

Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative (CHFI) Meeting Notes

March 13, 2024

Teams Meeting Facilitated by Laura Layman, SFWMD

Roundtable for any Updates on Issues, Research, Projects, Acquisitions, Upcoming Workshops/Training/Associated Meetings, Future Agenda Items, etc. - Please bring info to share with the partners

- Laura Layman, SFWMD Lead Project Manager: Still working with FWC to facilitate getting the southern 150 acres of the SLD landfill to be able to be purchased by Florida Forever.
- Phil Flood, SFWMD Legislative Liaison and External Affairs Specialist: Legislative Session update- There are some environmental bills that passed this legislative session related to water supply, resiliency, and stormwater. Funding is available for the Florida Wildlife Corridor, environmental restoration, Resilient Florida program, water quality issues; a lot of money is available for local government water projects (over \$410 million). The overall state budget is approximately \$117 billion. Laura will forward the legislative funding summary provided by Phil to the CHFI partners. For more information, please contact Phil at (239) 338-2929, Ext 7768 or at pflood@sfwmd.gov.
- Kathy Burke, FWC Section Leader Planning and Design: The Florida TIG (Trustee Implementation Group) Draft Restoration Plan 3 is now available for public review and comment. Public webinar on March 27th to present the projects and hear any public comments. We welcome and encourage support for the Bond Farm project, to solicit letters of support for Bond Farm. It's a very large funding request so showing a large group support would go a long way for the funding request. Scheduled release (assuming everything goes well) would be the final plan in July and the money is released 1-2 months later, then start the project. Summer 2024 FWC is starting all of the threatened and endangered species surveys for about a year. Hopefully run the contract bidding for construction simultaneously, so that in 2025 the project could be awarded. For more information please contact Kathy at (850) 591-0544 or Katherine.Burke@MyFWC.com.
 - Florida Trustees Seek Public Comment on Draft Restoration Plan 3 and Environmental Assessment: Water Quality [Florida Trustees Seek Public Comment on Draft Restoration Plan 3 | Gulf Spill Restoration \(noaa.gov\)](#)
 - <https://gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/media/document/2024-03-fl-draftrp3>
 - The public is encouraged to review and comment on the draft plan through April 8, 2024 by submitting comments online, by mail, or during the public webinar. Online: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FLTIGRP3>
 - By mail: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Gulf Restoration Office 1875 Century Blvd. Atlanta, GA 30345
 - The public webinar is on March 27, 2024 at 3:00 pm Eastern Time / 2:00 pm Central Time. A summary of the draft plan will be presented and public comments will be taken during the webinar
 - Register for the webinar at <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8172353705750284118>
- Mark Walton, SWFWMD, Environmental Scientist SWIM Program: He has received a couple of requests to review the permit items related to Bond Farm, so he is looking at that. The seagrass survey for Charlotte Harbor has been completed and the accuracy assessment/ field validation investigations have begun. Cape Haze Restoration Project – permit applications have been

submitted to DEP and USACE and that is moving along. District previously did two big restoration projects along Coral Creek (hydrological restoration) and this is an extension of that. For more information please contact Mark at (813) 985-7481, Ext 2209 or at Mark.Walton@swfwmd.state.fl.us.

- Other Local Governmental Partners: Lee County, Charlotte County, City of Cape Coral, others
 - Roland Ottolini, Lee County – Nothing new to report.
 - Anastasia DeFilippo, Charlotte County – No updates.
 - Rand Edelstein, City of Cape Coral –
 - Tara Spieler, KCA – Just getting started on Southwest Aggregates project (NE Reservoir Storage Enhancement). They have the surveyor, geotech and environmental staff out there working on it. They are working on the conceptual plan and will bring updates to the next meeting. For more information, please contact Tara at tspieler@kcaeng.com or Rand Edelstein at (239) 242-3651 or redelstein@capecoral.gov.
- Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP, Director of Research & Restoration: There are several CHNEP updates as follows. For more information, contact Nicole at (941) 833-6582 or at niadevaia@chnep.org.
 - CHNEP drafted a letter of support for the Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area, which meets the objectives of the Partnership as laid out in the CHNEP Habitat Restoration Needs Plan (HRN), the CHNEP HRN was built with the assistance of the CHFI and other land conservation partners (letter and other resources can be found here: <https://www.chnep.org/everglades-to-gulf-conservation-area>). CHNEP also provided GIS maps and technical comments during the development of the Draft Protection Plan for the Conservation Area on behalf of our member organizations. Part of the CHFI area of focus is within the Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area and CHFI partners may be able to benefit from working in partnership with the USFWS to conserve critical habitat areas, meeting multiple objectives.
 - CHNEP attended the Management Advisory Group meeting for the Babcock Webb Wildlife Management Area (BWWMA) Management Plan update. The meeting focused on proposing new ideas as well as prioritizing proposed and ongoing management activities for the WMA to assist with agency plan update efforts. CHNEP suggested including/codifying the emphasis on efforts that have already put in to support hydrological restoration, removing excess water, aquifer recharge, and tidal creek management, to justify continued WMA staff and funding efforts to support this work. Along with ongoing species and habitat monitoring, management, and restoration activities this received the highest level of support from the group. Meetings will also be held with the public as well as permitting and management agencies.
 - PUBLIC HEARING for the BWWMA Management Plan Update: To receive public comment regarding considerations for the FWC ten-year Land Management Plan for the Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area, a meeting will be held at
 - Charlotte County, Florida 7:00 P.M. Wednesday, March 27th, 2024, Schandler Hall 419 Florence Ave, Fort Myers, FL 33905

- The FWC water monitoring data in and around Babcock Webb is now available from the CHNEP Water Atlas Database. The data can be downloaded using the Data Download tool or viewed on the Real-Time Data Mapper. Thank you, Kathy Burke and ESA team, for working with the Water Atlas staff to get the data uploaded.
- Additionally, FWC shared the Babcock Webb prescribed burn units shapefile and PDF burn maps, which are available to download from the CHNEP Water Atlas Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative page. Thank you, Cason, for putting us in touch with the FWC GIS person to get those maps.
- JoEllen Wilson, Bonefish & Tarpon Trust (BTT) Juvenile Tarpon Habitat Program Manager: We're not quite in Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods area yet. Working with Damon Moore and focusing on Cape Haze peninsula with NOAA Actionable Science Grant. Starting assessment and design for six restoration projects; funding will be available in the fall for final design and permitting to move four sites toward restoration. These projects will be similar restorations to the Coral Creek Phase 2. We identified spots on the East Wall as potential restoration projects for the future. For more information please contact JoEllen at (786) 618-9479 or jlwilson@bonefishtarpontrust.org.

Presentation: Proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area

- Kathleen (Kathy) Burchett, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Area II Refuge Supervisor for Florida and the Caribbean: Kathy presented a PowerPoint on the proposed Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area program. A copy of this presentation will be placed on the CHFI Water Atlas webpage.
 - Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area was established on March 5, 2024
 - Acquired the first parcel which was a donation.
 - Broad public support for the program
 - Main funding source for easements is the Land & Water Conservation Fund, which Congress goes through and decides on line-by-line.
 - Fee title land acquired by the Service will be part of the WMA Program and possibility panther mitigation funds can go to Service for this conservation area.
 - Comments:
 - For Conservation Easements, will there be flexibility to include water storage for hydrological restoration? Yes, if the hydrological restoration returns the area to its natural state (can't turn certain type of wetland into a different type of wetland).
 - Are there resources to share with our partners now that it's official? Yes, definitely share the website which has the Final Plan, Maps, presentations, etc. The more landowners and partners who show interest, the better it does with Congress.
 - Questions can be directed to Kathy Burchett. Kathy can be reached at (772) 584-1385 or at Kathleen_burchett@fws.gov.

Presentation: Species Inventory, Babcock-Webb WMA

- Brianna White, FWC Inventory Biologist: Brianna presented a PowerPoint on her wildlife inventory monitoring efforts at Babcock-Webb WMA. A copy of this presentation will be placed on the CHFI

Water Atlas webpage. This inventory project is to help inform management practices on the WMA. For more information, please contact Brianna at (330) 310-7660 or Brianna.White@MyFWC.com.

- Comments:
 - How are you tracking species trends? The focus of this project is to see what species we have and don't have.
 - Will this be continued annually? Ethan Noel from FWC indicated that inventory projects are supposed to happen every 10 years or so.
 - Is the inventory list publicly available? Ethan indicated it's not something we want published on a public page but we would be happy to share it with partners. There's no location data that we would be publishing or sharing. We are wrapping up this inventory on Webb this calendar year.

Remaining 2024 Quarterly Meetings

- June 12, 2024
- September 11, 2024
- December 11, 2024

If you have any important comments that were not captured in these meeting notes, or if you have any agenda items for future meetings, please send them to Laura Layman at llayman@sfwmd.gov.

The presentations and meeting notes will be posted on the CHFI Water Atlas webpage (see link below).

**All CHFI information is available on the CHNEP Water Atlas CHFI Webpage:
<https://chnep.wateratlas.usf.edu/charlotte-harbor-flatwoods-initiative/>**