

## FWEA Students and Young Professionals Newsletter

## Message from the (Outgoing) Chair

Nicole Cohen, *Carollo Engineers*

Welcome to the summer issue of the FWEA Students and Young Professionals Committee (SYPC) Newsletter. Many activities and events have happened since our last newsletter, and we are excited to share it all with you!

First, I am thrilled to share the exciting news that Jissell Muir, with Arcadis, will be stepping into the role of Chair for the FWEA SYPC. Jissell's journey with FWEA began as a student member at FIU. Her active involvement, including participation in the Student Design Competition in 2022, and her dedicated contributions to the committee have set her apart as a natural leader.

As I reflect on my tenure as the Chair for the FWEA SYPC over the past two years, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to work alongside such a dynamic and talented group. It has been an honor to witness the growth and achievements of our committee during this time.

I am excited about the future of the FWEA SYPC under Jissell's capable leadership, supported by Olga Mikhalchishina as Vice-Chair and the rest of their exceptional team. While I transition into my new role as an FWEA Director-at-Large, I do so with great confidence in the capable hands of Jissell and her team. Please join me in congratulating Jissell and wishing her and the entire committee the very best!

Second, thank you to all our volunteers and sponsors for supporting the S&YP events held at FWRC. We held our committee meeting, the poster competition, S&YP reception, YP Workshop, and the FWEA Student Design Competition, which are all discussed in more detail in this newsletter.

In addition to our FWRC events, you will read about the YP Summit, WEF Springboard, the YP of the Year Award, upcoming FWEA events, and more.

Thank you to all our committee members and sponsors. Have a great summer!

## Thank you to the SYPC Sponsors!

## GOLD LEVEL



## SILVER LEVEL



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## Looking to get involved?

Are you new to the industry? Do you want to join a committee, but not sure how? The SYPC is a great way to get involved and get connected with others in your field! If you're looking to get involved or become a sponsor please reach out to:

Jissell Muir, Chair  
Jissell.Muir@arcadis.com

Olga Mikhalchishina, Vice Chair  
OMikhalchishina@woodardcurran.com

Angel Villarruel-Moore, Treasurer  
avmoore@carollo.com

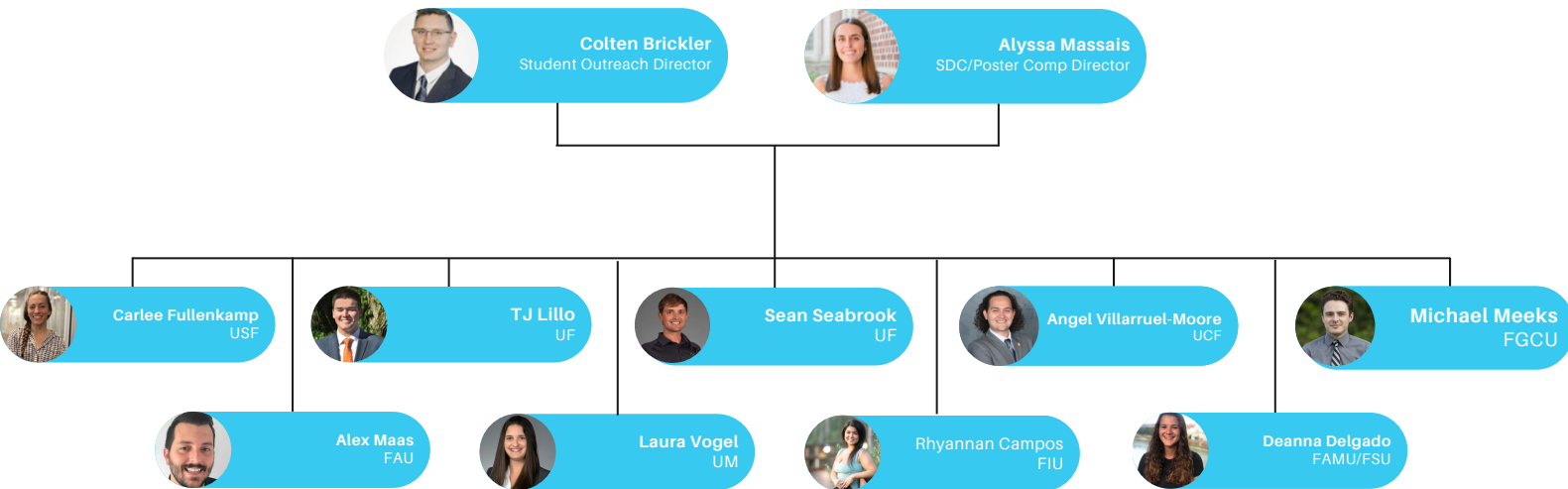
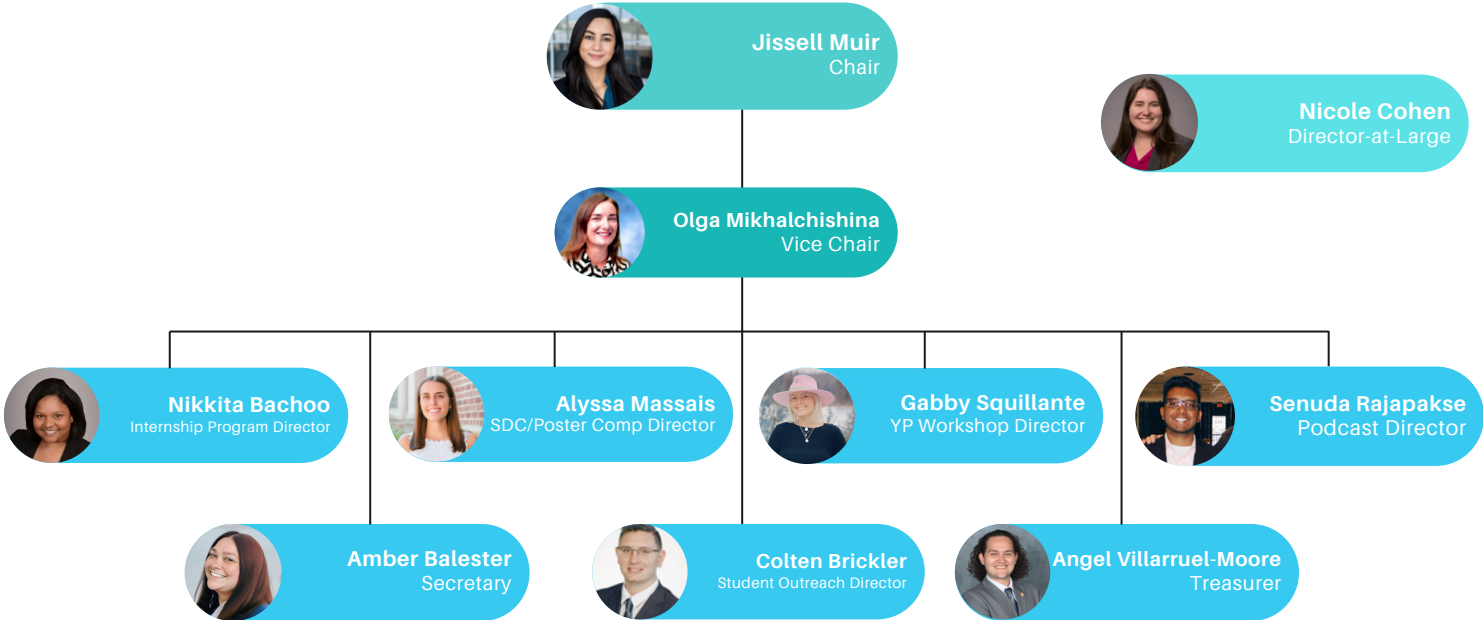
Amber Balester, Secretary  
AmberB@vapex.com



Check out the  
FWEA SYPC  
Webpage!



# FWEA S&YP FY24-25 Organizational Charts





## Meet the S&YP Committee

Nicole Cohen	(Carollo Engineers)
Kamal Taha	(Arcadis)
Olga Mikhachishina	(Woodard & Curran)
Jissell Muir	(Arcadis)
Emma Johnson	(Hazen and Sawyer)
Carlee Chaffin	(HDR)
Laura Vogel	(Chen Moore and Associates)
Laura Rodriguez	(Carollo Engineers)
Alex Maas	(Heyward)
Hayden Tse	(CDM Smith)
Zachary Loeb	(Clay County Utilities)
Angel Villarruel-Moore	(Carollo Engineers)
Amanda Guillory	(Garney Construction)
Meera Joshi	(Carollo)
Kaylei Kambak	(Tetra Tech)
Alexis Scheele	(Wade Trim)
Emily Lutter	(Carollo Engineers)
Kimberly Lawrence	(McKim Creed)
Samantha Hanke	(Mott MacDonald)
Lina Polo	(City of Tallahassee)
Alyssa Massais	(CDM Smith)
Rhyannan Campos	(Hazen and Sawyer)
Brittany Bassett	(Martin County)
Cassidy Botelho	(Black & Veatch)
Arpita Meher	(Arcadis)
Gabby Squillante	Carollo Engineers

## Central Florida SYP News



**Amber Balester**  
*Vapex Environmental*

On April 13th, The FWEA Central Florida Chapter (CFC) partnered with Keep Brevard Beautiful, ASCE, UCF and several others to host the Satellite Beach Clean Up. Volunteers met around 9am, buckets were distributed, and a thought felt speech by Angel Villarruel-Moore kicked off the clean-up. Together we collected over 22 pounds of trash from the beach and surround park areas.

During the event, students and volunteers were able to network with professionals in the water and wastewater industry. Grill Master Casey was also on deck cooking our hunger away as we played various tailgate style games.

As I take time to reflect on the day's events, it was a rewarding experience. Beachgoers walking by thanked us for keeping their beaches clean while numerous wildlife species made appearances to show their gratitude. This is an event I recommend to everyone in the industry to give back and connect further as one with water.






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# S&YP FWRC Committee Meeting



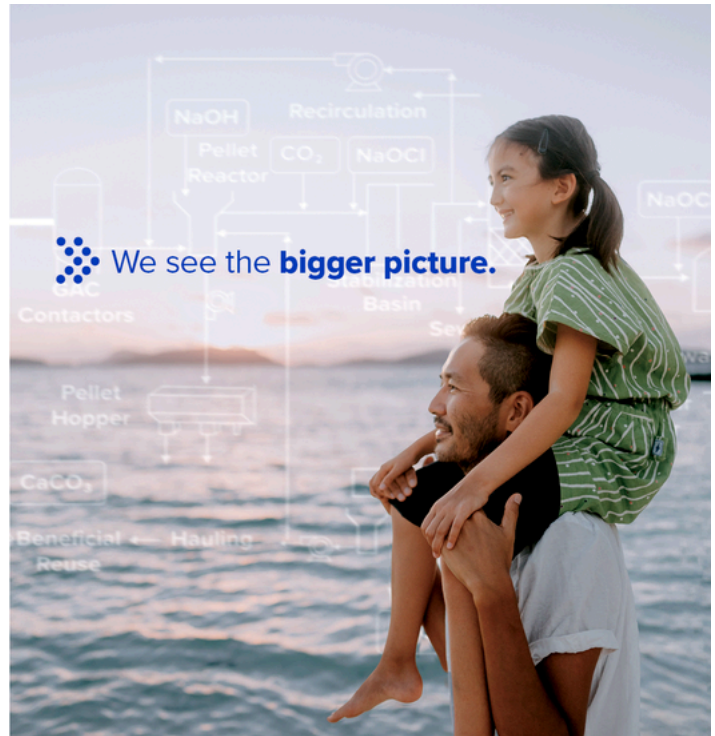
**Jissell Muir**  
*Arcadis*



The S&YP Committee Meeting took place on the morning of Thursday, April 4, 2024. To set the tone for the weekend of Student and Young Professional events, the meeting opened with an icebreaker to get everyone comfortable with each other through some fun introductions. Then the committee leaders ran through what we do as a committee, what events to look forward to, open board positions for recruitment, sponsor shoutouts, and the social media contest.

It is important everyone is aware of the different programs and opportunities available to them as a part of the committee and as members on both the Student and the Young Professional levels. We discussed the kick off of our latest initiative to start a podcast, updates on the success of the internship program, introduced the YP of the Year award, and brainstormed how to improve our university and student outreach methods. This meeting also served as an opportunity to get feedback and new ideas for future planning.

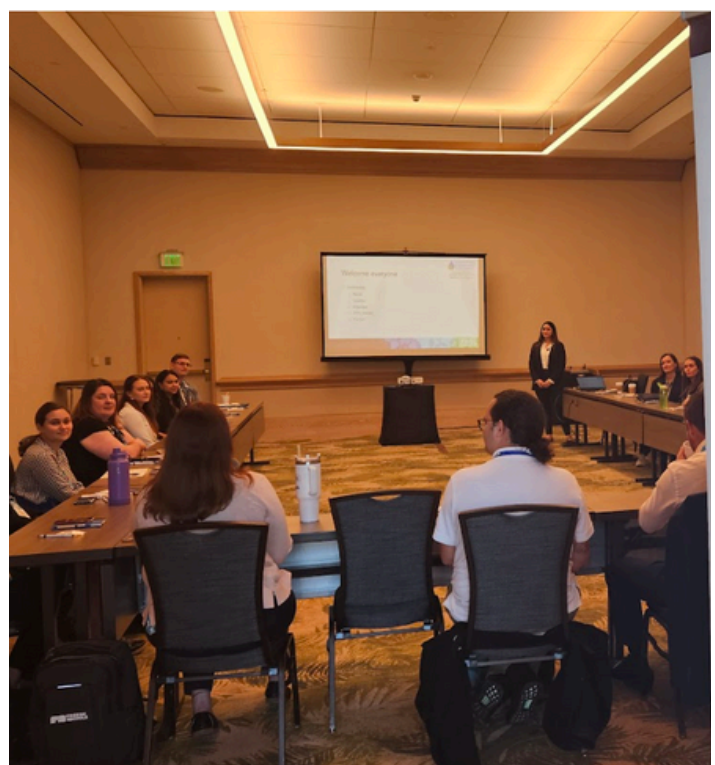
The current S&YP committee will be taking all the ideas from our peers into consideration moving forward to make the next year's conference even better. We will continue with the internship program, YP workshop, student design competitions, poster competition, and roll out new initiatives such as the Podcast. Stay tuned by joining us on our recurring monthly virtual committee meetings to learn more about our next steps and please reach out to get involved.



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# Students and Young Professionals Reception



**Jissell Muir**  
*Arcadis*

The Young Professionals Reception held on Thursday, April 4, 2024 was a great success. The evening started with a professional networking “heads up” icebreaker game, hors d'oeuvres and drinks were served throughout, and several raffle items were sprinkled into the mix.

Our raffle winners walked away with fun takeaways including a hand drill, a fitbit, and a pair of wireless headphones. Mead&Hunt was the proud sponsor of the YP reception. We thank them for supporting the opportunity to facilitate an event which promotes networking and mentorship in a casual setting for current and future leaders of our industry to participate in.

We hope to see you all again at our next year's reception event and we thank those of you who joined us in making it a memorable event!



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# FWRC YP Workshop



**Jissell Muir**  
*Arcadis*

The second ever YP Workshop held at FWRC was another huge success! On Friday, April 5, 2024, from 8:30 to 3:00, we gathered a grand audience of 50-75 engaged participants. This exceptional event was made possible by the joint efforts of FWEA and FSAWWA SYPC, exemplifying the power of collaboration.



The workshop began with a quick warrior warmup stretch. We then had an opening speech from Dr. Ivy Drexler, Senior Manager of the Wastewater and Water Resources Department at the City of St. Petersburg, offering waves of wisdom. In spirit of the “Water Warriors” theme, we embarked on a journey of “Fierce Leadership” for personal and professional growth through storytelling with the help of Executive Coach Erin Mosely.

Following the very interactive first half of the workshop, it was important to refuel. During this time we received messages from our organizations’ leaders including Marjorie Craig from the Village of Tequesta, Suzanna Mechler from CDM Smith, Joe



Paterniti from Clay County Utility Authority, Athena Tipaldos from the City of Orlando, and Lisa Wilson-Davis from the City of Boca Raton. After the leaders warm embrace and insights there was room for one more icebreaker and short recess before moving onto the final part of the workshop, the YP Panel.

This year’s YP Panel included Cedric Carswell the Third from Orange County Utilities, Allyson Felsburg from the Town of Jupiter, Ernesto Carlos Gonzalez with Wharton-Smith, Tori Morgan from Hazen and Sawyer, and Jack Stang with Westlake.



This event was sponsored by JonesEdmunds, celebrating 50 years in the industry this year. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the participants and attendees who made this workshop a memorable and enriching experience. If you're interested in joining the YP Workshop committee, we encourage you to reach out and get involved. Stay tuned for the next YP Workshop, which will take place at the 2025 FWRC in West Palm Beach, Florida. Thank you to our heroes, our guides, our water warriors.





# Student Design Competition



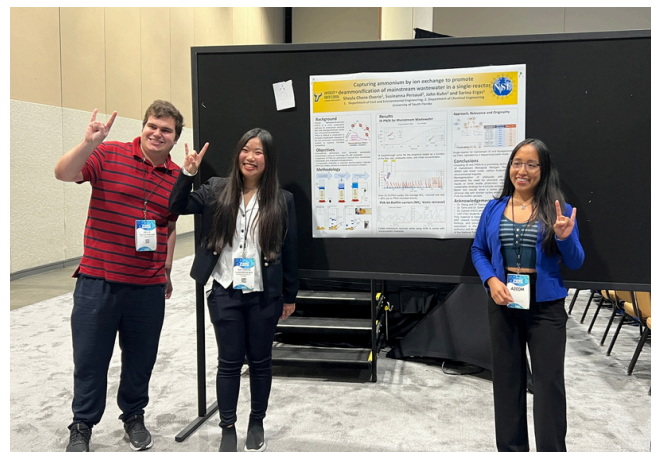
Alyssa Massais  
CDM Smith

The 2024 Student Design Competition (SDC) was held on Saturday, April 6th, at FWRC. Over twenty students from the University of Florida (UF) and the University of South Florida (USF) traveled to Orlando to present on topics such as wastewater treatment facility improvements, flood mitigation, and stormwater treatment. Some students even came to the conference early to take advantage of the SYPC events, such as the YP Social and YP Workshop. The SDC judges were so impressed by the preparation and diligence the students invested in their designs.

Congratulations to our winning teams - “Aqua Machina” (UF) in the environmental category, and “Enviro-Engineering Consulting” (USF) in the wastewater category! These teams will be presenting their design projects at WEFTECH in New Orleans this October – we are excited to see them represent the state of Florida well! Additional thanks go to our SYPC volunteers who gave up their Saturday to invest in this event. We look forward seeing the research and designs students bring to the 2025 SDC.



## Poster Competition



The SYPC Poster Competition was held on Thursday, April 4th. We were elated to have three great poster presentations from students at the University of South Florida (USF). It was wonderful to hear about the research these students are doing at the forefront of the industry, including things like ion exchange, piloting, and denitrification. Conference attendees were eager to stop by the exhibit hall to learn about the students' projects and had great support from our SYPC judges!

Congratulations to Sheyla Chero Osorio (USF), our first place winner, and Jade Luangphairin (USF), runner up!





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# Resume Workshop



Alyssa Massais  
CDM Smith



The Students and Young Professionals Committee (SYPC) held a resume workshop for all of the students who participated in the Student Design Competition (SDC) on Saturday, April 6th. The workshop kicked off with a presentation on resume tips and guidelines, and then lead into an open discussion on all things early career. Many members of the FWEA SYPC leadership team were present to answer questions and provide insight on topics like graduate degrees, PE certification, salary negotiation, and transitioning from college into the industry. Student engagement during the workshop was fantastic, and the SYPC team was eager to answer questions and build connections with industry leaders of tomorrow!

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# YP Summit



**Colten Brickler**  
*Kimley Horn*

The Young Professionals (YP) Summit activities were held in Portland, OR, from February 11th-13th. Every YP should strive to attend at least once in the early stages of their career. It was an engaging and enlightening experience. There were many discussions and activities that provided insight on how to be successful in our industry and the copious amounts of support we have to help us be successful. The YP Summit was prefaced with a field trip to the Joint Water Commission Treatment Facility in Forest Grove, OR and the Fernhill Natural Treatment System (NTS). The YP Leader Training Day was held a day prior and was split between the two professional organizations: Water Environment Federation (WEF) and America Water Works Association (AWWA).

Beginning with field trips to the Treatment Facility and NTS, YPs were able to visit the facility that utilized conventional media filtration with coagulation, flocculation, and sedimentation processes prior to filtration. The NTS helped show us how wetlands are used to improve the water quality of conventionally treated wastewater by removing nutrients, cooling, and naturalizing the water prior to its discharge to the river. The field trips allowed YPs to network as well as provide information to how different areas of the country treat their potable water and wastewater.

The YP Leader Training Day provided valuable advice from a vast number of leaders in the water industry, providing guidance for the YPs to become the next leaders. I found the most influential part was all YPs should strive to be influencers when shaping our DEI future by breaking out of molds we sometimes find ourselves in and influence others to also break out of the molds to grow cohesively. Another important topic was discussing how we can engage more operators in YP events. We discussed initiatives in focused on operators for the event, such as having them perform demonstrations like the Ops Challenge that takes place at the state level and WEFTEC.



Events spotlighting operators are more likely to bring younger operators to attend and engage them. It was no surprise that this issue is consistently seen across our industry.

Finally, the highlight of the week, the YP Summit, was a day jam-packed full of speakers, breakout sessions, and an activity-filled lunch hour. The theme for the Summit was “Taking Care of Business” which was focused on cross-country collaboration, workforce development, and utility management. Discussions touched on getting to know co-workers by taking workplace personality assessments like the DiSC assessment to provide insight to peers and self for collective growth. Additionally, speakers emphasized that inequality amongst gender and race still exist and discussed ways in which attention can be brought to how to eliminate the inequities. Finally, the lunch activity was the water circuit challenge which engaged all participants to be educated in the ways that WEF, AWWA, artificial intelligence, and operators contribute to the industry. There were four operator challenges including the maintenance of a submersible pump.

Overall, the YP Summit proved to be a very education and insightful experience in which all YPs should make the effort to attend at least once in their career. The event and the people collectively left me with a refined set of goals and purpose as I continue in my career.

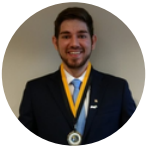
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# WEF 2024 National Water Policy Fly-in



**Zachary Loeb, E.I.**  
*Clay County Utility Authority*

Every year water professionals full of passion, purpose, and perspective all pool together from across the country for Water Week at the United States Capitol. Here they gather to help advance current key water policy priorities and attempt to raise awareness for the challenges that face the water industry. Thanks to the WEF Young Professional Travel Scholarship I was able to be one of them. This travel scholarship was awarded to 11 YPs across the country, including from Florida, myself, and Olga Mikhilchishina. Together with Kristiana Dragash we made the FWEA Delegation. The first day Olga had organized a tour of the capital building for the YP group, where we were able to see all the amazing art, engineering and history making up Capitol Hill as well as network and make new friends. I was able to make it to the Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, Supreme Court Building, and the White House, where I even ended up being stuck for a time at a security checkpoint when the Japanese delegation arrived to meet with the president.



Day two was the event presentation day, we met with the Government Affairs Community and went over upcoming legislation. Later that day we had many speakers ranging from Political Lobbyists and Senators to Utility Chief Officers. I learned so much and took advantage of the event to thank all the people who came to share all the hard work they do to help our water environment across the nation. Day three we were joined by our own WEF press mastermind Heidi Brag and met with our legislative representatives in their office buildings, which was a surreal experience. Here are essentially celebrities from across the country, making the decisions that impact the fate of the world, and we got to sit down and talk water with them.

I highly recommend wandering around the office buildings after a meeting just to see who you might run into, share your water story, and get a great selfie. I cannot stress enough what an amazing experience the Policy Fly-In was and how blessed I am to share my story with you. A huge thank you to everyone that supports this event every year and a massive thank you to WEF for investing in its YPs through this experience.

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# WEF YP Springboard Program



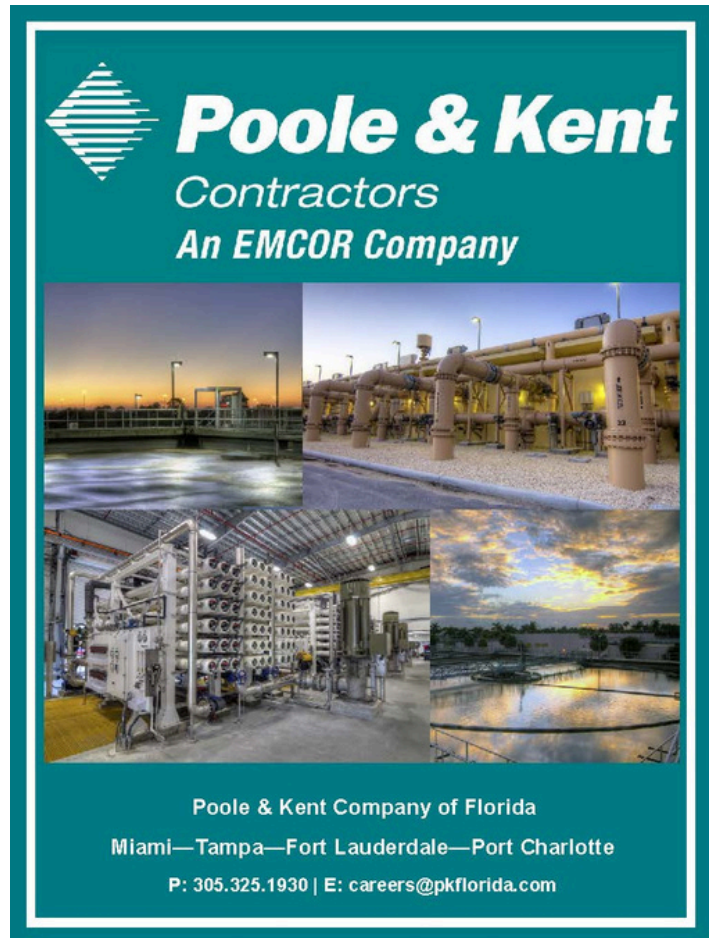
**Kaylei Kambak, EI, ENV SP**  
*Tetra Tech*

The Water Environment Federation (WEF) Winter Meeting serves as a gathering for key volunteer committees to collaborate and shape the programming for WEFTEC. It's a time when strategic discussions are held and the trajectory of WEF's initiatives are charted. Among the attendees are WEF's Board of Trustees, Committee Leadership Council, WEFTEC Advisory Committee, and Manufacturers & Representatives Committee, working together to propel the water industry forward.

The Springboard Program emerges as an opportunity within this landscape for the Student and Young Professional (SYP) community. Empowering emerging leaders by facilitating the integration into WEF's Technical and Program Committees.

With WEF's support, Springboard Candidates attended the Winter Meeting held in March in Washington DC, providing a platform to contribute development of WEFTEC's programming and served as an avenue to deepen our WEF engagement. We were immersed in discussions, brainstorming, and collaborative endeavors with industry leaders. Having experienced the captivating atmosphere of the Winter Meeting firsthand, I am confident saying that Springboarders were left inspired by the collective dedication of the WEF community toward shaping the future of water.

My personal highlight of the Meeting was the opportunity to connect with my Tetra Tech colleagues and professionals from around the world. The presence of passionate individuals fosters a powerful energy in the WEF community. These moments reinforce my sense of belonging and fill me with deep pride to be part of both my company and the overarching water industry.



My experience with the Springboard Program has been nothing short of transformative. I am grateful to be part of a community that is shaping the future of the water industry and nurturing the leaders to guide it forward. As WEFTEC approaches, I am filled with excitement to reunite with familiar faces at the forefront of innovation and sustainability. We eagerly await the opportunity to showcase our collective efforts, where our shared vision for a sustainable tomorrow shapes a world beyond water challenges.





# YP of the Year Award 2023-2024



Alejandro (Alex) Solanilla was nominated by his peers for the 2023-2024 FWEA “YP of the Year” Award and was selected by the S&YP Committee, along with members of FWEA’s Board of Directors, due to his service to FWEA's Central Chapter.

Alex was recognized at the 2024 Florida Water Resources Conference Award Luncheon. As the YP of the Year, Alex will get the opportunity to take an all-expenses paid trip to the Young Professional Summit, held in **Dallas, Texas** at the **Utility Management Conference in February 2025**.

Applications will open Fall 2024 for the 2024-2025 YP of the Year. Stay tuned and check the SYPC website for the application.



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# Upcoming Events

## First Coast Chapter

July 18

YP “Wicked” Connection Event  
4:30pm - 6:30pm

## Central Florida Chapter

September 20

24th Annual Charity Golf Tournament  
7:30am - 3:00pm

## Manasota Chapter

July 25

Inaugural Long Drive Competition  
5:30pm - 8:00pm

## Southwest Chapter

August 22

17th Annual Southwest Florida Water &  
Wastewater Expo  
8:30am - 5:30pm

September 27

23rd Annual Charity Golf Tournament  
8:00am - 2:00pm

## South Florida Chapter

August 21

Networking and Dinner Event  
6:00pm - 9:00pm

## Southeast Chapter

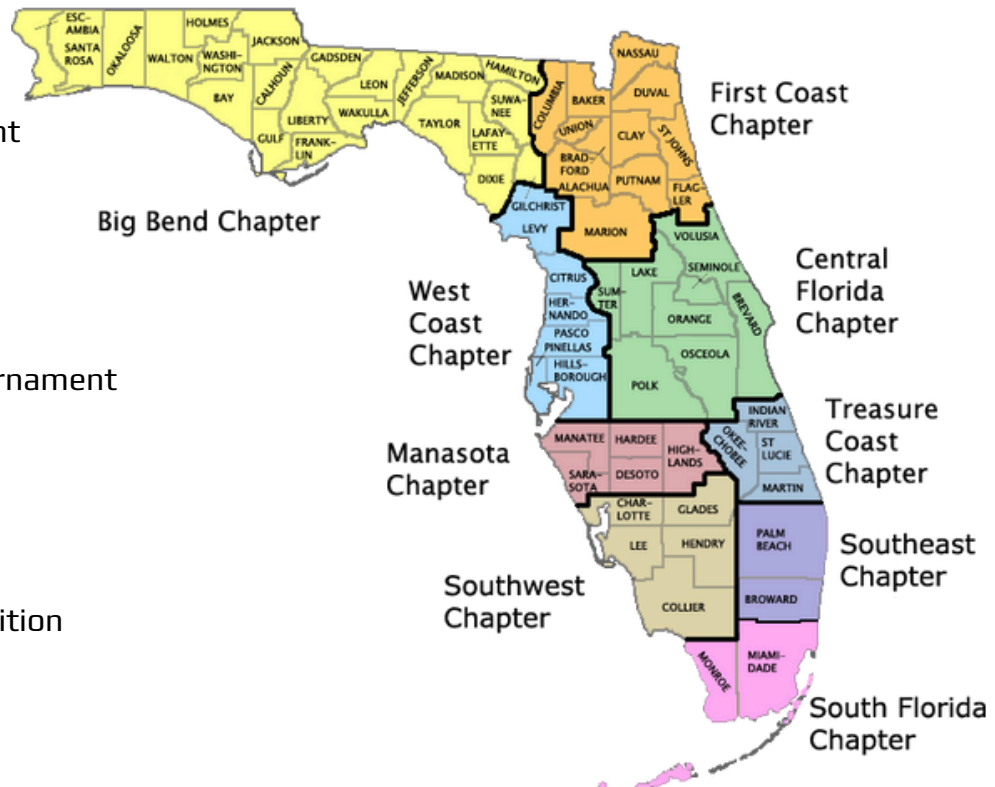
July 11

Cove Brewery Networking Event  
6:00pm - 8:00pm

## Seminars

July 18

Biosolids Seminar  
Miami



## Contact Us

Visit our website or contact the S&YP Committee Chair for more information on FWRC, volunteering, or sponsorship opportunities.

Jissell Muir  
Jissell.Muir@arcadis.com

[S&YPC Website](#)

Additional Events listed at: [FWEA Calendar of Events](#)