



Calusa Waterkeeper 2024 Annual Plan

Calusa Waterkeeper (CWK) is a non-profit organization with a mission to protect and restore the Caloosahatchee River from Lake Okeechobee to the coastal waters. Its members are fighting to protect water resources, wildlife habitat, human health, and our way of life in Southwest Florida. CWK is a member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, a global force for clean water.

During 2024 we plan to work on the following objectives:

I. Aerosolized Toxin Testing – CWK is particularly interested in examining the potential human health risks from chronic cyanobacteria exposure in Southwest Florida. CWK's Aerosol Detector for (Harmful) Algae Monitoring program (ADAM), provides sampling, analysis, and reporting regarding the presence of potential toxins in the air. Since inception in 2021, we have rapidly grown this pioneering research program, and in 2024, CWK plans to:

1. Experiment with additional ADAM sampling hardware to test quantitative effectiveness.
2. Create procedural documentation and train more Rangers/volunteers on ADAM sampling.
3. Distribute six ADAM units among Rangers, ready to deploy within 24-hour notice.
4. Continue in-house processing and training of volunteers in the lab; to include possible investment into a LightDek reader to supplement the rapid field testing deployed last year.
5. Develop reporting protocols and begin reporting test results to the public in a timely fashion.
6. Explore possible collaborations with University research programs, as well as grant opportunities to help realize these ADAM objectives.

II. Fecal Indicator Bacteria (FIB) – Testing for enterococci is used as an indicator of pathogens and related risks from exposure to waters polluted by human or animal waste, which could cause gastrointestinal illness, rashes, and infections. Starting with Billy's Creek, for over five years CWK volunteers have regularly collected water samples within our work area and process monthly monitoring data via our in-house lab. The results are published publicly and inform our advocacy in addressing stakeholders and enforcement agencies. In 2024, our goals to advance the FIB program include:

1. Continue independent monitoring of ~ 30 sites per month that are not tested by the state (FDOH).
2. Add strategic testing for e. Coli to our existing enterococci regimen.
3. Enter new collaboration with FGCU faculty and students on source tracing practices.
4. Potentially seek certification of our in-house FIB lab.
5. Implement strategies to advocate among local stakeholders about our waters with chronic FIB pollution.

III. Vertical Oyster Gardens (VOGs) - Vertical oyster gardens are strings of recycled oyster shells hung on docks and seawalls to create habitat for juvenile oysters to attach and develop. They provide a low-cost way to contribute to healthier waters. Initially started by staff in 2023, CWK will continue momentum for VOG installations throughout the estuary and encourage volunteer and community participation. To achieve this CWK will:

1. Host quarterly oyster-stringing events.
2. Improve on the construction process and recycled materials.
3. Develop a monitoring/survey program to track growth rates and viability.
4. Explore new volunteer group collaborations and fundraising opportunities via the VOG program.



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IV. CWK Rangers – The CWK Ranger program is a unique initiative that differentiates us from other environmental non-profits and Waterkeeper organizations. It is designed to engage, educate, and empower residents who are passionate about improving our local watersheds in SWFL. Rangers monitor the health of regional waters through several observational objectives and testing programs. Our Ranger program initiatives for 2024 include:

1. Implement the recently redesigned Ranger Academy. Host two training series in early 2024, possibly a third towards the end of the year.
2. Continue participation and critical support of the three primary initiatives in the annual plan: ADAM, FIB & VOG programs.
3. Create additional on-the-water trips between the Waterkeeper and Rangers and continuing education components to the quarterly meetings.
4. Increase the number of Rangers and volunteers participating in data mining and advocacy activities.

V. Advocacy – State policy and legislation has the most critical impact on many of our water quality issues. However, our organization’s ability to effectively lobby for change in Tallahassee are limited by capacity and resources. CWK anticipates working in collaboration with other environmental organizations to advocate for the passage of the Safe Waterways Act (HB 165), to defend our local fertilizer ordinances from possible preemptions, and oppose HB 527, Land and Water Management. We will support other legislation that is protective of clean water and oppose proposals that threaten clean water.

Locally, we will monitor/advocate for improvements to the Lee County MS-4 permitting, Caloosahatchee Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), the Fort Myers Wastewater Treatment Plant consent order, and the development of TMDLs for nutrients in SWFL waters. We will continue to monitor and advocate potential environmental impacts from policy changes such as the Lee Comprehensive Plan (Captiva development code), Redfish Pointe, Cape Coral spreader canals, Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve, and more.

The primary project we wish to advance locally is strategizing advocacy efforts and pollution reform resulting from our FIB monitoring data in Lee County. We plan to focus on Manuels Branch in Fort Myers, but efforts may also include Billys Creek or Estero Bay tributaries.

We also seek to publish a 2nd edition of the SWFL Water Quality Impairment Trends (aka 9-County) Report that CWK pioneered in 2021.

VI. Other Projects/Collaborations – There are several miscellaneous objectives that may also be part of our efforts:

1. CWK will be prioritizing receiving GIS and technology assistance from volunteers or contractors to benefit the ADAM, FIB and VOG initiatives.
2. We may pursue a new collaboration monitoring seagrass if the partner institution is a good fit.
3. Several collaborative projects with Bonefish & Tarpon Trust and Engage Estero were recently concluded. We will remain open to any follow-up projects which are compatible with our resources.

Additional initiatives that fall under the CWK mission may arise over the course of the year, and our annual plan may be amended as necessary.



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VII. Fundraising & Grants - Our members, partners, and benefactors provide the donations necessary to implement our many initiatives. CWK's current fundraising sources depend on three main pillars: everyday giving (membership), a major donor program, and grants. Our primary fundraising initiatives for 2024 are:

1. Host the CWK Annual Meeting and Fundraiser in the Spring.
2. Introduce our first inshore fishing tournament/fundraiser in Fall 2024.
3. Implement Key Performance Indicators and goal tracking for our revenue and fundraising efforts.
4. Publish the organizations' first annual report to aid in messaging and fundraising.
5. Continue to develop and increase revenue from a greater diversity of sources, including legacy giving, stock donations and establishment of an endowment fund.
6. Pinpoint pertinent grant opportunities and pursue funding to support our initiatives (aspects of ADAM, FIB, VOG, Ranger, advocacy).
7. Review fundraising performance quarterly and continue to improve our returns on effort and other KPIs.

VIII. Organizational Operations & Governance – Operationally, CWK has been in a period of transition since 2022. In the past year we welcomed a new Waterkeeper and board officers and experienced a substantial amount of change among the board and employee team members. Despite unprecedented challenges from COVID and Hurricane Ian, our organization has remained stable and growing. We are committed to maintaining a growth trajectory and completing the various personnel and organizational transitions that have been underway.

The CWK board remains committed to building a team of employees who can take on operational tasks historically performed by board members and volunteers. This will allow us to build a more diverse board of directors and transition from a “working” board to a “governing” board. In 2024, we will need to make several important decisions on our organizational structure and strategy that will likely include:

1. Fill the role of Executive Director or similar senior management position that oversees day-to-day operations.
2. Fill the role of a primary fundraising professional.
3. Continue defining Human Resources policies, to include the implementation of an employee handbook and protocols for performance reviews for employees and contractors.
4. Improve organizational documentation, digital resource management and internal communications by more widely utilizing and organizing our existing software subscriptions.
5. Strategize on the skillsets and values contributed by board Directors; identify and recruit new board members; implement requirements and performance reviews; improve succession and transitions of board officers.
6. Contemplate the options/viability of leasing additional equipment storage or a central office space as our needs increase and evolve.
7. Continue to build capacity and resources to reach longer term goals and items not adequately addressed in our current budget, such as increased funding for litigation services, advertising and marketing, advocacy and lobbying initiatives, and payroll growth and expansion.