

FWEA Students & Young Professionals 2025 Summer Newsletter

Message from the Chair

This summer, the FWEA Students and Young Professionals Committee (S&YPC) welcomed new leadership to help bring fresh energy and exciting initiatives to our community. We're eager to share updates on our latest programs during upcoming meetings and events – so stay tuned! In this newsletter, we'll highlight the achievements of our students and young professionals at the 2025 Florida Water Resources Conference (FWRC). These successes wouldn't be possible without the generous support of our sponsors and the dedication of our volunteers – thank you all for making it happen.

We're also excited to feature testimonials from members who had the opportunity to represent S&YPC beyond Florida, and we'll give you a sneak peek at what's coming next. A special congratulations goes out to our scholarship recipients, Poster Competition winners, and the University of South Florida for taking first place in both the Environmental and Wastewater categories of the Student Design Competition (SDC) at FWRC. We wish the SDC winners the best of luck as they head to WEFTEC in Chicago this fall to compete nationally!

Finally, I'm thrilled to introduce Olga as the new S&YPC Chair. With her extensive experience as Vice Chair and Treasurer, Olga brings deep industry knowledge and a strong commitment to our community programs. Together with our new leadership team of passionate water professionals, S&YPC is in great hands.

It's been an honor to serve on this committee. Thank you for the memories, and I hope you enjoy the rest of your summer!

Jissell Muir, EI

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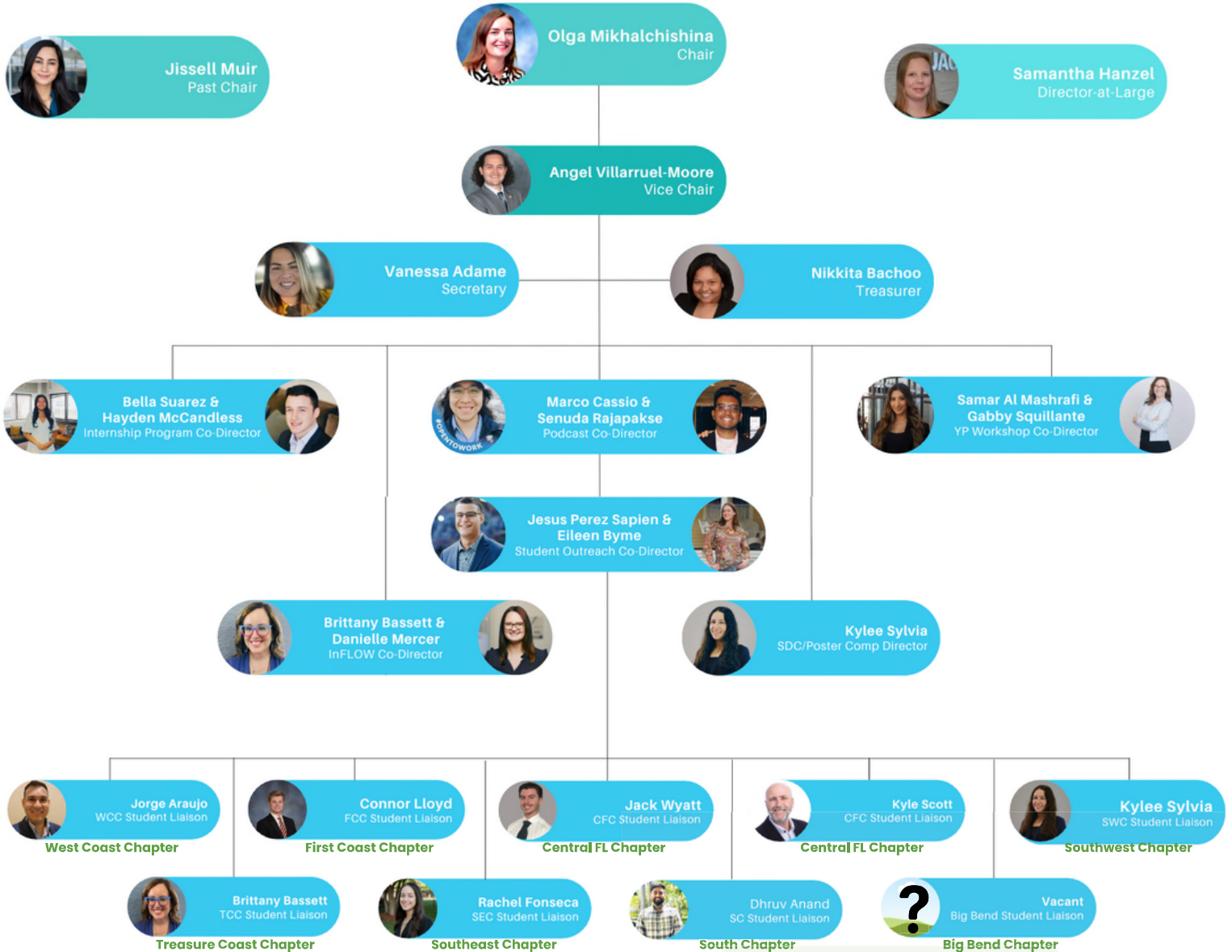


Florida Water
Environment
Association

STUDENTS & YOUNG
PROFESSIONALS
COMMITTEE



2025-26 SYPC Leadership Organizational Chart

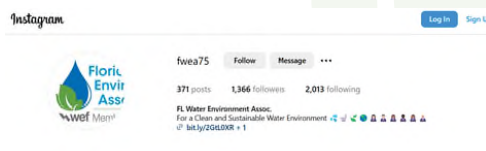


Are you a student or young professional interested in becoming involved. Please contact: sypc@fwea.org

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Student Design Competition



The 2025 Student Design Competition (SDC) was held at the Florida Water Resources Conference (FWRC) and tasked students with designing and presenting solutions to real-world engineering problems. Teams from various universities traveled to West Palm Beach on May 4, 2025 to compete in either the Wastewater or Environmental categories, and presented on topics such as wastewater treatment facility improvements, stormwater management, and flood mitigation.

The competition aims to give students interested in pursuing a career in water/wastewater engineering and sciences real-world design experience. This year, six teams from five different universities and colleges across Florida participated and competed in one of two categories. First-place winners received a \$4,000 travel allowance to represent Florida at the national Water Environment Federation Technical and Exhibition Conference (WEFTEC) in Chicago, along with a \$1,000 Norm Casey Scholarship. All other teams received a \$500 participation bonus.

Congratulations to all the students who participated! Special recognition goes to the students from the University of South Florida (USF) for winning first place in both the wastewater and environmental categories. These teams will represent Florida at the national stage during WEFTEC in September!

We would like to express our gratitude to all of our SYPC sponsors and the panel of SDC judges for volunteering at this year's SDC. We look forward to seeing the research and design projects that students will bring to the 30th Annual SDC next year!

Vanessa Adame

FWEA SYPC Secretary Chair

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SDC – Winners' Experience

First Place Wastewater Team: The University of South Florida, also known as SustainaCore, had an unforgettable experience presenting at the conference. Their project, "From Waste to Worth: Biosolids Optimization at the Howard F. Curren Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant," focused on enhancing the City of Tampa's current production of Class B biosolids by evaluating ten different treatment and disposal alternatives. After thorough analysis and design, the team recommended Solar-Thermal Pasteurization for its potential to significantly reduce biosolids mass while upgrading the end product to a Class AA fertilizer.

Beyond the competition, the team made the most of their time in West Palm Beach - enjoying the beach, exploring CityPlace and Worth Avenue, walking through the exhibition hall, and learning from industry professionals.

First Place Environmental Team: The University of South Florida, also known as ReNew Engineering Solutions, with team members Garrett Rolle, Chase Royall, Santosh A. Jagan, Nicholas Moran, and Regina Demechko. Successfully winning the environmental design competition was the perfect way to end the semester for USF's Environmental Team. The team is incredibly proud and excited to continue sharing their project on the David L. Tippin Water Treatment Facility Redesign and to continue learning through other presentations and seminars at FWRC.



Pictured above (left to right): Adriana Mayr Mejia, Issac B., Isabella Guzaldo, Ochithya Fernando, and Schuyler Jones.



Pictured above (left to right): Garrett Rolle, Chase Royall, Santosh A. Jagan, Nicholas Moran, and Regina Demechko.





FWRC Poster Competition

The SYPC Poster Competition provides students and young professionals the opportunity to attend FWRC by presenting a project that relates to the field of wastewater engineering, water resources, and other environmental topics. On May 5th, 2025 posters were displayed and presenters discussed their research data, plans, or case studies to the panel of judges. Angel and Brennan share their experience on participating and winning this year's SYPC Poster Competition.



SYPC Poster Competition winners: Angel Villarruel-Moore (left) and Brennan Schneider (right)

Angel Villarruel-Moore (Left) – 1st Place:

“Participating in this year’s FWRC Poster Competition was a great experience and a valuable opportunity to share interesting data and insights from operating a direct potable reuse demonstration facility in Central Florida. The event also gave me the chance to connect with fellow students and industry professionals, which made it even more rewarding. I even left with a great book recommendation on water reuse – 10/10 would participate again.”

Brennan Schneider (Right) – 2nd Place:

“On behalf of England-Thims & Miller (ETM) in Jacksonville, I presented our team’s dynamic GIS-based approach to identify critical aging water infrastructure in JEA’s network and to prioritize areas for water main replacement. I loved the look on people’s faces when they saw the difference between a 2” tuberculated galvanized water main and new 6” PVC.”

Vanessa Adame

FWEA SYPC Secretary Chair

sypc@fwea.org

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InFLOW and YP Utility Worker Scholarships

FWEA S&YP Scholarships Brought New Faces to FWRC 2025

At the 2025 Florida Water Resources Conference (FWRC), held from May 3 to 7 at the West Palm Beach Convention Center, the Student and Young Professionals (S&YP) Committee proudly hosted two impactful scholarship programs: the InFLOW Scholarship and the YP Utility Workers Scholarship. These programs supported the attendance of promising students and young professionals by providing scholarships for travel, registration, meals, and accommodations, enabling participants to fully engage in FWRC's extensive programming.



InFLOW: Introducing Future Leaders to Opportunities in Water

Designed to increase diversity and inclusion in the water sector, the InFLOW program welcomed students currently enrolled in technical or community colleges. Over two days, students attended the YP Workshop, the Student Design Competition, and a Water Treatment Plant Tour. They also explored the exhibit hall and connected with professionals, mentors, and potential employers.



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InFLOW and YP Utility Worker Scholarships



YP Utility Workers Scholarship: Empowering New Industry Professionals

The YP Utility Workers Scholarship provided a three-day immersive experience for young professionals actively working in the Florida water sector. The program offered access to technical sessions, networking events, and the exhibit floor, while fostering deeper engagement with FWEA. Together, these scholarships helped build a stronger and more inclusive pipeline of future water leaders while creating memorable FWRC experiences for each recipient.

Olga Mikhalchishina

Ardurra

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We are excited to announce that as of January 2025, FWEA SYPC started a local InFLOW program. We invite community college and vocational students to apply to our new scholarship opportunity to attend FWRC, for an in-person introduction to the water industry. Additionally, we plan to offer a similar scholarship for Young Professional Utility Workers. Please visit our [website](#) to learn more about upcoming 2026 scholarship opportunities!





FWRC Utility Worker Scholarship Experience



Aliya Moktadier

City of Pompano Beach

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Attending the Florida Water Resources Conference always leaves me feeling inspired. This year, I was honored to attend as one of the first Young Professionals Utility Worker Scholarship recipients.

I have attended the Young Professionals Workshop twice and thoroughly enjoy the day planned for us. It's clear how much thought and effort go into organizing this event. Our speakers this year were fantastic—Ifetayo Venner, Chelsea Boozer, and Stephen Crawford—who all shared some of their expertise, advice, and wisdom with us. One highlight for me was their emphasis on the importance of working hard while remembering the values that matter most to us. The speakers reminded us that planning for the future is productive, but remaining open-minded can lead to unexpected opportunities—especially early on in your career.

The conference is also a great opportunity to expand your network and meet other water professionals in Florida.

Thank you to the FWEA S&YPC for this opportunity. I really enjoyed participating in this Utility Worker Scholarship program and would highly encourage other utility workers to apply.



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FWRC InFLOW Scholar Experience



As a student, getting involved in professional organizations can be both intimidating and costly. However, the scholarship program allowed me to be able to attend so many events such as the YP workshop, student design competition, and plant tour. All of the professionals I met were super friendly and helped ease my nerves. The technical side of engineering is very important, but my key takeaway from this whole experience was how vital your connections are. The more you're able to network, the farther you will get in your career. Being able to attend the FWRC conference was an amazing experience, and I plan to be back next year!

Kyla Abraham

UCF Student

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FWRC YP Workshop



SPOTTED AT THE WORKSHOP!



WHO WE SAW

Keynote with Ifetayo Venner, PE

Takeaway: *Don't be afraid to ask questions & find your mentor!*

Interactive Workshop with Chelsea Boozer

Takeaway: *Advocate for yourself and keep showing up!*

Financial Planning with Stephen Crawford, PE

Takeaway: *Determine your priorities, make a plan, be intentional with your decisions, and check in at your milestones!*

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Breakfast & coffee

Inspiring speakers

Scholarships & lunch

Local leadership intros (get involved!)

More than 100 people joined!

JOIN US IN 2026!

Where: *Daytona Beach Ocean Convention Center*

Build your network, get advice, meet future mentors, and connect with other passionate students & young professionals!

WANT TO HELP US PLAN NEXT YEAR'S EVENT?

Get involved and pick a team! You can specialize in:

- Speaker & panelist coordination
- Marketing & outreach
- Registration & Day-Of Support

If you're interested in helping plan the event, we have a place for you! Reach out to Samar at

samar.almashrafi@arcadis.com





2025 WEF /AWWA YP Summit

The 2025 WEF/AWWA Young Professionals (YP) Summit is an annual leadership conference held in conjunction with the Utility Management Conference. This year, the Summit took place on February 10 in Dallas, Texas. It serves as the premier workshop for young professionals in the water and wastewater industry across North America. Attendees benefit from professional development sessions, networking opportunities, and interactions with industry experts, catering specifically to early-career water professionals and students entering the field.

Attendees can learn essential skills and make valuable connections that shape their careers and pave the way to leadership in the water sector. During the YP Summit, participants will engage with hands-on water and wastewater tools and approaches in a collaborative team setting, expanding their practical knowledge while building lasting peer-to-peer support networks. By meeting with current water leaders and young professionals from across the industry, everyone gains unique insights and learns about exciting innovations and projects, providing different perspectives on the challenges we face as water professionals. For future water leaders, the opportunity for growth comes from these challenges. Identifying how these challenges may impact a person's goals and relying on the skills they have, as well as those that might need to be developed further, is essential for future leaders.

Vanessa Adame

FWEA SYPC Secretary Chair

sypc@fwea.org



Alejandro (Alex) Solanilla was nominated and selected for the 2023 - 2024 YP of the Year Award and participated in the 2025 YP Summit. He shares his experiences at the YP Summit with us:

"I had the opportunity to attend the 2025 WEF/AWWA Young Professionals (YP) Summit, which was an incredible experience for both professional development and networking. The summit was a great platform for young leaders in the water and wastewater industry to come together, collaborate, and learn about the challenges and opportunities within the sector. One of the highlights for me was the hands-on problem-solving activities, where we worked as teams to assemble pipes, valves, and meters against the clock, as well as other activities using Biowin software to solve complex issues at a wastewater treatment facility. These interactive sessions were not only fun but also helped to sharpen my technical skills."



2025 WEF / AWWA YP Summit



Networking was a key focus for me, and I had the chance to meet a diverse group of professionals, from consultants and vendors to utility engineers from across the U.S. It was inspiring to see so many companies are willing to invest in their young professionals by sending them to events like the YP Summit. Beyond expanding my network, I gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by professionals in other regions and was able to provide career advice to younger attendees. I also made meaningful connections that I believe will last for years to come, especially during the social events like happy hours and dinners in Dallas. Overall, it was an enriching experience that reinforced the value of collaboration and learning from others in the industry."

Alex Solanilla

AECOM

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Each year the S&YPC administers the "Young Professional of the Year" award, recognizing outstanding service to FWEA. The FWEA YP of the Year is an outstanding young professional that shows leadership, initiative, technical knowledge and actively participates within FWEA. The winner will be announced and awarded at the FWEA Awards Luncheon. The winner also earns a paid trip to attend the annual [AWWA/WEF YP Summit](#). The winner may also be recognized in the Florida Water Resources Journal, FWEA S&YP Website, social media and other publications. Past recipients of the YP award can be seen [here](#).

Nominations are now closed for 2025 and will reopen in the Spring of 2026.

YPs are not allowed to nominate themselves but are encouraged to have their supervisors or colleagues submit a nomination form on their behalf. Members of the S&YP Committee are eligible.



WEF 2025 National Water Policy Fly-In



The nexus between policy, advocacy, and how we manage our water is not always as clear as a glass of drinking water.

Water professionals, policymakers, students, and the public must stay updated on scientific knowledge, along with the impact of our choices on the environment around us, as innovation, policies, and societal needs shift.

There is no argument that water is an essential need for life, health, and business. But who manages it, how we ensure quality, and who pays for it — are the focus of ongoing discussions. What's refreshing is that clean, accessible water for all crosses party lines and unifies people from different walks of life.

In April, I attended US Water Week in Washington, D.C. as a WEF Young Professional Scholarship recipient and senior Civil Engineering student at the University of South Florida. Alongside Kristiana Dragash and Zachary Loeb — seasoned industry professionals in water infrastructure and operations — we met with congressional offices to advocate for PFAS generator accountability, labeling of non-flushable wipes, low-income water assistance programs, and tax-exempt municipal bond funding. We also visited a few offices impromptu, excited to share our passion for water.

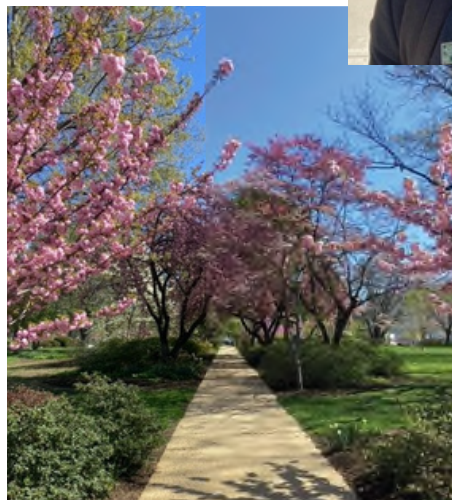
I stepped from the classroom to Capitol Hill, soaking in the drops and splashes of strategy and candor it takes to advocate for water. And yes, the cherry blossoms in D.C. were in full bloom too.



Isaac Washington

USF Graduate Student

washingtonbisaac@gmail.com





YP of the Year Award 2024–2025



As the YP of the Year, Angel will have the opportunity to travel to the Young Professional Summit, held in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was also recognized at the 2025 Florida Water Resource Conference Award Luncheon.

Applications for the 2025–2026 YP of the Year open in Fall 2025. Stay tuned and check the SYPC website to nominate next year's YP of the Year!

Vanessa Adame

FWEA SYPC Secretary Chair
sypc@fwea.org

Angel Villarruel-Moore was nominated by his peers for the 2024–2025 FWEA “YP of the Year” Award and was selected by the S&YP Committee, along with members of FWEA’s Board of Directors, for his service to FWEA’s Central Chapter.

Angel has served as the Central Florida Chapter (CFC) Student Liaison, promoting the FWEA organization and SYPC to student groups at the University of Central Florida (UCF). He has built and maintained strong relationships with students, FWEA student chapter chairs and members, and professors at UCF, as well as planned creative and engaging events, including the FWEA Internship Program, Bi-Annual CFC Beach Cleanups, and other University events that help bridge the gap between students and professionals in the water/wastewater industry. Angel’s mission is to strengthen relationships between the industry and students, which was especially important following the pandemic.



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Upcoming Events

Central Florida Chapter

August 27

FWEA CFC & EWB Trivia Night Fundraiser
05:30 AM – 07:30 PM

September 19

CFC 25th Annual Golf Tournament
07:30 AM – 03:00 PM

Manasota Chapter

September 18

Long Drive Competition
05:30 PM – 08:00 PM

Southwest Chapter

September 09

FWEA Southwest & FSAWWA Region V 24th
Annual Charity Golf Tournament
07:30 AM – 03:30 PM

Treasure Coast Chapter

September 25

FWEA Treasure Coast Chapter Fall Technical
Luncheon
10:30 AM – 01:30 PM

West Coast Chapter

August 21

FWEA WCC Inaugural Fantasy Football
League – Draft Party
05:00 PM – 08:00 PM

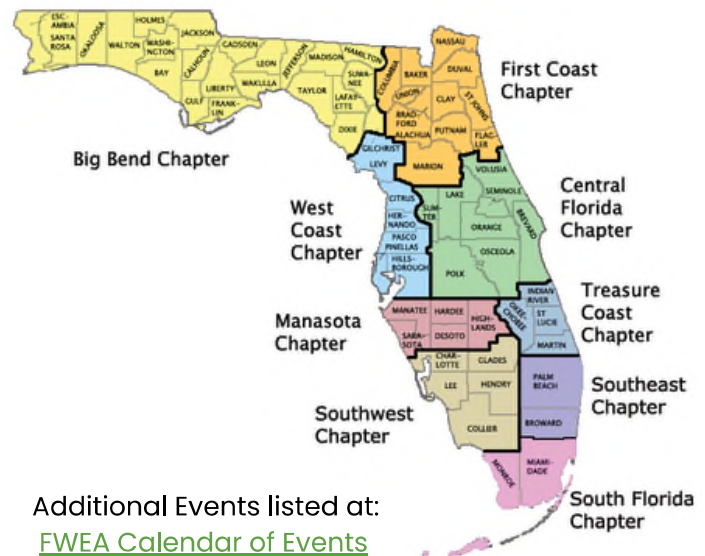
August 28

WCC Women in Water Event
04:00 PM – 08:00 PM

Conference

August 20 – 21

The Water Expo (14th Edition)
Visit thewaterexpo.com to learn more



Additional Events listed at:

[FWEA Calendar of Events](#)

Looking to get involved in the FWEA's SYPC?

Email: sypc@fwea.org

Fill out our [interest form!](#)





2025–2026 FWEA SYPC Internship Program

**July
23**

Organization Interest
Form is now open!

**Aug
6**

FWEA SYPC Organizations
Open House!

**Sept
5**

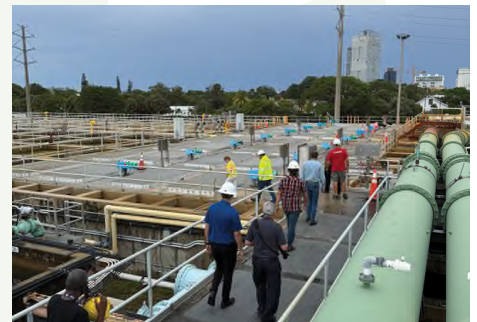
Organization Interest
Form is closed!

**Sept
8**

Student Interest form
is now open!

**Dec
5**

Student Interest Form
is now closed!



This program connects talented students with impactful organizations across Florida's water industry; educating, mentoring, and empowering the next generation of water professionals.

Complete the [Organization Interest Form](#)
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For additional information visit fwea.org