAVING SCRAPS

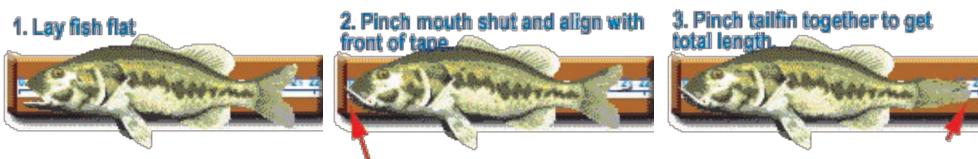
Feeding fish scraps to birds or throwing them back in a waterway can harm wildlife and water quality. Even birds that normally eat fish, can't swallow them properly once the bones have been exposed from filleting — becoming sick or dying. Scraps thrown in the water release nutrient pollution and bacteria as they decay, which can cause water quality to become unsafe. Bagging scraps to take to a trash can or compost pile is a better alternative.

PACKING OUT TRASH

Litter, whether on land or in water, can find its way into the rivers, lakes, and bays we like to fish in. Some can break down and be ingested by marine life including fish, even getting into their tissue which we consume. Bringing a trash bag to collect and pack out trash, disposing of it properly, keeps fishing spots clean and productive, as well as keeping our fish safe to eat.

RELEASING THE SMALL ONES

It is important to carefully handle and quickly release undersized fish. Once you catch a fish that appears to be undersized, wet your hands and try to unhook the fish carefully in the water if possible. If you are unsure that it is undersized, pick up with wet hands and carefully lay down on measuring board with mouth and tail gently clamped together. If undersized, place in water and gently remove hook, holding fish upright so it can immediately swim away. Keeping fish out of water too long, overhandling/roughly removing hook, or releasing improperly in the water can result in the fish dying— keeping small ones from growing up to make more fish.

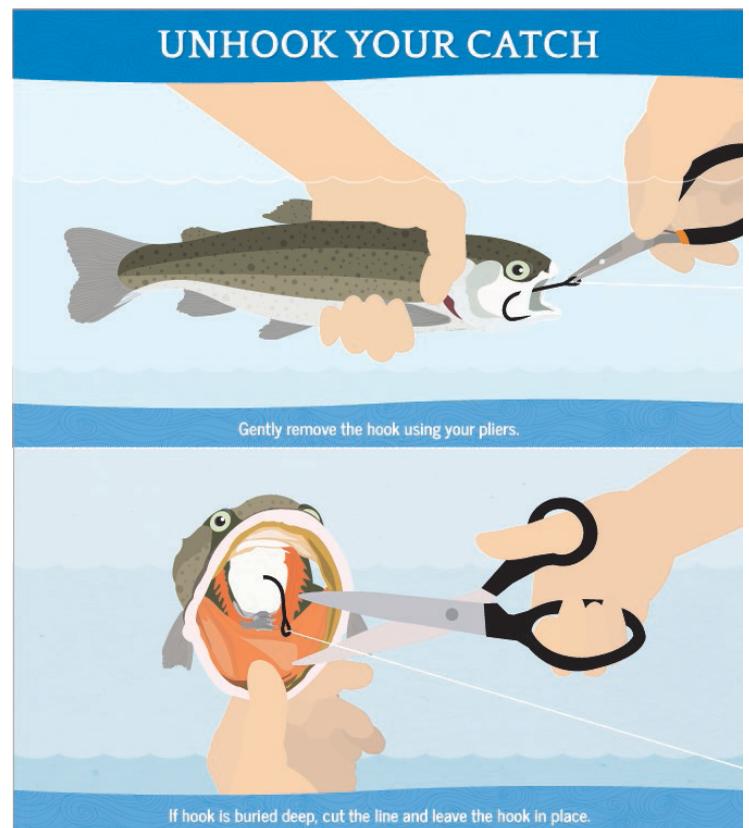


MIND THE LINE

Casting away from trees and wildlife is important to reduce line entanglement that could result in wildlife injury or deaths.



Gathering and stowing your extra fishing line, as well as collecting any other you see, can protect water quality and wildlife — ensuring our waters and fish stay healthy.



Clean water equals more fish and happy fisherman. Our use of sustainable fishing practices now will ensure we have plentiful healthy fish for generations to come.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE is a collection of natural lands, working landscapes, open spaces, and appropriate construction interventions that conserves ecosystem functions and provides benefits to human populations.



Going Green with “Green Infrastructure”

Whether it’s in working landscapes such as ranch or farmlands, or urban/suburban green spaces such as parks and yards, we can all do our part to go green with the use of green infrastructure.

Green infrastructure uses approaches that mimic nature to capture water and allow it to infiltrate back into the ground or be slowed down and cleansed with plant material, protecting our surface and groundwater supplies.

Some things you can do at your home include:

- ◆ Use stone or shell instead of pavement or concrete for walkways, parking and driveway areas wherever possible
- ◆ Make sure roof gutters and downspouts are directed to grassy or vegetated areas where water can soak into the ground
- ◆ Preserve buffers of native vegetation along natural waterways such as lakes and rivers, so pollutants and runoff can be captured and kept out of the waterway

Small actions like these can make a big difference.



Bringing it Home

Practical Tips for Personal Action

In this issue of Harbor Happenings and going forward in our quarterly publications, we are adding a new column— “Bringing it Home”. In it, we will be providing you tips and resources on small easy steps we can all take to help protect water resources.

One major pollutant we are finding in our waterways is microplastics. These bits of plastic too small to be seen with naked eyes are working their way up the food chain, into the food we eat and even into our own bodies.

To address this problem, a number of new plastic alternatives have come on the market. Instead of buying plastic plates, straws, and bags, we can now readily buy biodegradable plant-based ones. When buying towels, bedding, and clothing, we can choose natural fibers such as cotton, silk, rayon, and wool, rather than polyester or nylon. Also, buying less and reusing more overall helps to limit the waste we generate.



One neat plastic alternative that is economical and effective is cloths covered in beeswax to be used to store food in lieu of plastic wrap. The wax makes the cloth seal to the container or can be folded into pouches, keeping food fresh. Once done, simply rinse, leave to dry, roll and store in drawer to reuse. Beeswax wraps and kits to make them are sold online and in many stores now.

Making these small adjustments to reduce the use of plastics in our daily lives, significantly reduces the plastic pollution in our waterways, keeping our marine life healthy and seafood safe to eat.

Get Involved



Join our Monthly Volunteer Events!

Looking for unique opportunities in your area that benefit the environment and address resource concerns? Consider participating in our Monthly Volunteer Events! Each month will focus on a different topic, where volunteers learn about an issue and take action to address it.

At September's event, our volunteers were trained on how to sample for microplastics and assist in the Gulf-wide Coastal Clean-up microplastic sampling effort.

In October, we did a fall wildflower walk where Dr. Bill Dunson taught participants about the native plants and animals in our area (see photo above).

November, our volunteers went out to do annual monitoring of created oyster reefs at the mouth of the Peace River, as well as assisted with our 2018 Nature Festival.

In December, our volunteers learned our native birds and then went out to participate in the

annual nation-wide Christmas Bird Count — covering the Ponce de Leon Park location in Punta Gorda, FL.

Finally, in January, we partnered with the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center to have our volunteers use their kayaks to paddle Alligator Creek for a marine debris clean-up.

We have many fun upcoming volunteer events and opportunities planned including water quality sampling training, horseshoe crab and seagrass monitoring, and other activities to educate and empower the public to protect important natural resources in their communities. We also need more volunteer ambassadors to help with our environmental education and outreach events.

Want to get involved? Sign up to be added to the volunteer list and receive notifications on upcoming opportunities at <http://www.chnep.org/get-involved>.



CHNEP
326 W. Marion Avenue
Punta Gorda, FL 33950-4417

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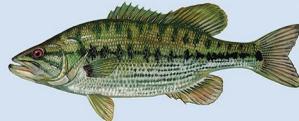
GAME FISH

BLACK BASS

Fish art by Duane Raver, Jr.



Largemouth bass:
SR 17.27 lbs; BC 24"/8.0 lbs



Spotted/Choctaw bass:
SR 3.75 lbs; BC 16"/2.0 lbs

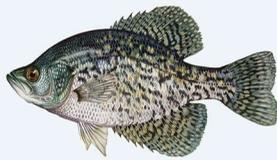


Shoal bass:
SR 5.95 lbs; BC 16"/2.0 lbs



Suwannee Bass:
SR 3.89 lbs; BC 14"/1.5 lbs

PANFISH



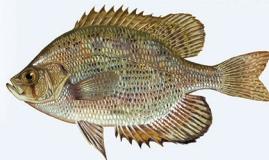
Black crappie:
SR 3.83 lbs; BC 14"/2.0 lbs



Bluegill:
SR 2.95 lbs; BC 10"/1.0 lb



Redear sunfish:
SR 4.86 lbs; BC 11"/1.25 lbs



Flier:
SR 1.35 lbs; BC 8"/0.5 lb



Redbreast sunfish:
SR 2.08 lbs; BC 9"/0.5 lb



Warmouth:
SR 2.44 lbs; BC 9"/0.5 lb



Spotted sunfish:
SR 0.83 lbs; BC 7"/0.5 lb

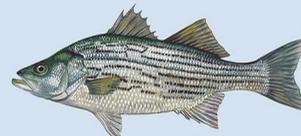
TEMPERATE BASS



Striped bass:
SR 42.25 lbs; BC 30"/12.0 lbs



White bass:
SR 4.69 lbs; BC 15"/2.5 lbs



Sunshine bass:
SR 16.31 lbs; BC 20"/5.0



Butterfly peacock bass:
SR 9.08 lbs; BC 18"/4.0 lbs

CICHLID

NONGAME FISH

CATFISH



Channel catfish:
SR 44.50 lbs; BC 25"/12.0 lbs



White catfish:
SR 18.88 lbs; BC 22"/5.0 lbs



Yellow bullhead:
SR 5.05 lbs; BC 14"/1.5



Brown bullhead:
SR 7.02 lbs; BC 16"/2.0 lbs

BOWFIN, SHAD, PICKEREL & GAR



Bowfin:
SR 19.00 lbs; BC 28"/8.0 lbs



American shad:
SR 5.19 lbs; BC 18"/3.0 lbs



Chain pickerel:
SR 6.96 lbs; BC 22"/3.0 lbs



Longnose gar:
SR 41.00 lbs; BC 40"/15.0 lbs



Florida/Spotted gar:
SR 9.44 lbs; BC 28"/4.0 lbs

State Record (SR) and Big Catch (BC) trophy sizes listed above.

For latest catch size limits, visit www.eregulations.com/florida/fishing/freshwater/freshwater-fish-florida

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