



**CHNEP Policy Committee Meeting**  
**Thursday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM**  
**Centennial Park, Large Multipurpose Room**  
**1120 Centennial Blvd. Port Charlotte, FL 33953**

## **Policy Committee Draft Meeting Minutes**

### **Members Present:**

Brian Smith	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 4
Elizabeth Sweigert	Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)
Kali Spurgin (alternate)	Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)
Jennifer Codo-Salisbury	Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC)
John Hall	Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD)
Ken Doherty	Charlotte County
Tim Stanley (alternate)	Glades County
Emory Howard	Hendry County
Scott Kirouac	Highlands County
Roland Ottolini (alternate)	Lee County
Jason Bearden	Manatee County
Ryan Taylor (alternate)	Polk County
Mark Smith	Sarasota County
Maya Robert (alternate)	City of Cape Coral
Alice White	City of North Port
Tom Cavanaugh (alternate)	City of Punta Gorda
Mike Miller	City of Sanibel
Joan Farrell	City of Venice
John R. King	Town of Fort Myers Beach
Lori Fayhee	Village of Estero
Dave Hutchinson	CHNEP Management Committee Co-Chair

### **Others Present:**

Jennifer Hecker	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership
Nicole Iadevaia	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership
Sarina Weiss	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership
Keara Abel	Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership
Randy Smith	Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD)
Chadd Chustz	Town of Fort Myers Beach
David Shutz	Heal Our Harbor
Jennifer Shafer	Shafer Consulting

### **Agenda Item #1 – Call to Order and Introductions — Brian Smith, Co-Chair**

Policy Committee Co-Chair Brian Smith called the meeting to order at 9:05 am. Introductions were then made.

**Agenda Item #2 – Agenda Additions or Deletions — Brian Smith, Co-Chair**

No additions or deletions were made to the agenda.

**KEN DOHERTY MOVED, SECONDED BY EMORY HOWARD, TO APPROVE AGENDA WITHOUT ANY ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS. THE MOTION WAS UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION.**

**Agenda Item #3 – Public Comments on Agenda Items – Brian Smith, Co-Chair**

No public comments on agenda items were made.

**Agenda Item #4 – Policy Committee January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024 Meeting Minutes, Brian Smith, Co-Chair**

**EMORY HOWARD MOVED, SECONDED BY KEN DOHERTY, TO APPROVE THE JANUARY 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2024 MEETING MINUTES. THE MOTION WAS UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION.**

**Agenda Item #5 – CHNEP Update — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP Executive Director**

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

The Winter meetings were planned and executed. CHNEP Policy Committee approved updates to the Committee bylaws and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Charlotte County at its January meeting. CHNEP reached out to participating agencies, cities, and counties with committee vacancies to designate new representatives. Based on the responses, all internal lists for each committee were updated and new member emails and packets were sent out. CHNEP received USEPA Region 4 and HQ approval for 2023 NEPORT Congressional Report for annual partner conservation, management, and restoration accomplishments. CHNEP provided two letters of support for projects relating to stormwater improvements and septic-to-sewer conversion; updated the CHNEP conservation grant application to reflect increases to available funding which is now up to \$10,000; and sent out custom budget reminder letters to all CHNEP members who make contributions. CHNEP also provided letters of interest/acknowledgement for the following research project proposals focused on the CHNEP area: *Testing the effectiveness and suitability of Vallisneria sp. planting in stormwater canals for improving water quality in a southwest Florida estuary and Coastal Habitat Monitoring*. At the request of FWC, CHNEP served on the Management Advisory Group for the Babcock Webb WMA Plan update, providing comments and data to assist in the development of management intent, goals and objectives, and challenges and strategies for their ten-year Management Plan. As for finance and grants between last cycle and this one, CHNEP fully executed the SD015 FDEP Funding Agreement, the Central Florida Regional Planning Council Interlocal Agreement, and the Lee County Interlocal Agreement. CHNEP sent FY24 Quarter 1 reports for SWFWMD FY21 and FY24 cooperative funding agreements. After these reports were approved, CHNEP staff prepared the final reimbursement that was received – closing out the SWFWMD FY21 agreement. CHNEP staff worked with the EPA to update the FY24 BIL Work Plan and submit a revised grant request package for FY24 BIL funds from EPA, which is expected to be processed shortly. CHNEP worked with the EPA and the City of Punta Gorda to update a grant request package for novated funds from FY22-23 from

the EPA, which has been awarded by the EPA and will be used in FY25. CHNEP received the SWFWMD FY24 Cooperative Agreement which has been fully executed and now is in effect; received and processed all annual CHNEP member contribution checks for FY24 CHNEP dues; and received and processed 40 private individual donations, in the total amount of \$1,995.

CHNEP staff attended numerous partnership meetings since last cycle. In addition, CHNEP was a Plenary Panelist at the 2024 Eco Summit (hosted by the Science and Environmental Council in Sarasota) on the *Recharging Nature with Estuary Restoration* panel along with other Florida Gulf Coast NEP Directors; was a session proposer/host at the Gulf of Mexico Conference (GOMCON) with Auburn University, session title: *Advancing Coastal Resiliency through Watershed Planning and Hydrological Restoration*; presented on hydrological restoration planning initiatives in the CHNEP – *Moving Water to Restore Rivers, Wetlands and Estuaries* at the Gulf of Mexico Conference; presented on updates to the CHNEP Water Atlas in *CHNEP Water Atlas: An Interactive Estuaries Report Card* presentation at the 2024 AWRA Geospatial Water Technology Conference; presented on *CHNEP Water Atlas: An Interactive Estuaries Report Card* at the Coastal Habitat Integrated Monitoring and Mapping Program Workshop; gave a poster presentation on *CHNEP Habitat Restoration Needs Plan* at the Coastal Habitat Integrated Monitoring and Mapping Program Workshop; and submitted abstracts for the Restore America’s Estuaries Conference 2025. For outreach events, CHNEP hosted and organized the 2024 Southwest Florida Climate Summit in Punta Gorda, which had 200-plus attendees each day (videos of the event are posted on the CHNEP website and YouTube channel); prepared science communication/education tools and resources that were sent to each CAC member to assist them in their community outreach efforts; attended Water, Wings and Wild Things Festival at Circle B Bar Preserve in Polk County which had over 200 students from schools throughout Polk County attended; co-hosted the Myakka Headwaters Preserve Tree Planting with the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast and SBEP (volunteers planted 600-plus tree saplings in 2 hours); provided environmental education materials for partner events including LAMSID, Wings Over Water Festival, Cape Coral Waterways Festival, Lemon Bay Conservancy Open House and the City of North Port Public Works Road-E-O; held exhibitor booths at the One Charlotte One Water Workshop, Annual Southwest Florida Water Resources Conference, Annual Everglades Coalition Conference where we distributed a variety of educational materials including calendars, fact sheets, CCMP brochure, upcoming volunteer event information, and 2024 Southwest Florida Climate Summit information; attended the Highlands Hammocks Civilian Conservation Corps Festival - over 300 people visited the CHNEP booth, which included a bird trivia wheel, Backyard Bird Week information, kid’s scratch off ocean crafts, and more; attended the Swamp Cabbage Festival in LaBelle – over 600 people came to the CHNEP booth where children received educational materials about CHNEP and calendars, CCMP brochures, and Kids’ Activity Books; attended the Chalo Nitka Festival in Moore Haven – over 40 people came to the CHNEP booth where children played a fish habitats game and learned how to measure popular game fish; updated the Funding Opportunities Fact Sheet to distribute to stakeholders, community members, and anyone who can benefit from utilizing current funding opportunities; celebrated and recognized #IHeartEstuaries month in February with a series of posts on Facebook and Instagram highlighting estuaries and projects in the CHNEP; and attended the Hardee County Schools Field Trip to Charlotte Harbor and assisted in providing hands-on environmental and water resources education to 50 4th grade students and provided 50 copies of the CHNEP Kids’ Activity Book to Hardee County Water Resources Education Program. CHNEP staff were interviewed and featured in “Experts: Flooding puts flat Florida at risk” in the Charlotte Sun Newspaper and “Experts will gather in Punta Gorda

next week to present the latest climate science and the public is invited to attend” for the WGCU National Public Radio’s Gulf Coast Life program. CHNEP has 1,951 Facebook followers with 1,714 total likes, 6,041 subscribers for the educational mailings, 3,124 unique visitors and 4,742 page visits to the CHNEP website this year, 10,209 YouTube views with 65 subscribers and 299 videos, and 584 Instagram followers.

There were no comments or questions by the CHNEP Policy Committee members on the CHNEP Update item.

**Agenda Item #6 – Management Committee Report, Dave Hutchinson, Management Committee Co-Chair**

Dave Hutchinson, Management Committee Co-Chair, provided a briefing from the last Management Committee Meeting on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Highlights are as follows:

Mark Walton was elected to serve a second term as co-chair of TAC and Aaron Zimmerman was elected to serve as co-chair of CAC. The TAC guest presentation was given by Dr. Madison Trowbridge of SWFWMD. It was regarding the recent study in the Rainbow River which determined that growth of filamentous macroalgae was also stimulated by iron sediments and groundwater rather than by nutrients alone. The CAC staff presentation was regarding a conservation grant application. It involves Stewardship Funding for Neighborhood Land Management in the amount of \$2,150 and was approved based on CHNEP staff recommendations. TAC and CAC provided CCMP update suggestions to the Management Committee for review and revisions. The Management Committee reviewed and incorporated their CCMP update recommendations to the Policy Committee. The Management Committee offered small additions and revisions to the FY25 EPA 320 and FY25 EPA BIL Work Plans and Budgets, unanimously voting to recommend that the Policy Committee approve both with those changes. The Management Committee heard the CHNEP Program and Technical Projects Updates presentation as well as shared updates with each other on their respective counties and communities’ natural resource-related activities and projects.

There were no comments or questions by the CHNEP Policy Committee members on the Management Committee Report item.

**Agenda Item #7 – FY2025 EPA 320 & BIL Work Plans & Budgets – Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP**

Ms. Jennifer Hecker presented the FY2025 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget and outlined pertinent removals, carryovers, decreases, updates, and overall adjusted funding in detail for both revenue and expense portions with narrative task descriptions to reflect the changes. The list of amendments for the FY2025 EPA 320 and BIL Work Plans & Budgets are as follows:

For FY2025 EPA 320 Table 1: changed the table title to “FY25 Budget Overview;” included \$2,000 for personnel, paid for by local funds, to cover D.C. Congressional Hill visits regarding annual Congressional appropriations for funding the National Estuary Program; FY24 Novated EPA 320 funds shown in revenue category as they have just been received so will be carryover revenue for FY25 personnel costs; and overall Revenue and Expenditures changed from \$2,272,800 in FY24 (without Novated Funds) to \$2,431,675 in FY25 (with Novated Funds). In Table 2: changed the table title to “Fiscal Year 2025 Administrative Budget;” Meeting Support increased from \$7,000 to \$10,000; Communication Software and Fees increased from \$9,000 to

\$12,000; and the overall Administrative Budget increased from \$250,869 to \$256,869. In Table 3: changed the year in the table title and overall anticipated revenue remains the same at \$338,000. In Table 4: updated the year in the table title as well as the anticipated staff travel conferences and locations based on the best currently available information and overall Travel Budget Costs remain the same at \$25,000. In Table 5: increased sponsorships from \$6,500 (which had decreased due to Hurricane Ian) to \$10,000; increased Conservation Grants from \$24,500 to \$30,000; changed “Calendar” to “Calendar Support” to “Publications” and “Publication Support;” removed printing of separate Harbor Happenings issues (due to rising print and mailing costs of publications and move to more digital communications, still one issues is included as an insert of annual calendar); increased CHNEP Events from \$4,238 to \$16,214 to account for rising costs of annual Climate Summit/other CHNEP-hosted events; and overall Public Outreach Budget decreased from \$115,068 to \$106,321. In Table 6: changed the table title to “Research and Restoration Projects Budget;” added FY23 EPA 320 item for Water Quality Trends Project paid for by unexpended carryover funds; removed FY23 EPA BIL item for CHNEP Water Atlas Maintenance and Improvements as that year’s contract is anticipated to be completed prior to the next fiscal year; adjusted 2024 EPA 320 TBD Research/Restoration (\$14,491 to \$49,491) to reflect the current amount of unexpended unappropriated funds available for this; added 2025 Lower CCHMN – Water Quality Monitoring and Assistance in the amount of \$13,000 and Caloosahatchee Basin SAV Restoration and Water Quality Project for \$260,000 paid for by EPA 320 funding; added 2025 Upper CCHMN – Water Quality Monitoring in the amount of \$74,000 paid for by SWFWMD funding; added 2025 TBD Project Costs in the amount of \$20,000 paid for by local funding; added 2025 EPA BIL funded projects including Sarasota and Manatee Vulnerability Assessments each in the amount of \$200,000, next year’s CHNEP Water Atlas Maintenance & Improvements in the amount of \$85,000, and FY25 Restoration Project TBD in the amount of \$414,800; and overall Research & Restoration Projects Budget increased from \$1,021,291 to \$1,342,675 – this is the result of the Novated EPA 320 funding paying for a large amount of FY2025 personnel costs, allowing regular EPA 320 funding to go to added research and restoration projects and initiatives. Other Work Plan highlights include added FY24 Previous Year Accomplishments (to date, will be updated in next cycle’s amendments with accomplishment through the remainder of this fiscal year); staff organization chart is unchanged. The only presently unfilled budgeted position is Restoration Specialist, which we are waiting full BIL workload to become clearer before deciding whether to hire; EPA 320 FY24 Novated Funds will be used towards FY25 personnel, and this will allow those funds to be expended and closed out in the timeliest manner within the remaining grant timeframe; and these changes outlined were then carried forward into the appropriate areas of the narrative task descriptions.

For FY2025 EPA BIL, which is a subset of the 320 master workplan, in Table 1: updated year in table title; Revenue and Expenditures same as FY2024 (\$909,800); and replaced Yucca Pens Hydrological Restoration Project Phase 1, as well as DeSoto County and Hardee County Vulnerability Assessments FY24 funded projects with FY25 BIL-funded Sarasota County and Manatee County Vulnerability Assessments. In Table 2: updated year in table title; input anticipated FY25 staff travel conferences and locations based on best currently available information; and overall BIL-funded Travel Budget Costs remain the same at \$10,000. In Table 3: changed table title to “Research and Restoration Projects Budget;” added FY2023 EPA 320 item for Water Quality Trends project, paid for by these unexpended carryover funds; removed FY2023 EPA 320 BIL item for CHNEP Water Atlas Maintenance & Improvements as that year’s contract is anticipated to be completed prior to next fiscal year; adjusted 2024 EPA 320 TBD

Research/Restoration (\$14,491 to \$49,491) to reflect the current amount of unexpended unappropriated funds available for this; added 2025 Lower CCHMN – Water Quality Monitoring & Assistance in amount of \$13,000 and Caloosahatchee Basin SAV Restoration and Water Quality Project for \$260,000 paid for by EPA 320 funding; added 2025 Upper CCHMN – Water Quality Monitoring in the amount of \$74,000 paid for SWFWMD funding; added 2025 TBD Project Costs in the amount of \$20,000 paid for by local funding; added 2025 EPA BIL funded projects including Sarasota and Manatee Vulnerability Assessments each in the amount of \$200,000, next year’s CHNEP Water Atlas Maintenance & Improvements in the amount of \$85,000, and FY25 Restoration Project TBD in the amount of \$414,800; overall Research & Restoration Projects Budget increased from \$1,021,291 to \$1,342,675 - this is a result of the Novated EPA 320 funding paying for a large amount of FY2025 personnel costs, allowing regular EPA 320 funding to go to added research and restoration projects and initiatives; and these changes were then carried forward into the appropriate areas of the narrative task descriptions.

A Committee member inquired as to DC travel item being listed as being one day in length and Jennifer Hecker indicated that was a typo, as trips there annually are 3 to 4 days – so would revise the Work Plan before submitting to US EPA to correct that. Another member thanked the City of Punta Gorda and Charlotte County for their coordinated efforts in helping the fiscal host transition go more smoothly.

**KEN DOHERTY MOVED, SECONDED BY SCOTT KIROUAC TO APPROVE THE FY2025 EPA 320 AND EPA BIL WORK PLANS AND BUDGETS WITH THE DC TRAVEL REVISION. THE MOTION WAS UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION.**

**Agenda Item #8 – Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) 5-Year Update Workshop Discussion – Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP**

The U.S. EPA requires a *Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan* (CCMP) from each National Estuary Program entity, for them to receive and guide federal funding to the region. The U.S. EPA requires each CCMP to be reevaluated every five years to see if it needs a “Revision” or an “Update”. Revisioning is major substantive changes like adding priority actions, and as such, requires lengthier more extensive review and approval by EPA. CHNEP did this 2017-2019, when we rewrote the entire CHNEP CCMP over two years with committee input over multiple meeting cycles. Updating is for minor substantive changes and updates, so required less EPA review process. Since it has been 5 years since the 2019 CHNEP CCMP was approved, CHNEP staff was required to review to determine if updating or revisioning was needed, and it was determined only an update is needed. It is important to update the CCMP because it guides CHNEP funding and staff time, enables continued federal funding for resource protection in CHNEP area, some of which is distributed to CHNEP member municipalities/agencies and partner organizations, and is intended to capture the latest science and consensus on the direction of the Partnership’s collective work to further water quality and habitat goals for the region. These updates are not obligating partners to actions, but instead are used to guide how the NEP can provide programmatic or funding support for research, restoration and public engagement efforts outlined therein. CHNEP staff read through the entire document and formed an initial list of staff recommendations on the updates that are needed (all graphics with data will also be reviewed and updated with newer information as it is available at the time of updating). The CHNEP CCMP 5-year update timeline is as follows: April/May – staff recommendations presented to CHNEP Management Conference committees

(TAC, Citizen’s Advisory Committee, Management, and Policy) and all committee members’ comments are collected; in June/July, there is the procurement of contractor services to create an updated CCMP together with a comment/response document to committee comments, graphics updating, editing, layout, etc.; in August/September, the final draft is brought back to the Fall Management Conference meetings for final review and approval; and in October/November, the updated CCMP is sent to the EPA for final approval (once final draft is approved, it will be printed and distributed in 2025). In preparation for this meeting, committee members were asked to review the 2019 CCMP and staff recommendations. This meeting is the opportunity to provide comments and suggestions relating to the CCMP update. Update suggestions could include adding new and emerging research or issues that the Partnership is working on to reflect the state of the science; removing outdated information or text relating projects and initiatives that have since been completed or retired; and/or making any needed adjustments to an “activity,” including adjusting the metrics to reflect current capacity and priorities.

## **WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN**

**VISION:** Waters that meet their designated human uses for drinking, shellfish harvesting, or swimming and fishing, while supporting appropriate and healthy aquatic life.

**GOAL:** Water quality improvement.

**OBJECTIVE:** Meet or exceed water quality standards for designated uses of natural waterbodies and waterways with no degradation of Outstanding Florida Waters.

**STRATEGY:** Support comprehensive and coordinated water quality monitoring programs, and projects and programs that reduce pollutants entering waterways.

Action 1: Support a comprehensive and coordinated water quality monitoring and assessment strategy.

- 1.1 Maintenance or increase of the spatial and temporal extent of ambient water quality monitoring data collection with appropriate QA/QC.
- 1.2 Updates of water quality data to the Water Atlas at least twice per year, and continuous public online access to water quality via the Water Atlas.
- 1.3 Creation and dissemination of water quality status summaries for all basins in the CHNEP study area at least once per year.
- 1.4 Establishment of sampling and analysis protocols; periodic water sampling using established sampling and analysis protocols at targeted locations.

### **MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**WQ 1.3: Assess and report water quality status and trends:**

- Revise 5-year Performance Measure to reflect new CHNEP Water Atlas Capabilities (tools, pages, etc.) that assess and report water quality status and trends.

**WQ 1.4: Assess and report water quality status and trends –**

- Add PFAS and PCBs into the Narrative on Emerging Pollutants/Contaminants, making sure language is broad scale enough to capture any other pollutants that emerge later.

*There was Policy consensus on these Management Committee recommendations. A Policy Committee member asked if anyone is exploring using drones for water quality samples. Nicole Iadevaia explained there is some research in other regions (ex. Biscayne Bay area) but none in the CHNEP area that we are aware of. Another Committee asked when would draft be available for review. Jennifer Hecker explained that it is posted online two weeks before Technical Advisory Committee, so will email to all Committee then (approximately six weeks before Policy meeting). Another committee asked if they could have a red line version then to see the changes made easily and Jennifer Hecker responded that CHNEP will send out a red line draft to all Committees when it is available.*

Action 2: Develop water quality standards, pollutant limits, and cleanup plans.

2.1 Restoration of water quality in at least 5 impaired waterbodies, demonstrated by water quality data indicating they are fully meeting the water quality standards for their designated beneficial use(s).

Action 3: Reduce urban stormwater and agricultural runoff pollution.

3.1 Increased number of green infrastructure projects developed and implemented.

3.2 Increased agricultural stakeholders enrolled in SWFWMD-FARMS, USDA NRCS, and FDAC Programs for their commodity.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

WQ 2.1: Encourage review, development, and implementation of additional water quality criteria and targets:

- Update the WQ indicators section to reflect expanded focus on additional metrics to measure WQ and system health reflecting new holistic management strategy for agencies: WMDs and FWC.
- Clarify in narrative and Activity Section that FDEP is the regulatory lead with establishing WQ thresholds, but CHNEP and partners will provide data and support to assist FDEP in this role where appropriate.

WQ 3.1: “Reduce urban stormwater and agricultural runoff pollution”

- Update language to reflect current status of stormwater rule if signed and goes into effect.

*There was Policy consensus on these Management Committee recommendations. A Committee member asked if the new Statewide Stormwater Rule was ratified yet, to which CHNEP staff indicated they had heard was going to Governor for signature a week or two ago but not sure if it has been yet. Committee decided proposed language was broad on Statewide Stormwater Rule is enough as is to accommodate the status of that. The Policy Committee had no further comments or recommendations on WQ 2.1 or 3.1.*

Action 4: Reduce wastewater pollution.

4.1 Reduced sanitary sewer system overflows and releases.

4.2 Reduced the number of septic systems and small package plants threatening surface and groundwater



## Action 5: Reduce harmful algal blooms.

### 5.1 Tracking and dissemination of information about occurrences and reduction of harmful effects from algae blooms, including influencing factors and impacts of climate stressors on HABs.

#### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

##### WQ 4: Reduce Wastewater Pollution –

- Recommend adding language about identifying opportunities to encourage wastewater improvements and/or relocation of lift stations to a higher elevation to accommodate climate change effects (such as sea level rise).

##### WQ 5.1: Reduce Harmful Algae Blooms –

- Adding “including macroalgae” after HABs in activity header, as well as revise narrative to expand language on macroalgae to reflect how it has increased in our region and other scientific evidence of its impacts.
- Also revise to reflect growing scientific evidence/consensus on role of anthropogenic nutrients on red tide severity, frequency, and duration.

*There was Policy consensus on these Management Committee recommendations. A Policy Committee member asked about red tide and whether it is included in harmful algae blooms. Jennifer Hecker mentioned red tide is described in narrative and included in the broader term of red tide. The Committee member wants to ensure included for red tide mitigation funding. Another member asked about whether Blue Green Algae is included in harmful algae blooms, and Jennifer Hecker affirmed that is also mentioned in the narrative and included in that term. There was a follow-up question about harmful algae mitigation and Jennifer Hecker explained that nutrient pollution is known to exacerbate and contribute to the excessive growth of these algae to inhibit them from proliferating. Also, there is research on algae mitigation technologies. The Committee member wants to ensure that the algae mitigation technologies are also mentioned, to help treat these harmful algae blooms. Another member said that the term harmful algae blooms covers red drift algae and other ones as well. The Policy Committee also made the following additional recommendations to on the Water Quality section:*

#### POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBER ADDITIONAL CONSENSUS RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Activity 4 - Suggest broadening language to reflect all resiliency
- Activity 5 – Suggest adding activity 5.2 that CHNEP “promote technologies and best practices that mitigate Harmful Algae Blooms.”

## **HYDROLOGICAL RESTORATION ACTION PLAN**

**VISION:** Appropriate freshwater flow across the landscape to sustain healthy wetlands, rivers, and estuaries.

**GOAL:** Enhanced and improved waterbodies with more natural hydrologic conditions.

**OBJECTIVE:** Adequate aquifer recharge and freshwater volume and timing of flow to support healthy natural systems, meet water quality criteria, and protect the designated use.

STRATEGY: Support data-driven watershed planning and hydrologic restoration projects to protect and restore natural flow regimes and provide sufficient fresh surface water and groundwater to natural systems.

Action 1: Conduct data collection, modeling, and analyses to support hydrologic restoration.

1.0 Updated estuarine mixing, surface water, and groundwater models to support MFL development and recovery strategies and creation of regional watershed restoration plans where needed. Increased number of surface and groundwater level and flow gauges in areas with limited data to monitor natural variations in flow and impacts of man-made barriers and alterations (including mining, ditching, channelizing, and damming).

Action 2: Increase fresh surface water and groundwater availability to support healthy ecosystems.

- 2.1 Increased number of recovery strategies and projects to reduce or eliminate MFL exceedances.
- 2.2 Increase in long-term average annual levels in aquifers.
- 2.3 Increased water conservation.

Action 3: Protect and restore natural flow regimes.

- 3.1 Increased number of completed plans with hydrologic restoration projects that are ready for implementation.
- 3.2 Increased acres or linear miles of hydrologically restored or reconnected habitat, while maintaining or improving water quality and flood protection.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

HR-2.2: Increase fresh surface water and groundwater availability to support healthy natural systems-

- Add language to support communities encourage other communities to use Low Impact Design and Nature-based Solutions

HR-3: Preserve and restore natural flow regimes –

- Add language to encourage adding water quality components into stormwater hydrologic engineering projects
- Update language on mention of C-43 Reservoir to reflect progress.

HR-3.1: Preserve and restore natural flow regimes –

- Add language encouraging more floodplain connectivity projects, as well as include language to address reducing channelization where feasible

*There was Policy consensus on these Management Committee recommendations, and made the following additional recommendation to on the Hydrological Restoration section:*

POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- HR 1: Clarify “responsible parties” language

## **FISH, WILDLIFE, AND HABITAT PROTECTION ACTION PLAN**

**VISION:** A diverse environment of interconnected, healthy habitats that support natural processes and viable, resilient native plant and animal communities.

**GOAL:** Natural habitat protection and restoration.

**OBJECTIVE:** Permanently acquire, connect, protect, restore, and manage natural terrestrial and aquatic habitats.

**STRATEGY:** Promote and facilitate permanent acquisition and effective protection and management of critical natural habitats including wildlife dispersal areas, movement and habitat migration corridors, wetlands, flow ways, and environmentally sensitive lands and estuarine habitats.

### Action 1: Protect, restore, and monitor estuarine habitats.

- 1.1 Increased created and restored oyster reefs, living shorelines, and seagrass meadows.
- 1.2 Improved understanding and additional data on habitat condition and function for supporting native aquatic life.

### Action 2: Protect, restore, and monitor environmentally sensitive lands and waterways including critical habitat areas.

- 2.1 Updated and adopted Habitat Restoration Needs Plan that includes priority projects. Increased acreage of conserved land.
- 2.2 Increased acres of restored aquatic, wetland, and upland habitat and habitat under maintenance phase management.

### **MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **FW-1.1: Protect, restore, and monitor estuarine habitats –**

Update the water quality indicators section to reflect expanded focus on additional metrics to measure water quality and system health.

#### **FW-1.2: Protect, restore, and monitor estuarine habitats –**

Expanding language on bioindicator data for understanding estuary health

#### **FW-2: Protect, restore, and monitor environmentally sensitive lands and waterways including critical habitat areas–**

Incorporate “Low Impact Design” that encourages a portion of the property to remain undeveloped which would preserve wildlife habitat/corridors on private properties.

*There was Policy consensus on these Management Committee recommendations. A Committee member asked if there is a tool that can guide restoration in showing where due to climate change, some habitat restorations will be suitable and other areas may not be for the vegetation that historically existed there. They wanted to make sure we are putting the right plants in the right place. CHNEP staff responded that the Habitat Restoration Needs (HRN) Plan is that tool that maps those vegetative community shifts; however, that Plan is now 5-years old and newer data suggested the projections used were overly conservative (i.e., that changes are more rapid and impactive than what was modeled then.) so should be updated based on newer climate data when feasible. In the meantime, the current HRN Plan is useful in guiding current restoration efforts.*

*The Policy Committee in response created the following additional recommendation to the Fish, Wildlife and Habitat section:*

**POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBER RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Add a FW-2.3 activity: Implement the Habitat Restoration Needs Plan in facilitating habitat restoration and migration in current and future scenarios

Action 3: Assess and promote the benefits of land, waterway, and estuary protection and restoration.

FW 3.1 Updated cost-benefit and/or ecosystem services analyses of natural resource conservation and restoration.

**MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:**

FW 3.1: Assess and promote the benefits of land, waterway, and estuary protection and habitat restoration –

Revise 5-year performance measure: “Provide technical support and comments in support of land conservation initiatives, to advance implementation of HRN” to reflect current actions underway as the original listed performance measure natural resources economic valuation study was completed.

Add an activity to consider mangrove and salt marsh trends as another biological indicator of ecosystem health and fisheries (ex: snook or redfish habitat)

*There was Policy consensus on these recommendations, with no further added recommendations from the Policy Committee. One Committee member also remarked that the CHNEP Water Atlas has also evolved to be a very useful tool for natural resource managers.*

**PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN**

**VISION:** An informed, engaged public making choices and taking actions that increase protection and restoration of estuaries and watersheds.

**GOAL:** Public education and engagement.

**OBJECTIVE:** Increase the proportion of the population that supports and participates in actions to protect and restore estuaries and watersheds.

**STRATEGY:** Promote environmental awareness, understanding, and stewardship to the general public, new target audiences, and policymakers; and strengthen non-profit partner collaboration in education and engagement programs.

Action 1: Promote environmental literacy, awareness and stewardship through expanded education and engagement opportunities for the general public.

1.2 10 research, restoration, or outreach initiatives showcased in educational materials, presentations, or at public events per year.

1.3 10 CHNEP volunteer activities hosted per year.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

PE-1.2: Provide CHNEP volunteers with activities to participate in research, monitoring, and restoration:

- Revise 1.1 Performance Measure to "Provide information to interested public about activities to participate in research, monitoring, and restoration."
- Revise 1.2 Performance Measure to "Monthly mass communications to volunteer opportunities subscribers about volunteer opportunities" to allow time to better support increased partner initiatives in the region, rather than focusing on CHNEP-only events and avoid effort duplication.

Action 2: Engage underrepresented and underserved communities, businesses, and other priority stakeholders in estuary and watershed protection activities and educational programs.

2.1 An event or activity annually that is focused on business and/or other priority stakeholders.

2.2 An event or activity annually that is focused on underserved communities.

Translation of educational materials to multiple languages or formats.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Revise 2.1 Performance Measure to "Annual public event that includes diverse stakeholder perspectives and presenters"

*A Policy Committee member mentioned appreciating the CHNEP providing materials and highlighting partner volunteer events and opportunities. The Policy Committee Co-Chair mentioned that CHNEP staff are also available to attend partner events so to reach out if a member has an opportunity in their community that they would like CHNEP staff to participate in. They also remarked that the overall scope of work that the CHNEP staff is doing is expanding so even if there are less CHNEP-hosted volunteer events, there is more outreach as a result of that. They concluded with acknowledging that the CHNEP staff has assumed a greatly increased workload so it is understandable about this shift of focus, which may even yield greater opportunity. There was Policy consensus on these Management Committee recommendations to the Public Engagement section.*

Action 3: Strengthen non-profit partner collaboration in education and engagement programs.

Action 4: Increase outreach to policymakers to enhance understanding and support for CCMP implementation.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

PE-4.1: Provide regular updates and information to policymakers.

- Revise 5-year Performance Measure to "Communications with interested elected officials" to account for policymaker interest and availability.
- Add examples of how CHNEP helping policymakers connect with partner resources to the narrative (sending fact sheets about current and new projects, sending CCMPs as they are updates, sending local elected officials individual packets of information annually, etc.).
- Throughout Section, add language about CHNEP's role to participate in regional collaboration to address vulnerabilities identified in VAs and increase resiliency.

*There was Policy consensus on these Management Committee recommendations.*

CHNEP substantive overarching recommendations:

- All figures, maps, tables, etc. updated with the best available and most current information.
- Resiliency considerations Incorporated into each section:
- Add any new climate change consideration information based on science in last 5 years related to all Actions. (ex. habitat shifts or loss due to sea level rise and other habitat changes, etc.)
- Emphasize opportunities when building or upgrading infrastructure to address resiliency and natural resource protection opportunities as well.
- Role of CHNEP to assist in the event of natural disasters and episodic event response and recovery efforts.

*There was Policy consensus on these Management Committee recommendations to the Public Engagement section, in addition to the Policy Committee offering this addition to the last recommendation above.*

POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To add to the recommendation that following natural disaster or episodic event, encourage CHNEP coordinate any Partnership activities with the local EOCs, Water Management Districts, FDEP to ensure safety.

*In conclusion, the Policy Committee Co-Chair said these comments and recommendations will go to the contractor and then the updated draft CCMP will be brought back next cycle. It will be sent in early August well ahead of Policy Committee to the members of all CHNEP Committees for review, so Co-Chair asked that members review when they receive to ensure it reflects discussion at this meeting and include or remove key projects initiated or completed since 2019. The intent is that at next meeting, a vote will be held to approve the updated draft. This is excellent opportunity to familiarize oneself with this document in understanding what CHNEP does.*

### **Agenda Item #9 – CHNEP Technical Projects Updates and New Tools – Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP**

Ms. Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP Director of Research & Restoration, provided the committee with a brief overview of updates regarding recently completed, current, and on-going technical projects (or phases of projects). 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. The objective is to translate water quality and other data collected by partners into one place to give a holistic management picture to create live ‘reports’ of status and trends by water quality, hydrology, wildlife/habitat, and climate stressors. New waterbody, basin and watershed pages are coming soon. The pages will be presented with associated FDEP WBIDs and appropriate impairment criteria (which is currently being updated with the most recent IWR Run information), WQ snapshot dials, and associated data on the 4 interactive mappers. Map layers include water quality, hydrology, aquatic habitat, terrestrial habitat, and climate change. CHNEP also produces and updates water quality and seagrass fact sheets by basin as an additional communication tool for partners and the public. New waterbody, basin, and watershed pages are now live for over 800-plus waterbodies. Pages will be presented with associated FDEP WBIDs and appropriate

impairment criteria (currently being updated with the most recent IWR Run information) and water quality snapshot data.

The Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring Network (CCHMN) is a regional partnership of agencies that collects monthly surface water quality data. CHNEP funds sampling, coordinates the Network, conducts field sampling audits, and uploads data into the Water Atlas. Q1 data and report deliverables and Q2 data are completed. Upper Charlotte Harbor Partners are working on data management/optimization to create electronic field entry to streamline field data QA/QC by integrating checks into the data entry. There was field and laboratory partner participation in the Southwest Florida RAMP quarterly meetings and field/lab for method comparison to support data validation. CHNEP contributed comments to the manuscript for trend analysis of CCHMN data.

As for the Myakka Headwaters Preserve Restoration, the wetland habitat restoration/enhancement project was recently completed. This project was on 363 acres of conserved land within Flatford Swamp (Myakka Headwaters Preserve) which is the Myakka River's largest forested wetland located in Manatee County. The partners are SWFWMD and the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast. The project plantings and treatment of exotic species is completed, and the final site visit was held in December 2023. A project report with detailed methods, results, and discussion with recommendations for future land management is now available on the CHNEP website.

CHNEP produces and updates fact sheets on basin water quality, basin seagrass health, and state and federal research and restoration funding opportunities as additional resources for partners and the public.

#### **Agenda Item #10 – Policy Committee Member Updates – Brian Smith, Co-Chair**

Alice White (North Port): There was a Zoom meeting with John Thaxton, who is excited about the potential "Wild and Scenic River" designation of the Myakka River. Representative Steube is also supporting it.

Tom Cavanaugh (Punta Gorda): Punta Gorda is thankful for CHNEP's help for its program with Heal Our Harbor – taking water samples and sharing them with the County and working with City and County management. It is a collaborative and cohesive effort to get a handle on water quality.

Mike Miller (Sanibel): Hurricane Ian brought a 13-foot storm surge to Sanibel Island. When that water receded, it created about 64 gullies or scours along the 12 miles of beach. It was imperative for safety reasons, and other reasons that the scours be renourished. That project was started in December and had to be completed by the beginning of sea turtle nesting season (May 1<sup>st</sup>). It was completed. Permits were required from the DEP for depositing sand above the mean high-water line and from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for deposits below the mean high-water line. The entire program required about 389,000 tons of sand. The sands came from mines near Moore Haven. Acquiring the sand from the Gulf of Mexico would have required significantly more permitting and up to possibly 2 years of time and more cost. Transporting the sand required 16,000 truckloads. It included 65,000 tons deposited around the lighthouse below the mean high-water line at a total cost of about \$14.4 million funded from the grant from the DEP.

Roland Ottolini (Lee County): Lee County, like Sanibel, is still in recovery mode from Hurricane Ian. Lee County is also looking at beach renourishment. One bid that was received, which would have only covered 2 areas was well over the budget. The source is not truck-haul but offshore, some at approximately 12 miles out. There is hope that the increased price is just a

timing issue with contractors, and they will go out for bid again at a later date with an updated scope to generate more interest. After the storm, federal and state departments have been supportive with funding, including resiliency funding. Flood areas are being evaluated to prepare for future storm impacts including flood reduction for the City of Bonita Springs and the Village of Estero. Lake Okeechobee levels are being monitored as the USACE are constantly working on trying to bring them down. Levels have gone down lately due to mostly evaporation and releasing into the Caloosahatchee. We are trying to stave off some major releases during the summertime.

Ryan Taylor (Polk County): There are several water quality projects that the County is working on around South Creek and East Creek. These projects will improve water quality as the water moves southward. There is a stream bank restoration project that the Commission just approved also.

Mark Smith (Sarasota County): At the recent County commission meeting, \$45 million of the \$201 million that was received, was distributed, with the majority going to South Sarasota County to help with infrastructure. The advanced water treatment plan is on schedule.

Elizabeth Sweigert (FDEP): As newly appointed director of FDEP's Southwest office, I am available to anyone who needs any assistance from either myself or FDEP.

Brian Smith (US EPA): Within the EPA, there is the South Florida Program – a special jurisdictional focus where there are critical water resources. It is out of Region 4 – out of Atlanta – with the focus of South Florida that includes Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee and south of there. There is a “notice of funding” opportunity that is expected to be released in June which can be used for water restoration projects and water study projects. There will be a focus in this notice to highlight the ability to use it to study groundwater and surface water interface impacts. Any organization can apply for that funding. There will be a website created for all the South Florida programs to provide information on what work is being done.

Ken Doherty (Charlotte County): Charlotte County continues to implement its master plan of converting septic-to-sewer. The challenge is affordability. There are designs for numerous neighborhoods with a concentration of those neighborhoods closest to tidal water. The East Port plant expansion is under construction to convert it to advanced wastewater treatment to lower nitrogen and phosphorus. Bids are being taken for Burnt Store, but cost is a factor. An initial bid from a reputable firm estimated the cost of the advanced wastewater treatment to be about \$56 million. The whole bid ultimately came in at \$106 million. Steve Suau is about to publish a paper titled “An Evaluation of the Relationships Between the Duration of Red Tide Blooms and Watershed Nitrogen Lodes in Southwest Florida.” This might be a possible Policy Committee future presentation as it shows that the nitrogen lodes coming down from the Caloosahatchee make red tide events more intense and longer lasting. The data is showing that everything is integrated.

Emory Howard (Hendry County): There is work going on to expand the Port LaBelle utility system for water. There has been a lot of land acquisition – wells – and design and construction are underway. Water capacity is being increased out there.

Scott Kirouac (Highlands County): In Highlands County, there is an issue with the watershed improvement district, and it involves a bill that was signed into law last year and took effect in July. It prohibits any special assessments on agricultural lands. It took away the County's ability



to fund the operation of the district, involving 18,000 acres. Landowners in the County want to pay their per-acre assessment but when the bill was signed, the County cannot fund the district anymore. We have spoken with representatives in Tallahassee about enacting legislation that will help the County with funding the district. The district constructed one water impoundment structure with FDACS (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services) and SWFWMD. SWFWMD also funded the purchase of 400 acres with the district for the second phase. FDACS provided close to \$4 million of which about three-quarters has been spent on design and engineering. There were some problems with easements during the project. When the County was able to get the easements, the bid was north of \$11 million. This is a district that is out of money. There is no way for the County to collect revenue for the district. The County's agreements with FDACS and SWFWMD are about to expire at the end of this year or the beginning of next year. The owners are willing to pay or even donate the money and it would violate the law for the County to accept the money. They are looking at creating an independent district that could create a tax bill to generate the funds. The thought is that if the district dissolves, DEP may step in and start working with each individual landowner. The consequences include possibly having coastal counties forcing agricultural people off their lands through special assessments.

John R. King (Fort Myers Beach): Like Sanibel, the Town of Fort Myers Beach has been doing beach renourishment through trucking. Chadd Chustz, the Town's Environmental Project Manager, has been spearheading the project. The final hurdle has been cleared to begin the offshore sand renourishment which will entail piping it onto the island.

Jennifer Codo-Salisbury (CFRPC): On June 11<sup>th</sup>, the CFRPC will host its 4<sup>th</sup> annual Landowner Assistance Expo. It will be in partnership with Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District. It will be at the Burt Harris Agricultural Center in Sebring. It is action-packed with lots of resources for people with agricultural lands or lands with significant natural resources, providing them with a number of programs that are available to keep those working lands working in agriculture. It is getting them more attuned to the natural resources and other avenues, voluntary conservation easements, and other programs to assist with their ownership and their goals. The CFRPC is working with CHNEP, FDEP and other communities on their vulnerability assessments. There is a 2050 planning horizon that is being looked at in a number of the communities in the heartlands working with partners (such as CHNEP), taking a look at those plans and that balance of development, economic development, natural resources, infrastructure, all those things that are grappled with on a daily basis. Teaming up with CHNEP at different public engagement events will get communities involved to thoughtfully look at the horizon. There is also the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape Program that is a national partnership with the Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Defense. It is a 1.6-million-acre area. That has brought together a number of partnerships looking at that balance, and also working in a partnership with the Soldiers to Science program. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CFRPC takes place on June 12<sup>th</sup>.

Tim Stanley (Glades County): The City of Moore Haven is undergoing a septic-to-sewer conversion. Almost all of the City is sewer through state grants. There will now be an expansion in Moore Haven. The Lake Okeechobee levels are going down dramatically fast. It is unusual for the levels to drop that fast and there are concerns as to what will happen to South Florida if there is another drought. It could be a catastrophe. Everyone in the County wants to build sand mines because there is money to be made. There is not enough money to replace the roads.

Lori Fayhee (Estero): The Village of Estero has been working diligently to acquire land that can be used to preserve open space and limit development. Over 200 acres have been acquired thus far. Funding has been received for the utility extension projects, the septic-to-sewer, and that should be ready to begin in the third quarter.

Maya Robert (Cape Coral): The inaugural Waterways Science Festival was held this past March with close to 1,000 participants. Several hundred trees and mangroves have been planted throughout the City since the last Policy Committee meeting in January. Ten of the larger retention ponds have been converted into rain gardens. A large-scale project of aquatic vegetation harvesting to remove nutrients from the freshwater canals has started. So far, several thousand cubic yards have been harvested. The City is also in the process of receiving an \$800,000 grant from FWC to buy multiple lots for burrowing owl habitat protection that will be preserved and maintained in perpetuity.

**Agenda Item #11 – Public Comment – Brian Smith, Co-Chair**

Chadd Chustz of the Town of Fort Myers Beach provided public comment that the Town is finishing up the last of the trucking projects and has gotten through its last hurdle – the bid protest. It looks like there is a greenlight for a mid-June start for working on Matanzas Pass and putting sand on the beach. It will start up north and work its way to the central section. Once the bird nesting season is finished, there is the southern segment where 300,000 feet of sand will be put.

**Agenda Item #12 – Future Meeting Date and Topics – Brian Smith, Co-Chair**

Contact [jhecker@chnep.org](mailto:jhecker@chnep.org) if you would like any topics added to future agendas. The next meeting date is September 20, 2024.

**Agenda Item #13 – Adjourn – Brian Smith, Co-Chair**

Meeting was adjourned at 12:39 pm.