

FLERA 2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 17-18, 2025

UF STRAUGHN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER
ALACHUA COUNTY

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FLERA

FLORIDA LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL
RESOURCE AGENCIES



AGENDA

TUESDAY- **SEPTEMBER 16**

6:30 – 8:00 PM

Board of Directors Meeting & Dinner
Hilton University of Florida Conference Center
Hawthorne

WEDNESDAY- **SEPTEMBER 17**

8:00 – 8:30 AM **BREAKFAST (*Foyer*)**

8:30 AM

Welcome Remarks, Annual Business Meeting
(Installation of Officers) & Overview of
Committees (UF Straughn Center)

Beth Jackson, FLERA President
Environmental Programs Administrator
Water and Land Resources Management

9:15 – 10:15 AM

Green Infrastructure

Christianah Oyenuga,
Sustainable Cities Manager
Kierstyn Cox,
Sustainable Communities Project Manager
The Nature Conservancy
Eban Bean, Ph.D., P.E., Associate Professor &
Extension Specialist,
Urban Water Resources Engineering
Claire Lewis,
Florida Friendly Landscaping Program Director
UF/IFAS

10:15 – 10:30 AM **BREAK**

10:30 – 12:00 PM

Florida Friendly Landscaping to Protect Florida's Waters

Stacie Greco, Water Resources Program Manager
Alachua County EPD, Moderator

Claire Lewis,
Florida Friendly Landscaping Program Director
UF/IFAS

Emily Lang, Environmental Administrator
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Eliana Bardi, Senior Planner
Alachua County EPD

12:00 PM – 1:30 PM **LUNCH ON YOUR OWN**

1:30 PM **Committee Meetings**

Air Committee: *Conference A*

Water Resources: *Conference A*

Land Conservation: *Conference B*

Natural Resources: *Conference B*

Waste Management/Tanks: *Conference C*

2:30 – 3:00 PM **BREAK**

3:00 – 5:00 PM **Committee Presentations**

Air Committee

Water Resources

Land Conservation

Natural Resources

Waste Management/Tanks

5:30 – 7:00 PM **WELCOME RECEPTION**

University of Florida Hilton Conference Center
Azalea Room



AGENDA

THURSDAY - **SEPTEMBER 18**

8:00 – 8:30 AM **BAGELS & COFFEE (Foyer)**

8:30 – 9:30 AM

**Restoring the Great Florida Riverway: The
Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers and Silver Springs**

Margaret Spontak, President
Great Florida Riverway Trust Inc.
Cameron Jaggard, Officer, U.S. Conservation
The Pew Charitable Trusts

9:30 – 10:15 AM

2025 Legislative Briefing & Look Ahead at 2026

Diana Ferguson, FLERA Executive Director
Rutledge Encina

10:15 – 10:30 AM **BREAK**

10:30 – 12:00 PM

Waste Regulation:

**Innovative Solutions for Biosolids Management: A
Pasco County Perspective**

Jonathan Toplak, Environmental Compliance Officer
Pasco County Solid Waste
Blake Merrell, COO, Florida Division
Ted Merrell, Co-Founder, Co-Chair
Merrell Brothers, Inc.

Brownfields - The Latest & Greatest

David Vanlandingham, Director
Broward County Environmental Permitting Division

12:00 PM- 1:15 PM **AWARDS LUNCHEON**
(Conference A & B)

Keynote Speaker:
UF/IFAS - Alachua County
Legislator of the Year Award Recipient:
Representative John Snyder, District 86, Florida House

1:15 – 2:45 PM

**Innovation in the Environmental Space
Sky Wave at CDM Smith**

Brendan V. Brown, PWS
Senior Environmental Scientist
CDM Smith

**Utilizing AI and Digital Data to Map Exotic
Species and Improve Fire Fuel Management at
the Wildland Urban Interface**

Mary Barnwell,
Environmental Lands Management Coordinator
Hillsborough County

2:45 – 3:00 PM **BREAK**

3:00 – 3:45 PM

Road Map to Meeting BMAP's Allocations Panel

Mike Hardin, Water Resources Engineer
Geosyntec
Stacie Greco, Water Resources Program Manager
Alachua County EPD

3:45 – 4:00 PM **CLOSING REMARKS**

David Vanlandingham, Director
Broward County Environmental Permitting Division

4:30 – 5:30 PM

Guided Tour of Sweetwater Wetlands Park

Darby Guyn, Recreation Leader
Sweetwater Wetlands Park
325 SW Williston Rd, Gainesville, Florida

WEDNESDAY PRESENTATIONS

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Beth Jackson, FLERA President
Environmental Programs Administrator
Water and Land Resources Management



Beth Jackson is an Environmental Programs Administrator for Orange County's Environmental Protection Division. In this role, she Oversees for leading Orange County's Green PLACE program (Environmentally Sensitive Lands Acquisition), Water Sciences Program and Lake Management Program. She participates in several regional groups whose focus is the protection and enhancement of Florida's natural resources such as the Wekiva Wild and Scenic River Advisory Committee, Florida Trail Coalition, and President of FLERA, Cochair of Florida Local Environmental Resource Agencies (FLERA) Land Conservation Committee and is a member of the Central Florida Expressway Authority Environmental Stewardship Committee and a member of the Florida Wildlife Corridor: Corridor Compatible Committee (CCC). She graduated from Western Carolina University with a B.S in Environmental Health and received her MBA from Northcentral University.

WEDNESDAY PRESENTATIONS

Green Infrastructure

Christianah Oyenuga, Sustainable Cities Manager
The Nature Conservancy



Dr. Christianah Oyenuga builds cross-sector partnerships and develops inclusive strategies to advance resource conservation, smart growth, and climate resilience. In her role as the Sustainable Cities Manager with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Florida, Christianah develops, coordinates, leads and implements innovative conservation initiatives necessary to advance TNC's Sustainable Communities goals through community-centered strategies and science-based policymaking. Prior to joining TNC, Dr. Oyenuga worked with private and public sectors to develop corporate sustainability strategy and climate action plans aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, mitigating climate change impacts, and mainstreaming nature-based solutions.

WEDNESDAY PRESENTATIONS

Green Infrastructure

Kierstyn Cox, Sustainable Communities Project Manager
The Nature Conservancy



Kierstyn Cox has been with The Nature Conservancy in Florida since 2018 where she currently serves as the Sustainable Communities Project Manager. In her role at TNC, Kierstyn has managed and implemented a variety of strategic conservation projects focusing on nature-based solutions, smart growth, land protection, and equitable conservation. Prior to joining TNC, she worked in project management, policy, and data analysis in the nonprofit and public sectors in Florida. Kierstyn holds a B.S. in Public Administration from the University of Kansas and a M.P.A. from Florida State University. Kierstyn is passionate about scaling conservation impact to strive for a sustainable, resilient, and biodiverse future.

WEDNESDAY PRESENTATIONS

Green Infrastructure

Eban Bean, Ph.D., P.E., Associate Professor
and Extension Specialist

Urban Water Resources Engineering, University of Florida



Dr. Bean is an Associate Professor and Extension Specialist of Urban Water Resources Engineering at the University of Florida (Gainesville, FL) in the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering. His integrated research and extension program at UF focuses on urban water resources engineering, with special emphasis on stormwater management, low-cost sensors, and improvements to landscape irrigation conservation by enhancing soil quality. He is a leader in sustainable stormwater management in Florida, frequently speaking at workshops on low-impact development (LID) and green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) and he works closely with state and local agencies on addressing these issues.

WEDNESDAY PRESENTATIONS

Green Infrastructure

**Claire Lewis, MLA, Florida Friendly Landscaping Director
and State Specialized Extension Agent
University of Florida IFAS**



Claire Lewis has been with the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ (FFL) Program since 2011. She serves as the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ State Specialized Extension Agent and the Director of the FFL program. Before joining the FFL team, Claire earned a Master of Landscape Architecture degree from the University of Florida and spent 12 years working for private landscape architecture firms in Gainesville. Her design projects included large-scale commercial, institutional, and residential home sites. In her current role, Claire is responsible for educational outreach to local governments, building professionals, homeowners, landscape professionals, and community decision-makers across Florida. She provides programming that promotes sustainable landscape practices and encourages the adoption of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles to preserve and protect the state's water and natural resources. A native Floridian, Claire enjoys spending time outdoors with her husband and two children.

WEDNESDAY PRESENTATIONS

Florida Friendly Landscaping to Protect Florida's Waters

**Stacie Greco, Water Resources Program Manager
Alachua County EPD, Moderator**



Stacie Greco currently serves as the County's Water Resources Program Manager with the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department, where she has worked to protect our water resources for the past 20 years. She received a B.S. in the Environmental Sciences from Warren Wilson College in Asheville, NC prior to obtaining her M.S. in Environmental Engineering Sciences from the University of Florida.

In 2010 she received a graduate certificate in Social Marketing at the University of South Florida to learn how to apply traditional marketing tools to change behaviors for protecting our water. Stacie enjoys exploring Florida's natural areas by kayak, foot, and bike, while camping in her vintage trailer.

WEDNESDAY PRESENTATIONS

Florida Friendly Landscaping to Protect Florida's Waters

Claire Lewis, MLA, Florida Friendly Landscaping Director
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WEDNESDAY PRESENTATIONS

Florida Friendly Landscaping to Protect Florida's
Waters

Emily Lang, Environmental Administrator
Florida Department of Environmental Protection



Emily Lang is an Environmental Administrator at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. With over 8 years of experience, specializing in nonpoint source pollution management and behavior change grants, Emily is here today to share exciting funding opportunities for green stormwater infrastructure implementation and public education grants.

WEDNESDAY PRESENTATIONS

Florida Friendly Landscaping to Protect Florida's Waters

Eliana Bardi, Senior Planner
Alachua County EPD



Eliana Bardi is a Senior Planner with over 20 years' experience researching and implementing programs to protect water and natural resources. Eliana implements regulatory and outreach water conservation programs for Alachua County. In her current role, she has been able to leverage her experience with the development review process and land development codes to further advance water conservation policies.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

Restoring the Great Florida Riverway:
The Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers and Silver Springs

Margaret Spontak, President
Great Florida Riverway Trust, Inc.



Margaret Hankinson Spontak is a seasoned conservation leader and strategic planner with more than three decades of experience advancing land and water conservation projects and community engagement initiatives across Florida. She currently serves as president of the Great Florida Riverway Trust, a political non-profit advocating for the reconnection of the Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers and historic Silver Springs. The Trust provides science-based, economic, and historical information to guide decision-makers at all levels of government. Spontak also has a private consulting practice focused on strategic planning and collaborative problem solving for non-profit and public sector organizations.

Spontak's environmental career includes leadership roles as Director of Development for Audubon Florida and Director of Policy and Planning at St. Johns River Water Management District. At SJRWD, she led regional planning efforts including the development of strategic plans, the District Water Management Plan, and local government technical assistance. Spontak has facilitated dozens of large-scale community planning sessions. She created and led the marketing campaign for "Pennies for Parks" land referendum campaign, which secured \$20 million for conservation in Marion County.

Spontak has held high-impact leadership roles in corporate philanthropy, workforce development, higher education, nonprofit consulting and tourism. Across roles, she has led multimillion-dollar grant programs, developed award-winning communications campaigns, and spearheaded programs that empowered both urban and rural communities.

She holds an MBA from Nova Southeastern University and a bachelor's degree in communications from Florida State University.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

Restoring the Great Florida Riverway:
The Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers and Silver Springs

**Cameron Jaggard, Officer, U.S. Conservation
The Pew Charitable Trusts**



Cameron Jaggard works to protect biodiversity, advance habitat connectivity, and improve adaptation and resilience of ecosystems and human communities in the United States' Southeast coastal states. Jaggard leads Pew's river reconnection and restoration efforts and supports coastal habitat resilience planning in Florida. As a member of the South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative leadership team, he advances state and federal efforts to conserve 1 million acres of salt marsh stretching from North Carolina to east central Florida. Jaggard previously led Pew's efforts to protect the largest seagrass meadow in the Gulf of America and to advance ecosystem-based fishery management in the Atlantic and Gulf coast states. Before joining Pew, Jaggard focused on protecting and restoring marine species in California and was an environmental consultant responsible for natural resource permitting, wildlife relocations, and habitat monitoring projects in some of Florida's east coast counties.

Jaggard holds a bachelor's degree in environmental policy from Rollins College. He is based in North Palm Beach, Florida, where he enjoys paddling local waterways and hiking with his family.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

2025 Legislative Briefing & Look Ahead at 2026

Diana Ferguson, FLERA Executive Director
Rutledge Encina



Diana Ferguson is an attorney and lobbyist with Rutledge Encina in Tallahassee, FL. Her work is concentrated in the areas of environmental and administrative law, regulated industries and government relations.

Diana previously served as the legislative staff attorney for the Florida Association of Counties. In that role, she lobbied water supply and water quality issues extensively as well as other environmental resource issues. With regard to water quality, she routinely worked on legislation pertaining to significant nonpoint sources of pollution, such as septic tanks and fertilizer, as well as regulatory issues such as total maximum daily loads, basin management action plans, and numeric nutrient criteria.

Diana graduated from the University of Missouri – Kansas City with a political science degree. She earned her Juris Doctorate from the Oklahoma City University School of Law. She is a member in good standing of the Texas Bar Association and of the Florida Bar Association.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

Brownfields - The Latest & Greatest

David Vanlandingham, Director
Broward County Environmental Permitting Division



David Vanlandingham is the Director of Broward County's Environmental Permitting Division, which houses environmental programs including Surface Water Management, Contaminated Site Cleanup, Waste Regulation, Wetland Mitigation, Tree Preservation, NPDES Compliance, and Hazardous Materials Licensing and Compliance Assistance. David is a graduate of Louisiana Tech University and the University of Arkansas, receiving a bachelors degree in Chemical Engineering and a masters degree in Environmental Engineering. He serves as the chair of FLERA's Tanks and Waste Committee, is a Florida-registered Professional Engineer, and has 30 years of experience in the environmental field. David is passionate about mentoring and has established several programs to incorporate student internships and equality programs within Broward County. While he currently calls Broward County home, David often spends time backpacking in the mountains of Western North Carolina.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

Waste Regulation: Innovative Solutions for Biosolids
Management: A Pasco County Perspective

Jonathan Toplak, Environmental Compliance Officer
Pasco County Solid Waste



Jonathan serves as the Environmental Compliance Manager for Pasco County's Solid Waste Department, where he oversees regulatory compliance and sustainability initiatives for the County's solid waste operations. With a career spanning both the public and private sectors, he brings a well-rounded perspective to balancing environmental stewardship with operational efficiency.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

Waste Regulation: Innovative Solutions for Biosolids Management: A Pasco County Perspective

**Blake Merrell, COO, Florida Division
Merrell Brothers, Inc.**



Blake Merrell serves as Chief Operations Officer of Florida Operations at Merrell Bros., Inc. where he oversees the company's strategic and operational initiatives across the state. A lifelong member of the family business, Blake grew up immersed in its culture, gaining early experience in asset, people and time management.

In his role, Blake oversees the full scope of Merrell Bros.' Florida operations, directing both day-to-day activities and long-term strategic initiatives. He cultivates and strengthens client relationships across the region. Blake is also instrumental in expanding the company's presence in Florida by championing Merrell Bros.' innovative technologies, services, and product offerings, including the FloridaGreen Fertilizer line.

With decades of experience in the industry and a deep understanding of the business from the ground up, Blake provided strategic leadership that positions Merrell Bros. for continued growth and expansion in the Florida market.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

Waste Regulation: Innovative Solutions for Biosolids
Management: A Pasco County Perspective

Ted Merrell, Co-Founder, Co-Chair
Merrell Brothers, Inc.



Ted Merrell co-founded Merrell Bros., Inc. with his brother Terry in 1982, growing it into one of the largest and most respected biosolids management companies today. Known for his hands-on approach and steady leadership, Ted remained at the forefront of advancing the industry – developing practical solutions, building long-term partnerships, and pioneering innovative systems that address complex biosolids challenges while opening new possibilities for communities and partners alike.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

Innovation in the Environmental Space
Sky Wave at CDM Smith

Brendan V. Brown, PWS, Senior Environmental Specialist
CDM Smith



Brendan Brown is a professional wetland scientist with over 19 years of experience in environmental data collection for ecological restoration and environmental compliance. He has extensive experience in assessing various ecosystems with advanced remote sensing and machine learning, including wetlands, grasslands, upland forests, seagrass, mangroves, and salt marshes. Brendan is the principal investigator of numerous R&D projects leveraging machine learning and remote sensing to assess environmental systems, including the use of lidar, multispectral sensors, drone-derived 3D models, and high-resolution cameras. He leads Sky Wave at CDM Smith.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

Utilizing AI and Digital Data to Map Exotic Species
and Improve Fire Fuel Management at the
Wildland Urban Interface

**Mary Barnwell, Environmental Lands Management
Coordinator, Hillsborough County**



Mary Barnwell has been a public land manager for 30 years, specializing in ecological restoration and fire management. She currently works for Hillsborough County coordinating management on over 15,000 acres of environmental land in the south region of the County, many significantly altered by former agricultural use. Mary has extensive experience restoring degraded lands, managing invasive species infestations, and conducting fire management.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

Road Map to Meeting BMAP's Allocations Panel

Mike Hardin, Water Resources Engineer
Geosyntec



Dr. Hardin is a graduate from the University of Central Florida (UCF) and is a licensed professional engineer (PE) in the state of Florida. To support projects at Geosyntec, Mike performs watershed assessments, develops water-quality master plans, conducts hydrologic and hydraulic modeling and water quality monitoring, and provides stormwater and groundwater quality enhancement designs. In addition, he provides GIS data analysis, conducts microbial source tracking, and conducts surface and groundwater hydrologic studies and nutrient budget studies.

THURSDAY PRESENTATIONS

Road Map to Meeting BMAP's Allocations Panel

**Stacie Greco, Water Resources Program Manager
Alachua County EPD**



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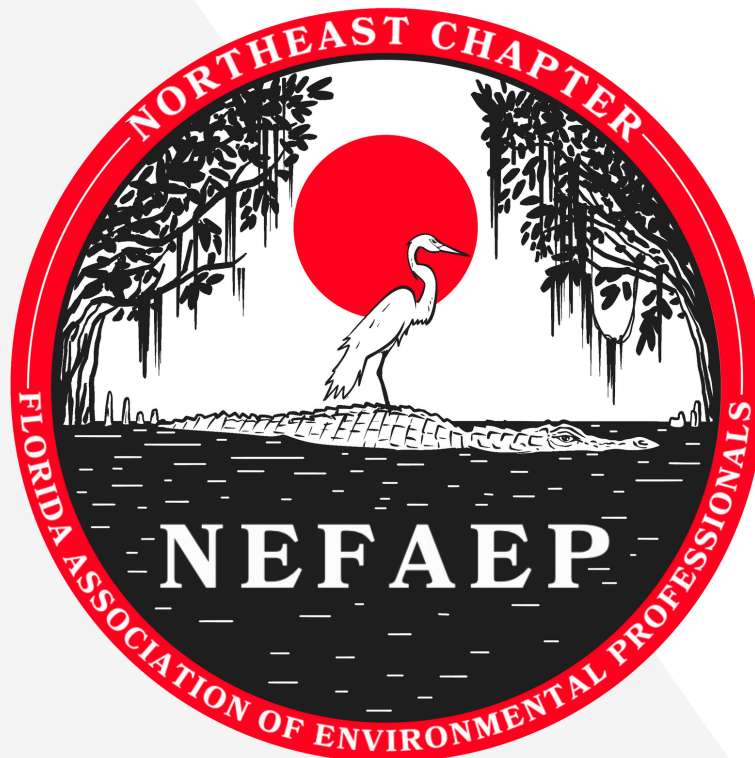
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