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Florida Association of Environmental Professionals



Spring 2026

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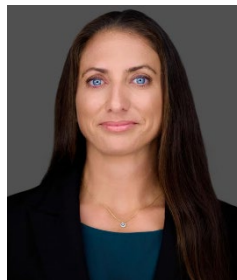
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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

GINA CHIELLO



Dear FAEP Members and Friends

I hope your new year is off to a great start! The Florida Association of Environmental Professionals (FAEP) has dived into 2026 with a splash.

February's Water & Groundwater Sampling Training, hosted in partnership with the University of Florida, was a great success and completely sold out. Attendance was capped at 50 participants to maintain an engaging and interactive experience.

We're also thrilled to be rolling out a brand-new membership management tool designed to better serve our members and chapters. This upgraded platform will enhance our website, streamline event planning and accounting, and improve communication across our eight chapters. This long-awaited upgrade goes live on June 1, and we can't wait for you to experience it.

And that's not all—FAEP is getting a fresh new look! You may have caught a sneak peek in recent emails or on social media, but the official logo reveal will take place at the FAEP-TCC Annual Conference and Training Symposium in Stuart, Florida, from April 29 through May 1.

In the meantime, be sure to join us for our FAEP Legislative Update webinar on April 9 as part of our Quarterly Webinar Series. This is a great opportunity to stay informed on key environmental legislation shaping our industry.

We're "...rolling out a brand-new membership management tool..."

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Looking ahead, mark your calendars!

- **Quarterly Webinar Series - FAEP Legislative Update: A review of the important bills pertaining to the environment** will be offered on April 9th, 12:15 – 1:15 PM. Free to FAEP members and \$30 for non-members. You must Register in advance for this webinar.
- **Annual FAEP Conference & Training Symposium**, hosted by the Treasure Coast Chapter, will take place **April 29–May 1, 2026**, at the Marriott Hutchinson Island Beach Resort. Sponsorship and Registration are live! Details can be found at the [Conference Website](#). Email your questions to faepconference2026@gmail.com.
- **Annual NAEP Conference & Training Symposium** will take place **May 11-14, 2026**, in Anchorage, Alaska! For more details - check their website <https://conference.naep.org>.

We're excited about everything ahead this year and look forward to connecting with you—whether at an upcoming event, webinar, or conference. Thank you for being an important part of FAEP's continued growth and success.

Warm Regards,



Gina Chiello

FAEP President 2025-2026



FAEP CONFERENCE 2026

FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSIONALS

2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

ANCHORED IN PURPOSE, DRIVEN BY VISION

APRIL 29 - MAY 1, 2026

 **Marriott Hutchinson Island Beach Resort, Golf & Marina**
555 NE OCEAN BLVD
STUART, FL 34996

 **Contact**
faepconference2026@gmail.com

 **Registration & Hotel Workshop / Field Trips Sponsorship Opportunities**
Visit: tcc-faep.org/faep-annual-conference

NEFAEP'S 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW: NAVIGATING CHANGE AND BUILDING COMMUNITY

The environmental industry entered 2025 amid meaningful regulatory and funding changes that influenced how projects advanced across Florida. Legislative updates, including SB 1080, introduced revised permitting timelines and more defined application standards for local land use approvals. These changes reshaped day-to-day workflows for consultants, agencies, and applicants, while updates to mitigation banking, brownfield redevelopment, and air and water quality programs required close attention to shifting regulatory expectations.

At the same time, Florida adopted a tighter overall budget while continuing to invest in key environmental priorities. Ongoing funding for Everglades restoration, water quality initiatives, resilient infrastructure, and petroleum cleanup programs created opportunity, but also intensified competition for limited resources. In this environment, collaboration and shared experience became especially valuable as professionals worked to interpret policy changes and adapt in real time.

Throughout 2025, the Northeast Florida Association of Environmental Professionals (NEFAEP) continued to build momentum by focusing on what matters most: connection. The chapter hosted well-attended socials in Gainesville, Jacksonville, and St. Augustine; supported the annual St. Johns River Cleanup; offered virtual lunch and learns featuring state and regional agencies; organized field visits and community conservation efforts; and created hands-on opportunities for members to engage beyond the office. These events strengthened professional networks while encouraging thoughtful discussion across sectors and disciplines.

As we look back on 2025, NEFAEP remains focused on supporting a strong, connected environmental community in Northeast Florida and across the state. Upcoming lunch and learns, socials, workshops, and special events will continue to provide space for learning, collaboration, and professional growth. In quarter two, we are excited to present the following events:

- St. Augustine Social & Cornhole Competition at V Pizza – April 9, 2026
- Drink Beer Save Turtles Gainesville Fundraiser – April 11, 2026
- FDOT District 2 Virtual Lunch and Learn – April 22, 2026
- SJRWMD Lunch and Learn – May 20, 2026

Those interested in getting involved can learn more at nefaep.com and follow us on social media at linktr.ee/nefaep. ■

Environmental Professionals Radio

Environmental
Professionals RADIO



National
Association of
Environmental
Professionals
Be Connected

Environmental Professional's Radio will be bringing to you anything and everything related to being an environmental professional. Including but not limited to the following topics:

- Sponsor and partner updates
- Career advice and insights
- NEPA and other Policy Updates
- Women in STEM
- Special interest
- and More!

New episodes coming out weekly on Fridays!

Florida House approves bill to restore the Ocklawaha River

A bill to restore the natural flow of the Ocklawaha River -- a decades-long priority for environmental groups -- was approved by the Florida House on Wednesday.

The northward-flowing Ocklawaha -- which intersects with the Silver River and the St. Johns -- has been blocked in Putnam County since 1968 by a dam now known as the Kirkpatrick Dam that formed the Rodman Reservoir. It was built as part of the never-completed Cross Florida Barge Canal.

The House bill (HB 981) requires the Department of Environmental Protection to develop a restoration plan by July 2027 and, assuming funds are provided, complete it by the end of 2032.

It also creates a 19-member advisory council that will make recommendations to address grants for outdoor recreation, economic development, and ways to minimize the impacts on property owners and businesses.

Bill sponsor Rep. Wyman Duggan, R-Jacksonville, said it's long overdue.

"Florida," he said on the House floor, "has a proud tradition of doing the hard right thing to protect our natural heritage, from the Everglades to the Kissimmee River, and the Ocklawaha River deserves that same commitment. For nearly 60 years, Floridians championed the river's restoration and waited for their leaders to act."

The bill passed by a vote of 107 to 3.

Republican Rep. Judson Sapp, whose district includes Putnam County, spoke in opposition, citing the economic struggles of people in that rural area.

"But one thing my community has had for generations is the Rodman Reservoir," he said. "It's our place. It's where people fell in love. It's where kids learn to fish. It's where even today, some families still put food on the table."

The Senate version of the bill, sponsored by Senate President Pro Tempore Jason Brodeur, R-Sanford, is awaiting a final vote.

"I am fully committed to the restoration of the Ocklawaha River," Brodeur said in an emailed statement, "and have worked for many years to bring all stakeholders to the table to reach a solution that provides for restoration and increased resiliency and recreation benefits of the Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers and Silver Springs."

Brodeur said he remains hopeful his bill will be heard on the Senate floor next week.

Last year, Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed funding set aside by the Legislature for an Ocklawaha restoration plan. ■

Article reprinted from **Central Florida Public Media** | By Joe Byrnes, Published March 4, 2026

[Post-production update: The Rodman Dam removal failed to get a final vote in the Florida Senate.](#)

From the Northwest Florida Chapter (NWFAEP)

As we begin 2026, the Northwest Florida Chapter of the Florida Association of Environmental Professionals (NWFAEP) is excited to share several important updates, including new leadership, upcoming events, and expanded digital engagement opportunities. It's shaping up to be a great year for our chapter as we continue to grow and strengthen our presence across the region.

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New Website Launch

We are proud to announce the launch of our new chapter website: <https://nwfaep.org/>. This platform will serve as a central hub for chapter updates, event information, and member resources. We encourage all members to visit, explore, and share the site as we continue to build out content and improve accessibility for our community.



Leadership Transition

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to Michael Cobb for his years of dedicated service as President and member of the Board of Directors. His leadership has played a vital role in the continued success of NWFAEP.



As we move forward, we are excited to introduce our 2026 leadership team:

- **President:** Dillon Draughn
- **Vice President:** Emily Harris
- **Treasurer:** Amy Mixon

This team looks forward to building on the chapter's strong foundation and continuing to provide value to our members.

Recent & Upcoming Events

NWFAEP continues to host engaging and informative events that connect professionals across the environmental field.

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February 20th – Lunch & Learn: Coastal Shorebirds of Florida

We were pleased to host **Nick Vitale**, Regional Shorebird Biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), who provided valuable insights into Florida's coastal shorebirds and ongoing conservation efforts. The event was well attended and highlighted the importance of protecting our coastal ecosystems.



March 27th – Joint Social Event

NWFAEP recently partnered with the Pensacola & Perdido Bays Estuary Program (PPBEP) to host a joint social event, which was a great success. The event provided an excellent opportunity for members of both organizations to connect, share ideas, and strengthen relationships within the local environmental community. Attendees enjoyed a relaxed atmosphere while learning more about ongoing initiatives and future efforts from both NWFAEP and PPBEP. We appreciate everyone who attended and helped make the event a memorable and engaging experience.

April 17 at Noon – Educational Field Trip

Join us for an educational field trip to the U.S. EPA Gulf Coastal Science Branch (GCSB) facility located at 1 Sabine Island Drive on Pensacola Beach. This 1.5-hour site visit will include a guided tour of the facility, including the coral lab and field operations space, along with an overview of the branch and its work.

Attendees will hear short presentations highlighting the EPA's laboratory, field, and modeling capabilities, followed by an opportunity to engage in discussion with the GCSB management team. This event provides a unique opportunity to connect with local stakeholders and gain insight into ongoing research and technical expertise supporting coastal and environmental science.

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Tentative topics to be covered include coral studies, aquatic chemical exposures, nutrient analysis, sediment profile imaging (SPI), benthic and invertebrate sampling, water quality monitoring, and hydrodynamic, water quality, fish population, and spatial modeling.

May 29 – Lunch & Learn: Navigating the New Stormwater Rules

Join us for a Lunch & Learn session featuring Savannah Cowen, P.E. and Alyssa Tessier from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Northwest District. This presentation will provide an overview of FDEP and its organizational structure, along with a detailed look at the ERP Stormwater Program.

Attendees will also gain insight into the new nutrient reduction criteria and what these updates mean for environmental professionals and practitioners moving forward.

Scholarships & Community Outreach

Supporting the next generation of environmental professionals remains a key priority for NWFAEP.

2025 Scholarship Award

Congratulations to Kyna F., a University of West Florida undergraduate student majoring in Earth and Environmental Sciences, who was awarded our \$1,000 scholarship. We received several outstanding applications this year and commend all students pursuing careers in environmental science. Information on the 2026 scholarship will be released later this summer.

Science Fair Participation

NWFAEP continues to engage with the community through educational outreach. This year, Rick Looney and Michael Cobb will represent the chapter as judges at the 71st West Panhandle Regional Science & Engineering Fair. The chapter will also award gift cards to top student projects, helping to encourage innovation and interest in environmental fields.

We appreciate the continued support and involvement of our members and look forward to an exciting year ahead. Stay connected through our new website and upcoming events as we continue to grow and make an impact across Northwest Florida. ■

Best regards,

NWFAEP Board of Directors

Everglades Restoration Also Helps Save the Planet from Climate Change, Study Finds

New research shows the carbon absorbed by the Everglades is equal to 10 percent of the emissions coming from Florida roadways, but the watershed's methane emissions complicate the picture.

Restoring Florida's fragile Everglades can help stem the greenhouse gas emissions that are warming the global climate and contributing to hotter temperatures, rising seas and more damaging storms in this particularly vulnerable state, new research has found.

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The research, published last month in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, shows the freshwater marshes and coastal mangroves of the river of grass absorb some 14 million tons of climate-heating carbon dioxide annually from the Earth's atmosphere. That amount is equal to 10 percent of the emissions coming from Florida roadways, said John Kominoski, a professor in the Institute of Environment at Florida International University and a researcher on the study.

"It's almost like an investment in your retirement fund. You start to put it away slowly, and you don't really understand the benefits," said Kominoski, principal investigator of the federally supported Florida Coastal Everglades Long Term Ecological Research Program. "But over time the benefits emerge, and they are more than the sum of their parts. And that's kind of what climate mitigation and climate sequestration are doing, not just locally, not just in the Everglades, but across the world." ■

Article reprinted from **Inside Climate New** | *By Amy Green*, Published March 17, 2026



The Academy of Board-Certified Environmental Professionals (ABCEP) is the certifying body for NAEP and the lead organization certifying environmental professionals; maintaining exemplary standards of ethics and technical practice; and supporting individuals, our profession, and the public relying upon

our services. It is a board-certified recognition. Beyond the acknowledgement by your peers, earning and maintaining the Certified Environmental Professional (CEP) designation is beneficial as a key differentiator when bidding on projects. It also opens new doors personally and professionally.

ABCEP would like to enhance the CEP (and CEP-IT) by growing our numbers and raising the awareness and value of the credential. If interested, you can find more details about the CEP and the application process on our website <https://www.abcep.org>. If you email the office (office@abcep.org), our Administrator will follow up to see if you have additional questions about the application process and offer to assign a mentor to help guide you through it.

The initial CEP application fee is typically \$200. ABCEP is offering a 10% discount through the end of 2020 reducing the initial CEP application fee to \$180. This is a great time to submit your application! We also have a CEP-IT application for those that don't quite meet the CEP requirements.

Making the decision to pursue a certification can feel like a daunting task, but in this climate, having the designation after your name can prove that crucial differentiator. Please share this with anyone in your office that might be interested. ■

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FAEP Member's Benefits
at our website:
WWW.FAEP-FL.ORG*

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SIZE	ONE ISSUE	ONE YEAR
Biz Card	\$35	\$100
¼ Page	\$100	\$375
½ Page	\$175	\$650
Full Page	\$250	\$900

The **CFAEP** would like to thank everyone that came out to the Annual Orlando Magic Basketball Game Social. Special Thank You goes out to Groundwater Protection for sponsoring this event. Please see our website for upcoming events including luncheons, networking socials, and the April 10th Golf Tournament. cfaep.org



SFAEP Moonlight Over the 'River of Grass'

The South Chapter, better known as the [South Florida Association of Environmental Professionals \(SFAEP\)](http://South Florida Association of Environmental Professionals (SFAEP)), kicked off the first quarter of 2026 with a Full Moon Bike Ride at Everglades National Park Shark Valley in Miami-Dade County on February 28, 2026 – with participation from three neighboring Chapters including the Southwest (SWFAEP) and Treasure Coast Chapters (TCC)!

A Nighttime Bike Ride Through One of America's Greatest Ecosystems

On a cool Southeast Florida evening beneath a glowing full moon, members and friends of the SFAEP gathered for a unique networking event in one of the most extraordinary landscapes in the United States - the Florida Everglades. The Everglades is one of the largest wetland systems in the United States spanning over 1.5-million acres from Lake Okeechobee to Florida Bay. This slow-moving 'River of Grass' provides essential water purification and supply for over 8 million Floridians, recharging the Biscayne Aquifer. This unique ecosystem also acts as a natural flood defense and supports biodiversity as a habitat for wildlife and protected species.



The SFAEP Full Moon Bike Ride event offered environmental professionals a rare opportunity to experience the Everglades National Park after sunset. Riders assembled at the Shark Valley Visitor Center just before dusk, preparing for a 15-mile ride along the park's scenic loop road. As daylight faded and the moon rose above the sawgrass marshes, cyclists pedaled into the Everglades under a canopy of stars. The paved path winds through vast wetlands that stretch uninterrupted to the horizon.

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Shark Valley Observation Tower Under the Full Moon

Midway through the ride, the group stopped at the iconic Shark Valley Observation Tower, which provides panoramic views across the central Everglades. From this elevated vantage point, riders could see the immense scale of the ecosystem — miles of sawgrass marsh, tree islands, and freshwater sloughs illuminated by moonlight. Moments like this offer a powerful reminder of the significance of the Everglades, not only as a national park, but as one of the most important ecological systems in North America.



Cycling Into the Everglades at Sunset

As the ride progressed deeper into the park, the sounds of the Everglades came alive. Night birds called from distant tree islands and fireflies glittered in the distance. Along the trail, riders were reminded that the Everglades remains one of the most wildlife-rich ecosystems in Florida, with sightings of American alligators, a rare white-morph great blue heron, and an array of native species and wildlife along the Shark Valley loop making this ride a unique and unforgettable experience!



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The Everglades: A System Defined by Water

Today, managing and restoring this landscape requires coordination among several key agencies, including the National Park Service (NPS), South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). These organizations work together to restore natural water flows while also addressing modern challenges such as flood protection, water supply, water quality, and invasive species management.

One of the largest ecosystem restoration programs in the world is currently underway across South Florida - the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). Authorized by the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2000, this long-term effort represents a partnership between the State of Florida and the federal government aiming to restore historical and natural hydrologic conditions across the Everglades ecosystem. CERP includes over 60 major restoration projects designed to:

- Restore historic freshwater flows
- Increase water storage across South Florida
- Improve water quality entering the Everglades
- Reduce damaging discharges to coastal estuaries
- Reconnect fragmented wetland habitats



Among the most significant projects currently underway is the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir, a major water storage and treatment project south of Lake Okeechobee. When completed, the reservoir will help store and clean water before sending it south toward the Everglades, helping to mimic the historic sheet flow that once defined the system. Another major milestone is the Central Everglades Planning Project, which focuses on restoring water flow within Everglades National Park itself. The project includes infrastructure modifications such as raising sections of the Tamiami Trail in partnership with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and removing barriers that previously restricted natural water movement through the park.

In addition to restoring hydrology, improving water quality remains a central focus of Everglades restoration. Nutrient pollution, particularly phosphorus, can significantly alter the Everglades ecosystems by encouraging invasive vegetation that displaces native sawgrass communities. To address this challenge, South Florida has constructed a network of stormwater treatment areas (STAs) to engineer wetlands designed to remove nutrients from agricultural and urban runoff before water enters sensitive natural systems. These treatment areas rely on natural ecological processes including plant uptake and sedimentation to filter pollutants from the water column. Over the past two decades, STAs have dramatically reduced nutrient concentrations entering the Everglades Protection Area.

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SFAEP and Environmental Professionals at the Center of Restoration

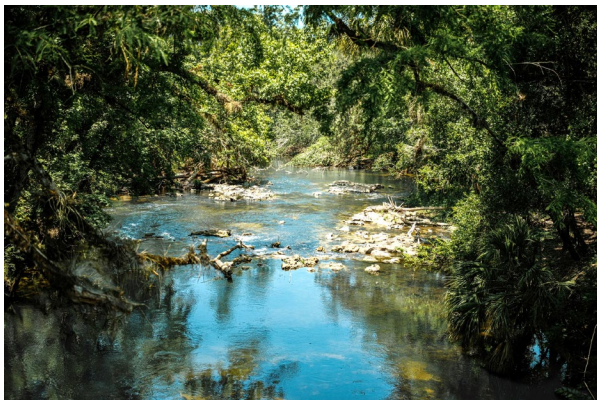
For many members of the SFAEP, the Everglades are not only an environmental wonder - it is central to their professional work. Environmental consultants, scientists, engineers, planners, and regulatory specialists play essential roles in restoration projects throughout South Florida. This work includes:

- Wetland delineations and habitat assessments
- Hydrologic modeling and water management planning
- Water quality monitoring and ecological research
- Environmental permitting, monitoring, and regulatory compliance

Together, these disciplines support the implementation of restoration projects that will shape the future of the Everglades and wetland ecosystems. SFAEP aims to support professional growth and development through the various training, educational, and networking opportunities offered to our members, students, and family / friends. For members of the SFAEP, the Full Moon Bike Ride served as both a memorable community event and a reminder of the importance of protecting the landscapes that define our region. ■

Upcoming Conferences and Workshops

EVENT	DATE	PLACE
2025 National Watershed & Stormwater Conference	April 14 – 16, 2026	Charlotte, NC
Florida Association of Environmental Professionals	April 29 – May 1, 2026	Stuart, FL
National Association of Environmental Professionals	May 11 – 14, 2026	Anchorage, AK
AWWA 2026 Annual Conference & Expo	June 21 – 24, 2026	Washington, DC
A&WMA 119th Annual Conference and Exhibition	June 21 – 24, 2026	Austin, TX
Annual Environmental Permitting Summer School	July 21 – 24, 2026	Marco Island, FL
Annual Georgia Environmental Conference	August 19 – 21, 2026	Jekyll Island, GA
StormCon 2026 Surface Water Quality Conference	August 25 – 27, 2026	Minneapolis, MN
American Institute of Professional Geologists National Conference	August 29 – September 2, 2026	Duluth, MN
AEHS Foundation, Annual East Coast Conference on Soils, Sediments, Water, and Energy	October 19 – 22, 2026	Amherst, MA



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If you would like to submit an article to the Florida Beacon, contact the Administrator, Andee Richards, at info@faep-fl.org.