



DRAFT Citizen Advisory Committee Minutes

CAC Members Present (with Co-Chair listed in bold):

Richard Larsen	Charlotte County
Robert Winter	Charlotte County
Danika Fornear	Glades County
Kayton Nedza	Hardee County
Pete Quasius	Hendry County
Scott Perry	Hendry County
Nicole Johnson	Lee County
Harry Phillips	Lee County
Ernesto Lasso de la Vega	Lee County
Debi Osborne	Manatee County
Tom Palmer	Polk County

Others Present:

Jennifer Hecker	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership
Nicole Iadevaia	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership
Andrew Webb	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership
Alexis Horn	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership
Elizabeth Noll	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership
Sophia Brown	Public
Betty Staugler	Sea Grant
Forest Hecker	Sea Grant

1. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Co-Chair Harry Phillips called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. He shared instructions on how the virtual meeting would be run and then introductions were made.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

No additions or deletions were made to the agenda at this time.

PETE QUASIOUS MOVED TO ADOPT THE AGENDA AND DEBI OSBORNE SECONDED. THE AGENDA WAS ADOPTED UNANIMOUSLY WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

No public present at this time and no comment.

4. CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) AUGUST 26TH, 2020 MEETING MINUTES

Tom Palmer requested that the phrase ‘tax bracket’ under agenda item 7. Economic Valuation Draft Report be edited to remove the word ‘bracket’ and replace with a better word to avoid confusion.

TOM PALMER MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES WITH EDIT AND ROBERT WINTER SECONDED. THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION.

5. CHNEP UPDATE

CHNEP’s Executive Director, Ms. Jennifer Hecker, presented on programmatic activity occurring since the beginning of the last Management Conference cycle to the current cycle. Activities in this cycle were impacted by the transition to tele-work and adapting to social distancing guidelines. While traditional meetings and public outreach efforts were disrupted, the CHNEP staff managed to quickly adapt to alternate ways of communicating and continuing the work of the partnership. Highlights are as follows:

CHNEP presented at the Sarasota Sustainable Communities Workshop, the Restore America’s Estuaries (RAE) 2020 Summit, and numerous partner meetings and presentations that have garnered media. These include:

- 11/20 [Saving Estero Bay Benefit Features Hollywood Royalty](#)
- 11/20 [Calusa Waterkeeper Online Benefit-Fort Myers Beach Observer](#)
- 9/20 [Calusa Waterkeeper "Saving Estero Bay" Online Benefit](#)
- 8/20 [Where Did the Water Used to Flow?-SUN News](#)

Financial support throughout this economic crisis continues to be a priority. CHNEP received \$509.50 in private donations and three (3) grant applications, completed seven (7) grant progress reports, and wrote thirteen (13) letters of support. CHNEP also submitted seventy-seven (77) habitat projects to the National Estuary Program Online Report (NEPORT).

In addition, public outreach remains essential to CHNEP during Covid-19. FY21 has begun and partners have started processing annual contributions. So far, CHNEP has received contributions from: Polk County, Lee County, Hardee County, City of Winter Haven, City of Venice, City of Punta Gorda, City of Fort Myers, City of Bonita Springs, City of Bartow, Sarasota County, City of Cape Coral and the Village of Estero. Staff prepared customized 2021 Invoice letters to all 10 counties and 25 cities in the CHNEP area. These packets included the FY21 invoice, CHNEP CCMP Summary, 2021 Legislative Priorities, and project fact sheets. CHNEP gained 118 new volunteers, 37 new Facebook followers, 1,862 unique website visitors, and have over 5,700 subscribers to CHNEP mailings.

CHNEP has resumed monthly events using adapted virtual platforms. The November Virtual Kid’s Fishing Clinic was created in partnership with Bonefish Tarpon Trust and FWC. Attendees completed 4 learning modules and were eligible to receive a free fishing rod and tackle box courtesy of a Fish Florida grant. Some of the content can be found on our YouTube channel: [Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership - YouTube](#).

Other notable outreach accomplishments were the release of the CHNEP 2021 Nature Calendar, contributed environmental educational content to WGPU's Age of Nature [Virtual Scavenger Hunt](#) and to the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast's [Wild About Nature Field Guide to Fun](#) activity book, and the contribution of funds and development assistance of virtual videos centered around the CHNEP CCMP Actions: Water Quality Improvement, Hydrological Restoration, Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Protection, and Public Engagement (they can all be viewed on our YouTube channel). Fact sheets have also been created or are in progress covering the Habitat Restoration Needs Plan, Habitat Resiliency to Climate Change, and Seagrass for each watershed in the CHNEP area.

Ms. Hecker concluded her update by recapping the [2021 CHNEP State and Federal Legislative Priorities](#). She also thanked staff for working together to accomplish so much under the circumstances.

The CAC members congratulated the CHNEP team for great accomplishments. They are especially thrilled about the YouTube channel and fact sheets. Ernesto Lasso de la Vega suggested also exploring educational segments like GOMA does with their environmental clips.

6. NEW CONSERVATION GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership'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. The Conservation Grants program has been set up to help CHNEP with this goal.

CHNEP Finance & Grants Specialist, Andrew Webb, gave an overview of the Conservation Grants program; which was created to support portions of larger projects that implement the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). Since 2001, CHNEP has offered grants to help establish and maintain environmental education efforts and further partnerships to help implement the CCMP. The cost reimbursement funding is in the \$500-\$3,000 range. It requires at least a 50% match of CHNEP funds, but that can be in the form of volunteer hours, in-kind donations, and other non-cash sources. Preference will be given to partners and to projects in communities that have been historically underserved.

CHNEP has already awarded 3 grant applications the current fiscal year. Mr. Webb shared an overview of the received 3 new applications with the CAC:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Project Title	Organization	Contact Name	Contact Info	Amount Requested	Total Project Cost	Short Description
Scrubby Flatwoods Lot Restoratin Project	The Environmental Conservancy of North Port	Barbara Lockhart	Npconservancy@gmail.com	\$ 665.00	\$ 1,330.00	Restoration of a 11,741 sq. ft. vacant lot in an active Florida scrub-jay neighborhood of North Port
Myakka River Management Coordinating Council (MRMCC) Website	Myakka River Management Coordinating Council (MRMCC)	James "Chris" Oliver	james.oliver@dep.state.fl.us	\$ 220.00	\$ 720.00	Project requests continued financial support for the MRMCC's website which is an educational resource about the watershed & supports the CHNEP mission
A birds eye view of Caloosahatchee Conditions: a weekly collection of aerial photos of the effects of Lake O regulatory releases	Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation	Leah Reidenbach	lreidenbach@scff.org ; 239-395-4617 x106	\$ 1,353.00	\$ 2,706.00	Monitor local water conditions as affected by Lake O regulatory releases and make recommendations to the US Army Corps of Engineers on behalf of the environment to protect important species. Provide visual aids such as photos of negative effects of releases.
Total Amount for Funding				\$	2,238.00	

The next Conservation Grant deadline is April 1, 2020 for an award notice in February 2021. All projects are to be completed by September 30th 2021. Please direct applicants interested in funding for future projects to: <https://www.chnep.org/conservation-grants>. All funds are given on a reimbursement basis.

In response to the above grant parameters members mentioned a homeowner's association that received a microgrant back in 2003 to develop a brochure showing what beneficial plants should be planted alongside canals. He believes the grant program can do a good job in helping spread outreach information. Mr. Webb responded that although CHNEP cannot fund projects on private lands like homeowner associations, that is something that could be considered since it reaches a wider audience and could be an outreach initiative. Members asked for clarification on the review process and Mr. Webb explained the CHNEP staff reviews the applications internally to make sure they meet all the criteria before bringing to the citizen's advisory committee for further comments and questions. Ms. Hecker added that CHNEP is seeking input from the CAC as to whether they agree or disagree with what staff recommends, as well as to stimulate new ideas for grants. Mr. Webb asked the CAC members to please reach out with ideas since there is a lot of funding left this cycle. Pete Quasis believes these are all good grant applications and hopes to see more in the future. Tom Palmer asked how sustainable the Scrub Jay project would be in a residential area. Debi Osborne stated that there is an effort being made to acquire more of the lots and part of the area is not developed and is without infrastructure, as well as increase education on proper management of property for Scrub Jay habitat. Mr. Quasis mentioned unless an area is at least 1,000 acres you may end up with a sink rather than a viable habitat so continuity or more habitat is important. Ms. Osborne explained that jumping points are also important to connect Scrub Jays to the big areas. Mr. Phillips mentioned that Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife is also doing something similar with Land Trust that allows people to donate or purchase land for conservation and he believes they have about 30 quarter acre parcels so as the city branches out there is still green space for burrowing owls, gopher tortoises, etc. Otherwise we are looking to have 400,00+ people within 120 square miles and not enough green space for wildlife.

7. HABITAT RESTORATION NEEDS (HRN) REPORT FOR CHNEP EXPANSION AREA

Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP Research & Outreach Manager, presented the final draft report incorporating previous stakeholder and staff comments as well as management recommendations based on the climate impacts study. The HRN Plan articulates CHNEP's habitat restoration vision for the next 50 years of "A diverse environment of interconnected, healthy habitats that support natural processes and viable and resilient native plant and animal communities" (CHNEP 2019). The Plan identifies Preservation/Conservation and Reservation Opportunities, as well as Management/Enhancement and Restoration Targets, in each CHNEP basin. Full implementation of the Plan will have substantial positive impacts on the long-term sustainability of water quality, water quantity, natural systems, and species populations. The overarching goal of the Plan is to increase the acreages of native habitats in the CHNEP area, both strategically and opportunistically.

CHNEP engaged ESA to expand the existing HRN using the methodology established in Phase I to develop the HRN for the CHNEP expansion area in the freshwater portion of the Caloosahatchee Basin (Phase II). The report created by this project will serve as an addendum to the original HRN Report.

Major recommendations in the Phase II report will include:

- Mapped Preservation/Conservation Opportunities acreages by Major Habitat Types.

- Mapped Management/Enhancement and Restoration Target acreages by Major Habitat Types.
- HRN Phase I took into account habitat impacts that would be exacerbated by climate change focusing on habitat shifts driven by Sea Level Rise. This would not be appropriate for the non-tidal portion Caloosahatchee River in the current report, so ESA worked with Coshow Environmental to model other climate change drivers that would be more appropriate to consider for the area. Results of this study will be reflected in the report conclusions and recommendations.

This was an opportunity for the CAC to see the final product and offer final comment before it moves to Management and Policy for final approvals. Discussion was as follows:

Members asked if the contractor had look into potential impacts on local aquifer and groundwater conditions from seepage/percolation from the planned C-43 reservoir as plans do not include a liner and so soil in this area could possibly be receiving more moisture than it would naturally. CHNEP staff noted the comment to share at the Management Committee meeting for a note to be included in the final report. Members also supported comments the Rural & Family Lands program should be noted as a key partner or resource for providing support and funding for easements. Additionally, discussion ensued regarding the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund- noting that if the state does not take advantage of the program to leverage funds for conservation/preservation or restoration programs these are federal dollars that could potentially be 'left on the table'. Members of the committee noted that they looked forward to using the interactive mapper when it is live on the CHNEP Water Atlas as both a potential planning tool for local governments and NGO's as well as an educational tool for elected leaders.

8. CAC MEMBERSHIP UPDATES & ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON WATER QUALITY ISSUES

This is a Round-Robin style discussion for each member to update the Committee on mutual issues of interest, with this cycle's focus on CHNEP's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP, <https://www.chnep.org/our-plan>) Water Quality Action Plan and present water quality issues in the CHNEP area. Each CAC member will have up to 10 minutes to brief the Committee on water quality issues of concern in the county they have been appointed to represent. Once each member has provided their briefing, there will be open discussion for remainder of the agenda item time on what can be done through CHNEP to advance addressing those issues to further the implantation of the Water Quality Action Plan. CAC Co-Chair Harry Phillips led and facilitated this discussion.

- Harry Phillips (Lee County) Lee County is monitoring water quality upstream with Lake O and releases; hurricane season is outlier so lake is up to almost 16 ft. City of Cape Coral doesn't want to be part of problem contributing to poor estuary water quality and is working to beef up fertilizer ordinances through education (400 linear miles of canals) getting message across is tough; outfall pipes that go into river. The City has made headway moving from septic to sewer as well.
- Pete Quasius (Hendry County)– SFWMD in development stage of WQ component of C-43 reservoir; significant reduction of nutrient pollution in recovery wells located (80 proposed) north of Lake O. Snook & Gamefish Foundation has a program of seagrass planting just west of county line; 100,000 plants are now over 1 million; expansion of planting is highly dependent on continue flow of water and water clarity is an important aspect; huge natural water quality component in Caloosahatchee
- Debi Osborne (Manatee County)– Reported that the Manatee County ballot initiative for funding for land protection passed with 71% support. Majority of land use along Myakka is

ag and a lot turning into residential; so wq is impaired with nutrients and fecal coliform. The role is to connect people to the Myakka and understand wq; there are not a of options for people to get on upper Myakka and the Conservation Foundation is looking for ideas for need to find ways to connect people to the resource. One new initiative is writing a monthly column for the Herald Tribune on the Myakka. In December, they will write about Christmas Bird Count to tell people what it is but also to connect land owners to work with local Audubon Society to have bird survey on their property and educate them why their land is important. Finally, ally, SWFWMD is implementing groundwater deep well injection so upper Myakka will be drier during the dry season. And the Conservation Foundation is working with partners to acquire last private pieces in Flatford swamp and working with Manatee County on future preserve to get people out to upper Myakka; invasive plant removal; appropriate grazing because cows are in the river; wq and quantity issues and trying to get land owners involved.

- Members asked about status of funding for ag bmp implementation. Debi added that hopefully more funding from NRCS and matching funds from Manatee County and the State will help improved stewardship of land and water. Federal funding from the Farm bill is incredible source, but requires match. FWC has some programs for bmp; not a lot of landowners take advantage; Conservation Foundation is continuing to do outreach on this through the cattlemen's associations.
- Ernesto Lasso de la Vega (Lee County)– Talked about the continuing issue of nutrients from fertilizer and reclaimed water system. Lee County and City of Cape Coral would like to encourage WWTP to upgrade to AWWT and incentivize homeowners to not use fertilizer. Fertilizer on top of areas with already high loads of nutrients from reclaimed water sources continue to damage water and canals when using it in wet season; reclaim runs right into canals and ponds; algae problems in ponds because of it; WTP need to improve, but the tech is expensive so they are holding off;

Further Comments from reclaimed Water discussion:

- City of Cape Coral and Lee County are conducting a study on reclaimed water to see how much N&P is in irrigation
- The Conservancy of Southwest Florida years ago did an analysis on Gordon river and the loading into Gordon was reclaim generated year round, but used mostly during dry season for irrigation; no storage for reclaim during wet season so they were routing into stormwater ponds in golf courses that weren't designed to handle that; it was a pass through system to get rid of reclaim water and it is a big issue; we need to figure out where this is happening and what is happening to reclaimed water during wet seasons in CHNEP areas; in some cases it is going into Class III Waters.
- Reclaimed water is in sprinklers; percolation is poor and it just runs. There are also issues with chloride loads in reclaimed water.
- Has anyone looked into routing reclaimed water to ag area? The purple pipes to distribute it are limited and very expensive; as you get further out it get costly to transport to ag. The reclaimed water gets flocculated into solid and mixes to sludge and transport to ag and spread into fields but it's expensive and most places aren't doing it.

- Discussion of problems with WWTP in Sarasota County where the plant downgraded from AWWT and discharges into the canals seem to have caused a massive seagrass die off and wq issues.
- Some WWTP use deep well injection and gets into aquifer so problem in many different facets; maybe best options is to sell it? Attractive to residents who have drift grass?
- Golf courses in Rotunda have not been on reclaimed water for the last 15 years (N&P) this would be a great test example to learn about changes in impacts when removing reclaimed water from the waterways.
- Robert Winter (Charlotte County)– Peace River Audubon will conduct a very limited bird count in December and continues to make education videos from restoration sites where birds have returned to share with the public.
- Kayton Nedza (Hardee County) – Addressed global warming and changing weather patterns; Locally we are communicating to put together an association to look at wq and consumption; especially communication with downstream communities such as North Port having a lot of population growth and need water to support. Lake Hancock and Peace river are options being looked at; Hardee co consideration ~ 500-1500 houses; if those are permitted then southern Polk may put in large housing as well that would rely on groundwater which leads to aquifer and other loss of water (river). New highway eastern Hardee and western Highlands Co. will create development and have same issue
- Nicole Johnson (Lee County) – Conservation Collier land aq program on ballot was an enormous success (~77% support) passed in all districts; ppl understood how important land acquisition is to water quality. The Conservancy is working with City of Naples on defending their ordinance against fertilizer ordinance suit. Everglades coalition conference (CHNEP is a sponsor) will be virtual. Conservancy is working on other projects focusing on advocacy in ensuring the everglades restoration including c43 and wq moves forward. Continued work to advocate for update to state stormwater standards engaging in root issues of runoff and new and redevelopments needs to take care of pollutants before they get into waterways.
- Scott Perry (Hendry County) – Continuing to prepare for outreach following Covid and to monitor Lake O into Caloosahatchee is pretty bad looking at 6-7 inches at LaBelle docks (almost 3 ft) water was pretty clear until releases.
- Richard Larson (Charlotte County)– Punta Gorda fishing club we are observational on Charlotte Harbor; the concern lately is increase in attached macro algae specifically on east side of harbor; what is this happening and where is it coming from? Betty Staugler (Sea Grant) is presenting research on this topic later in the meeting.
- Tom Palmer (Polk County)– County stormwater advisory committee digging deeper and found outlets didn't know existed and trying to do better treatment.

Following the updates the CAC and staff circled back to reclaimed water issues as a hot topic. CHNEP will explore related work underway on this issue and how to potentially use CHNEP as a vehicle to further explore the issue through research. Reclaimed water and AWWT are addressed in the 2019 CCMP.

9. CHNEP PROJECTS UPDATES

Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP Research and Outreach Manager, provided the committee with updates on the progress of select research and restoration projects.

First, Ms. Iadevaia spoke of the recently completed CHNEP Economic Valuation. CHNEP is pleased to announce this project has been completed (all questions and comments were considered and it was approved by Policy at the end of Sept), with county and basin fact sheets as well as full report available at <https://www.chnep.org/natural-resource-economic-valuation>.

Natural Resources in the CHNEP Area:

- \$13.6 Billion in Total Output
- \$3.8 Billion in Regional Income
- \$146 Million in Local & Tax Revenue
- Support Over 148,000 Jobs Annually

2019/2020 Projects:

- Gateway to Myakka River State Park – Marsh Restoration
 - CHNEP is awaiting completed Summer exotics treatments deliverables and invoices from contractor in coordination with the Site Manager
 - Upcoming treatments and native plantings to be completed by Fall 2021
- Warm Mineral Springs Creek Restoration
 - CHNEP and FWC reviewed and paid on deliverables and invoices associated with 60% and 90% design plans and permit agency pre-application meetings according to the scope
 - Stakeholder and public meetings were held virtually to review construction design plans and to gather feedback
- Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative Hydrological Modeling Project
 - Task 4 1st Quarter Monitoring data downloads and data submission to SWFWMD database has been invoiced and paid. 2nd Quarter is underway.
 - The contractor presented initial finding at Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative meeting in September
 - CHNEP has received final deliverables and paid invoices for Task 3a) Seasonal survey data memo, documenting biological indicator data collection for wet season conditions
 - Task 5-7 Modeling and Report will occur in 2021

2021 Projects:

- Pine Island Flatwoods Restoration
 - Brought to CHNEP by Lee County and FWC
 - Complete and shovel-ready restoration of 4 abandoned shrimp ponds on conservation land to enhance and expand native habitat and improve hydrology
 - CHNEP will work with finance staff from City of Punta Gorda to issue a 'Request for Qualified Bidders for engineering firm to hire and oversee construction firm while working with engineer of record to oversee project according to design plans
- CHNEP Water Atlas
 - Standard service: data management, site updates, revisions and maintenance
 - Enhancements: Habitat Resiliency to Climate Change (HRCC) Interactive ESRI Map, SWFWMD DB Hydro added as a real-time data source, CHNEP seagrass page

- additions, and Lake Okeechobee additions
- CCHMN Water Quality Monitoring and Assistance in Charlotte Harbor
 - Sample assistance: to provide sample kits to FWC field staff and to pick up water samples to deliver to Lee County Environmental Lab (LCEL) monthly
 - Lower CCHMN: to provide monthly WQ samples and data at 5 randomly selected field sites
 - Upper CCHMN: to provide WQ samples and data at 30 randomly sampled selected sites in lower Lemon Bay, Tidal Myakka and Peace Rivers, Charlotte Harbor, and Cape Haze/Gasparilla Sound

Discussion following Ms. Iadevaia's update is as follows:

Members asked why there is no sampling being done in the upper Caloosahatchee River in Glades and Hendry Counties. CHNEP staff responded that the Partnership is currently funding Charlotte Harbor to fill a data gap that was identified and could not be funded by Charlotte County. However, the FDEP does some sampling there as well as Lee County. She is unaware of any funding in Glades or Hendry for sampling. Ms. Hecker added there is some monitoring being done in the upper Caloosahatchee, but this area was just added into the CHNEP so now it is eligible for funding if there are needs.

10. 'EYES ON SEAGRASS' AND MACROALGAE MONITORING PROJECT IN CHARLOTTE HARBOR

Betty Staugler, the Florida Sea Grant Agent in Charlotte County, gave an overview of the citizen-science seagrass monitoring project recently undertaken in Charlotte Harbor and the role of Citizen Science in finding innovative solutions for natural resource protection. This initiative will create a long-term algae monitoring data-set in response to growing concerns about macroalgae overabundance. There has been much discussion recently among local scientists, agencies, and the public with regards to the continued presence of increased algae in Charlotte Harbor and several other estuaries within the Southwest Florida region. A comprehensive monitoring program to evaluate algae trends has been lacking. To fill this gap, Sea Grant has developed a citizen science monitoring program to observe seagrass and algae distribution patterns. This project will soon be expanded to more estuaries in the region that experiencing unique types of algae blooms of their own. While the types of algae encountered may be unique- this project will explore implementing a consistent and consolidated approach for monitoring data collection. The goal of this study is to improve our understanding of algae blooms, seagrass, and water quality. Member will have the chance to discuss the important role that Citizen Science and Science Communication play in a community. Members shared that they were generally interested in hearing more about the science and research results and the involvement of community members in data collection.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS

No members of public present.

12. FUTURE MEETING'S TOPICS, LOCATION AND DATE

The first CAC meeting for 2021 will be April 28th, 2021. Please mark your calendars. Additionally, if you have ideas for future presentations or topics, please email Nicole at niadevaia@chnep.org.

ADJOURN

Meeting was adjourned at 2:08pm.

DRAFT