

Meet the CFWI Steering Committee

The Steering Committee oversees the CFWI process and provides guidance to the technical teams and technical oversight/management committees that are developing and refining information on all aspects of central Florida's water resources.

The Steering Committee includes a governing board member from each water management district and a representative from a public water supply utility, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS).

Ben Butler, South Florida Water Management District



Ben Butler, of Lorida, is the manager of Butler Oaks Farm, a family owned dairy farm.

Butler Oaks Farm has operated for more than 80 years and has received the Agricultural-Environmental Leadership Award from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Butler has been a director of the Okeechobee Farm Bureau since 2007 and the past president and director of the Okeechobee Youth Livestock Show since 2008. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in animal science from the University of Florida.

Butler has taken an active role on his family's farm since 2005. He has been actively involved in his family's water use for agricultural and production purposes. He has become the farm's contact for its consumptive water use permits and has gained valuable experiences about water conservation practices, permitting requirements, and alternative water supply issues and opportunities. Butler understands the importance of water to not only agriculture, but to the entire central and south Florida growing population and industries. He hopes to use his real-world experiences to provide a background of understanding, while acknowledging the complexities and challenges with water use and availability.

Butler serves as an at-large Governing Board member for the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), representing an area that includes Glades, Highlands, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola and Polk counties.

Ashley Bell Barnett, Southwest Florida Water Management District



Ashley Bell Barnett of Winter Haven is a community advocate with experience as a public educator, workforce development analyst and nonprofit leader.

Bell Barnett was appointed to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) Governing Board in December 2020, and her term expires March 1, 2023.

A fifth-generation Floridian, Bell Barnett earned her bachelor's degree from Florida Southern College in Lakeland, Florida, and her Master of Public Administration from the University of South Florida.

Bell Barnett serves in a variety of capacities at organizations across the community, including Vice Chair of the Polk State College District Board of Trustees, Community Impact Chair of United Way of Central Florida, Talbot House, Lakeland Regional Hospital Foundation, GiveVisual Inc., Bonnet Springs Park, JDRF, and the Polk County School District.

A Leadership LA, Leadership Florida and Leadership Polk alumni, she was recently honored with the 2019 "She Knows Where She's Going" award bestowed by Girls, Inc.

Bell Barnett represents Polk County.

Chris Peterson, St. Johns River Water Management District



Serving on the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) Governing Board since March 2019, Chris Peterson is President of Hell's Bay Marine, Inc., a shallow-water skiff boat manufacturer. Previously, he was president of Heath-Peterson Construction Corp.

Peterson serves on the advisory board for the University of Florida's Biological Field Station at Cedar Key and was awarded the Conservation Award for Industry by the International Game Fish Association.

Peterson earned his bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Florida.

Todd Swingle, Toho Water Authority



Todd Swingle serves as the Executive Director for the Toho Water Authority (TWA) in Kissimmee, FL.

TWA serves more than 100,000 metered connections with services that include water, wastewater, and reclaimed water, supporting not only the residents of Osceola County, the City of Kissimmee, and portions of Polk County, but Central Florida's thriving visitor population.

Prior to joining TWA, Swingle spent more than 25 years serving in various environmental and utility roles, including consulting, service to the global manufacturing company Cummins Inc. as the Manager of Water Programs and Director of Environmental Strategy, and public sector roles as Public Services Administrator for the City of St. Cloud, FL and Deputy Director for Orange County, FL Utilities. Swingle is active in a variety of civic and professional organizations and currently serves on the board of the Florida Water Environment Association Utility Council and as Chair of WEF's Utility Management Committee as well as other local leadership roles.

Swingle holds bachelor's and master's degrees in Environmental Engineering from the University of Central Florida and a M.B.A. from the University of Florida. He is also a registered Professional Engineer.

Adam Blalock, Florida Department of Environmental Protection



Adam Blalock is the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Deputy Secretary for Ecosystems Restoration.

Blalock is responsible for overseeing statewide water supply; restoring and protecting Florida's aquatic ecosystems including the Everglades; managing aquatic research, monitoring and laboratory analysis; funding water and wastewater infrastructure; and governing coastal protection and resiliency.

Prior to joining DEP, Blalock worked at Hopping, Green & Sams, specializing in natural resource legislation and environmental permitting on the local, state and national levels. Blalock also has a wealth of experience in public environmental law, serving first as an attorney and later as the policy chief for the Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee of the Florida House of Representatives from 2005 to 2015. In addition to his legal experience, Adam holds a Juris Doctor and master's degree in Environmental Law and Policy from the Vermont Law School and a bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Florida. Adam is also an active member of the Environmental Land Use Section of the Florida Bar.

Chris Pettit, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services



Christopher Pettit is the Director of the Office of Agricultural Water Policy for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

The Office is responsible for the development and implementation of best management practices on agricultural properties related to water quality and conservation. Pettit previously served in the offices of counsel for both the South Florida and Southwest Florida water management districts and as a Policy and Legislation Manager handling water and environmental issues for Palm Beach County.

He earned a law degree from the University of Florida, an LLM from the University of Cape Town, and undertook doctoral studies at the University of London.