

## CHARLOTTE HARBOR FLATWOODS INITIATIVE (CHFI) Meeting Notes

March 11, 2026

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.

State Partners:

- **Laura Layman, Lead Project Manager, SFWMD:** Laura welcomed the group and indicated that the draft SFWMD/FWC interagency agreement for SFWMD to procure the construction of Bond Farm is in progress. Laura has been coordinating the SFWMD review of the document and will be sending the updated draft agreement to Kathy soon, for FWC's review. The goal is to have the agreement in place and the construction procurement process completed later this year or early next year. FWC provided documents for the bid package to Laura, and a Construction Project Manager at SFWMD has been assigned. Additional US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) 404 permitting is required as well. The existing state and federal permits for the Bond Farm project are posted to the CHFI website. The Bond Farm project is outlined in yellow on the map below.

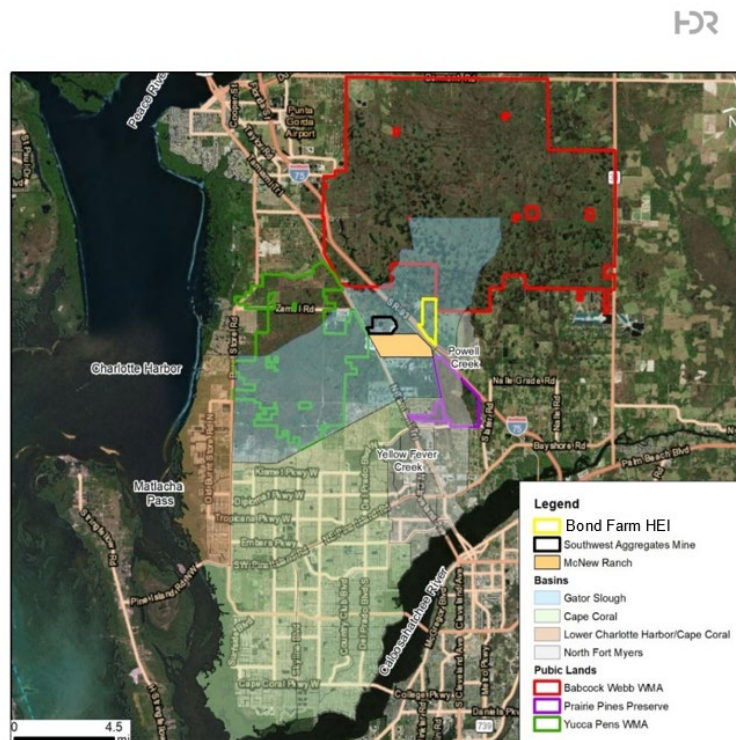


Figure ES-1: Bond Farm Hydrological Enhancement Impoundment (HEI) Project Location

For more information, please contact Laura at (239) 338-2929, ext. 7725 or [llyayman@sfwmd.gov](mailto:llyayman@sfwmd.gov).

- **Katherine Burke, FWC Section Leader, Planning and Design:** Bond Farm Project: Kathy mentioned that a new USACE 404 permit is required for the Bond Farm project. The current State 404 permit expires on 12/7/26 and therefore will not cover the construction period. The FDEP no longer has jurisdiction over State

404 permits, and so the Bond Farm State 404 permit cannot be extended. FWC and SFWMD have begun coordinating with the USACE to re-initiate the federal permitting of the project (which was in progress when the State of Florida assumed 404 permitting). FWC will have to modify the planned pre-construction wildlife surveys accordingly, once the USACE 404 permit is obtained and a construction start date is established. In addition, Beckie Reide with FWC has been coordinating with LCEC regarding underground vs overhead power lines at Bond Farm. The current design includes underground utilities. LCEC does not prefer utilities within the berm, and there are benefits to switching to overhead lines (reduced cost and construction work, etc.). LCEC is currently reviewing the existing design plans, and a final decision on the location of the power utilities will be made soon. Any additional funding needed for design or permitting will come out of the FWC's NRDA funding for construction. Kathy mentioned that she is retiring next year and that Beckie will be taking the lead on the Bond Farm project when she retires. For the SW Discharge Project, Kimley Horn has submitted the 60% design plans to FWC, and they are under review. Further design for this facility will be on hold, until we have agreements/easements in place for the flow path to the west. The SW Discharge pump station cannot be built until the Bond Farm project is constructed. Funding is needed for the construction of SW Discharge facility, and state Gaming Compact funds may be a possible source of funding. A future MOU is needed between FWC and the City of Cape Coral to define roles and responsibilities related to the SW Discharge project and the city's NE Reservoir Storage Enhancements Project, which are key projects to restore historical flows and move the excess water from Babcock Webb WMA and the Bond Farm discharges to the west to US-41. For more information, please contact Kathy at (850) 591-0544 or [Katherine.Burke@MyFWC.com](mailto:Katherine.Burke@MyFWC.com).

- **Mark Walton, Lead Environmental Scientist, SWFWMD SWIM Program:** Mark indicated that the 2026 seagrass mapping cycle for the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) is well underway, with map production starting soon. Field verification will be done on the draft maps, and the final maps are anticipated to be completed later this year or early next year. Mark also gave an update on the Cape Haze restoration project, the third in a series of Coral Creek restoration projects. The project is out to bid, with construction commencing soon. For more information, please contact Mark at (813) 445-6436 or [Mark.Walton@swfwmd.state.fl.us](mailto:Mark.Walton@swfwmd.state.fl.us).

#### Federal Partners:

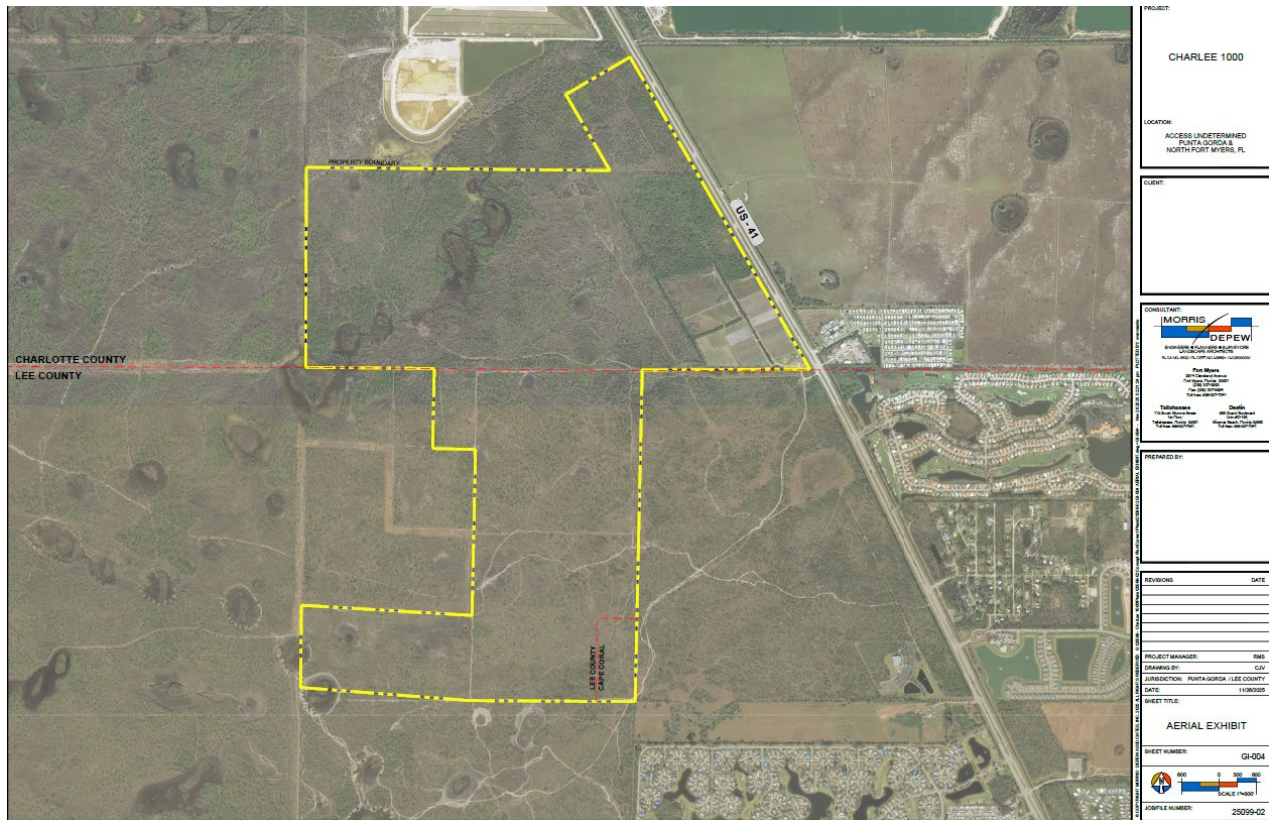
- **Sarina Barnard, Director of Research & Restoration, CHNEP:** For the Yucca Pens Hydrologic Restoration Project, Sarina indicated that CHNEP sent out the Request for Proposals (RFP) in early February, and that the RFP is now closed. Three (3) firms were short-listed; HDR, RES, and South Florida Engineering & Consulting. The evaluation team will be meeting on March 24<sup>th</sup> to score and select a bidder. Sarina and/or Jennifer Hecker will keep us posted on updates. This restoration project stems from the recommendations in the Lower Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Strategic Hydrological Restoration Plan and aims to restore hydrology within Yucca Pens WMA via the construction of ATV ditch blocks, weirs and low water fords. It also includes a potential groundwater seepage barrier at the southern end of Yucca Pens WMA adjacent to the Gator Slough Canal. The potential flows from the Bond Farm SW Discharge project will be incorporated into

the model to see if these collective improvements meet the ecosystem restoration needs of the Yucca Pens WMA. The modeling effort associated with this project will also look at the potential effects the restoration activities will have on the downstream tidal creeks. The project will deliver a shovel-ready construction design along with the associated local, state and federal permits, plans, cost-estimates, etc. The project received EPA grant funds, but funding is still needed for construction. Sarina mentioned that she will be leaving CHNEP in August.

For more information, please contact Sarina at (941) 833-6585 or [sbarnard@chnep.org](mailto:sbarnard@chnep.org).

Other Stakeholders and NGOs:

- **Ryan Shute, P.E., Chairman, Morris Depew:** Given the discussion on Bond Farm, the SW Discharge project, and the Yucca Pens Hydrologic Restoration Project, the group stopped to discuss the potential flow-way through the **Charlee 1000 property** (FKA the Charlotte 600 parcel, now with 400 acres in Lee County added). A map of this parcel is below, and this site provides a potential opportunity to connect the regional flow-way to the Yucca Pens WMA. Ryan Shute is contracted by the new owner (1897 Del Prado Blvd LLC, et.al.) to work on design and entitlements for the property, and he'd like to work with a smaller group of core CHFI partners on potential concepts. Ryan would like to see FWC's desktop analysis of a potential flow-way through the area. ESA has provided this analysis to FWC, and it is under review. Ryan indicated that it would be helpful to see the desktop analysis within the next 3-4 weeks or so. The design team has been meeting with local governments about the project, and the environmental consulting team has been flagging wetlands on the property. Concept planning will begin soon, and the design team is coordinating with Charlotte County and FDOT on the potential access road location(s) off of US 41. Ryan asked if the flow-way could be accommodated within a 150' average width corridor, similar to the potential flow-way depicted on the McNew Ranch conceptual permit plans. The FWC analysis will shed more light on that, and FWC's planned flows from the SW Discharge project are approximately 20 cfs for a few months at the end of the wet season/beginning of dry season. Laura thanked Ryan for attending the meeting and is looking forward to continued collaboration to hopefully secure a flow-way that is mutually beneficial to the development project and the CHFI restoration efforts!



Charlee 1000 property boundary

Local Government Partners:

- Rand Edelstein, Utilities Deputy Director, City of Cape Coral:** Rand discussed that construction for the NE Reservoir Pump Station and Pipeline has commenced and the Notice to Proceed (NTP) was issued on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. Per existing permits, the city is currently pumping water into the US 41 swales to Gator Slough to help meet the City's public water supply needs. For the NE Reservoir Storage Enhancements Project (NERSEP), Rand indicated that the modeling has been completed, but he'll be scheduling a meeting soon to discuss the modeling results and inconsistencies in relation to the previous modeling done for the CHFI (Lower Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Strategic Hydrologic Restoration Plan). The NERSEP modeling involved a full re-calibration of the integrated groundwater/surface water model and has a finer model domain grid size. This modeling effort is part of the overall Basis of Design (BOD) Report, which is under development. For more information on the NE Reservoir projects, please contact Rand at (239) 242-3651 or [redelstein@capecoral.gov](mailto:redelstein@capecoral.gov).
- Brandon Moody, Water Quality and Resiliency Manager, Charlotte County:** Brandon mentioned that there are some water quality initiatives along the east wall of Charlotte Harbor and at the Charlotte/Lee County line. Some algal blooms are already occurring in these areas in the dry season, and the surficial groundwater monitoring program has identified ammonium and phosphorus 10' deep in the surficial aquifer system. Charlotte County is collaborating with scientists at Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) to identify potential causes, especially given the lack of recent rainfall. They are investigating whether these nutrients are stemming from residential areas, legacy agricultural areas, deeper aquifers, etc. The spike in nutrients is concerning. Brandon asked which

water quality monitoring stations are still active in the CHFI area. While most of the FWC monitoring in the CHFI area is for water levels, Sarina mentioned that one water quality monitoring station is active near I-75 at the southern end of Bond Farm (WQ-7). Data on this station can be found on the Water Atlas website. If anyone has any suggestions or sampling ideas, please reach out to Brandon. He can be reached at [Brandon.Moody@charlottecountyfl.gov](mailto:Brandon.Moody@charlottecountyfl.gov) or (941) 743-1290.

- **Jamie Scudera, Projects Manager, Charlotte County Community Services:** Jamie mentioned that there are excess funds in the Conservation Charlotte program right now, so they are accepting nominations until funds are exhausted. The ballot initiative to re-authorize the program will be on the ballot for voters this fall. The renewal will include new acquisition criteria including resiliency, flood control, and expanded wildlife and environmental criteria. The link to the Conservation Charlotte website is here: <https://www.charlottecountyfl.gov/departments/community-services/natural-resources/conservation-charlotte/>. For more information, reach out to Jamie at [Jamie.Scudera@charlottecountyfl.gov](mailto:Jamie.Scudera@charlottecountyfl.gov) or (941) 613-3226.

Other Stakeholders and NGOs:

- **Brooke Langston, Director of Land Protection, Big Waters Land Trust (BWLTT):** Brooke mentioned that she has been working on the conservation of four (4) parcels in the general area. The first is the Summerland 81 acres, near the Lee/Charlotte County border. The second is the Ansin family property, which she has not heard back from recently. The third is a 4.4-acre parcel on Coral Creek, which she has under option now. JoEllen Wilson with BTT has been coordinating with Brooke on conservation options for this site, including purchase via Florida Forever or through SWFWMD. The fourth is a 47-acre island north of Stump Pass in Lemon Bay. Brooke also mentioned that the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and BWLT are helping Sarasota and Manatee counties with conservation ballot initiatives and offered to assist Charlotte County with theirs if needed. A PAC has been created to help with these efforts. For more information, please contact Brooke at (941) 918-2100 or [b.langston@bwlt.org](mailto:b.langston@bwlt.org).

**Presentation:**

### **Southwest Florida Water Management District's Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Plan**

- **Mark Walton, Lead Environmental Scientist, SWFWMD SWIM Program:** Mark gave an excellent overview of the District's comprehensive SWIM program. This program is part of the 2026-2030 strategic plan for the agency and focuses on natural systems, hydrologic restoration and water quality, particularly within priority waterbodies, while supporting and complementing other programs as appropriate. Charlotte Harbor is identified as a priority waterbody, and the Charlotte Harbor SWIM plan was last updated in 2020. The CHFI falls within the southern planning region of the program. The SWIM program has supported the CHFI since its inception and the initiative remains a priority within the Charlotte Harbor SWIM plan. In addition to participating in the CHFI, SWFWMD participates in the Coastal Charlotte Harbor Water Quality Monitoring Network and the Charlotte Harbor Algal Working Group, among other key partnerships in the region.

**Remaining CHFI 2026 Quarterly meetings**

June 10

September 9

December 9

**If you have any edits or 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](mailto:llayman@sfwmd.gov).**

**The presentation and meeting notes will be posted on the CHFI Water Atlas webpage at the link below.**

**All CHFI information is available on the CHNEP Water Atlas Webpage:**

<https://chnep.wateratlas.usf.edu/charlotte-harbor-flatwoods-initiative/>