



December 1, 2025

Jennifer Hecker
Executive Director
Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership
1050 Loveland Blvd., Suite D
Port Charlotte, FL 33980
jhecker@chnep.org

Re: Funding Application – Warm Mineral Springs Habitat Restoration and Education Initiative

Dear Ms. Hecker,

On behalf of the City of North Port Parks and Recreation Department and the Natural Resources Division, I am pleased to submit our funding application for the Warm Mineral Springs Habitat Restoration and Education Initiative. Warm Mineral Springs is an iconic landmark of our City, a place of natural beauty and cultural heritage that many, including yourself, have been able to visit and explore firsthand.

This project will remove invasive species, plant native trees and vegetation, and install educational signage in the area surrounding the Springs. These efforts will strengthen ecological resilience, improve water quality, and engage the public, ensuring that Warm Mineral Springs continues to thrive as both a natural resource and a celebrated community landmark.

With a total project cost of \$300,000, the initiative will deliver measurable ecological benefits while fostering sustainability and public education. We appreciate your consideration of this application and the opportunity to partner in protecting and enhancing Warm Mineral Springs.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stefan Kalev".

Stefan Kalev
Natural Resources Manager
Development Services Department
4970 City Hall Blvd., North Port, FL 34286
Office: 941-429-7033 | Cell: 941-740-3248
skalev@northportfl.gov



Project Name:

Warm Mineral Springs Habitat Restoration and Education Initiative

Project Objective:

The objective of this project is to enhance the ecological integrity of the area surrounding Warm Mineral Springs by removing invasive plant species, planting native trees, and installing educational signage. These efforts will improve water quality by reducing nutrient loading, restore hydrology by supporting native vegetation, and protect fish, wildlife, and their habitats. Additionally, the educational elements will engage the public, fostering stewardship and awareness of the ecological and cultural significance of Warm Mineral Springs.

Project Description:

The project will begin with the systematic removal of invasive plant species in the vicinity of the spring run. Invasive vegetation contributes to habitat degradation, alters hydrology, and can negatively impact water quality. Removal efforts will be conducted using best management practices to minimize disturbance and ensure long-term effectiveness.

Following invasive removal, native tree and understory planting will be implemented to restore natural habitat structure, stabilize soils, and improve stormwater filtration. Native trees will be selected for their ecological value, resilience, and ability to support local wildlife. Several live oaks will be planted around the spring to provide future shade for visitors and to help limit erosion along the banks. Planting will occur within six months of invasive removal, with irrigation, monitoring and maintenance scheduled to ensure survival and establishment.

The final component will include the installation of interpretive signage and educational elements around Warm Mineral Springs. These will highlight the ecological importance of native vegetation, the impacts of invasive species, and the connection between healthy habitats and water quality. Signage will be designed to engage the numerous visitors and strengthen community participation in conservation.

CCMP Elements Implemented:

This project supports the 2025 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) by implementing the following:

Water Quality Improvement Action Plan

Activity WQ-3.1: Reduce stormwater and runoff pollution



This project supports urban best management practices (BMPs) that restore freshwater inputs to a more natural pattern of quantity, timing, and distribution while reducing pollutant loadings. Removing invasive species and planting native trees enhances stormwater retention and filtration, lowering sediment and nutrient runoff. Live oaks around the spring will provide shade and stabilize soils, limiting erosion and improving water quality.

Hydrologic Restoration Action Plan

Activity HR-2.2: Increase fresh surface water and groundwater availability to support healthy ecosystems

The project promotes this activity by removing invasive species and planting native trees that improve infiltration, stormwater retention, and aquifer recharge. Live oaks will stabilize soils, reduce erosion, and support nature-based solutions that protect recharge areas.

Fish, Wildlife & Habitat Protection Plan

Activity FWHP-1.2: Research and promote best management practices for tidal creeks, rivers, canals, dredged channels, and stormwater conveyances that support habitats and native aquatic life

The project promotes this activity by restoring the spring run area, which functions similarly to a creek flowing from the spring. Removal of invasive species and planting of native vegetation improves habitat conditions and supports aquatic life by stabilizing banks, filtering runoff, and maintaining natural hydrology. Educational signage will further promote awareness of best management practices that protect these freshwater conveyances and their ecological functions.

FWHP-Activity 2.1: Encourage and support the permanent conservation of environmentally sensitive lands and critical habitat areas

Warm Mineral Springs is an iconic landmark and environmentally sensitive area. By restoring native vegetation and stabilizing soils, the project supports conservation of upland and freshwater habitats adjacent to the spring. These efforts strengthen habitat resilience and protect the ecological integrity of the site for future generations.

FWHP-Activity 2.2: Encourage management of public lands and private lands with public conservation easements to protect, restore, and create native plant and animal communities

The project advances this activity by eradicating invasive exotic species around the spring run and replacing them with native trees and understory vegetation. These actions restore native plant communities, improve habitat quality, and support local wildlife. Long-term monitoring and maintenance will ensure the restored areas remain resilient and ecologically functional.

FWHP-Activity 2.3: Implement the Habitat Restoration Needs Plan in facilitating habitat restoration and migration



This initiative directly contributes to regional habitat restoration priorities by removing invasive species, planting native trees, and creating conditions that allow native habitats to thrive. The project supports long-term ecological migration and adaptation to changing environmental conditions.

FWHP-Activity 3.1: Assist in assessing and promoting the economic, social, and environmental benefits of land protection and habitat restoration

Beyond ecological benefits, the project highlights the social and cultural importance of Warm Mineral Springs as an iconic landmark of North Port. Educational signage and public engagement components will promote awareness of the environmental, social, and economic value of protecting and restoring this unique resource.

Public Engagement Action Plan

Activity PE-1.1: Support programs, events, presentations, and educational content The project includes interpretive signage and educational elements that communicate key messages about water quality, hydrology, habitat, and wildlife in clear, accessible language. This directly supports Activity 1.1 by fostering public understanding of watershed protection and restoration.

Activity PE-1.2: Provide information to interested public about activities to participate in research, monitoring, and restoration By installing educational signage and engaging visitors, the project informs the public about ongoing restoration efforts, invasive species removal, and native planting. It encourages participation and awareness of monitoring and stewardship activities.

Activity 2.1: Engage stakeholders in estuary and watershed protection activities and educational programs The initiative involves collaboration with partners such as CHNEP, SWFWMD, and local organizations, engaging stakeholders in habitat restoration and water quality protection.

Activity 2.2: Engage different communities in estuary and watershed protection activities and educational programs Warm Mineral Springs is an iconic landmark visited by diverse communities. The project's educational components and restoration activities provide opportunities for broad community engagement in watershed protection.

Activity 3.1: Build and support capacity of non-profit and community partners

The project supports local environmental organizations and volunteers by involving them in planting and outreach. This builds capacity for ongoing CCMP implementation through community partnerships. In addition, the initiative may engage UF/IFAS Extension and local garden clubs to provide expert input on native species selection and planting strategies. Their participation will strengthen community knowledge, ensure ecological appropriateness, and expand the network of partners contributing to long-term restoration and stewardship at Warm Mineral Springs.



Partners and Roles:

- City of North Port Natural Resources Division:** Project lead, coordination, oversight, and monitoring.
- Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP):** Alignment with CCMP goals and potential funding support.
- Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD):** Technical support and permitting guidance.
- Local environmental organizations and volunteers:** Assistance with planting, rewilding, and educational outreach.

Outputs/Deliverables/Milestones:

- Completion of invasive species removal (within 6 months).
- Planting of native trees and other vegetation along the spring run (within 9 months).
- Planting of native oak trees along the spring head.
- Installation of 5 educational signs (within 12 months).
- Proper irrigation to ensure establishment.
- Monitoring report on vegetation survival.

FY 2026 Budget:

Invasive species removal:	\$150,000
Native tree planting (materials, labor, maintenance):	\$75,000
Native plant rewilding (with irrigation):	\$72,500
Signage and educational materials:	\$2,500
Total Project Cost:	\$300,000 + Staff Time

Outcomes:

- Significant reduction of invasive plant coverage in targeted areas.
- Establishment of native tree canopy to improve habitat and stormwater filtration.
- Increased public awareness of ecological and water quality issues through signage and outreach.
- Improved water quality through reduced nutrient loading and enhanced hydrology.
- Enhanced resident and visitor well-being through shade and comfort provided by planted native canopy trees.



CWA Core Program Goals/Objectives Addressed:

- 4) Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution
- 5) Protecting wetlands
- 7) Protecting large aquatic ecosystems
- 8) Ensure clean and safe water for all communities
- 9) Protect and restore waterbodies and watersheds