WATER INSTITUTE SYMPOSIUM

10th Biennial

FEBRUARY 24–26, 2026 | GAINESVILLE, FL

Navigating Waters: A Career Panel for Graduates in Water Science

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES

Savanna Barry, Regional Specialized Extension Agent, UF/IFAS Extension Nature Coat Biological Station and Florida Sea Grant

Dr. Savanna Barry serves as a Regional Specialized Extension Agent III with UF/IFAS Extension and Florida Sea Grant. She is based at the UF/IFAS Nature Coast Biological Station in Cedar Key, Florida. Savanna grew up on a small farm in central Virginia and discovered her interest in marine ecology during family vacations to small fishing towns along the Chesapeake Bay. She holds a B.S. in Biology from the University of Virginia, and a M.S. and Ph.D. in Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences from the University of Florida. Her work focuses on the intersection of environmental management and applied research and supporting community-driven coastal science.

Florida Sea Grant is a university-based program that works at the intersection of improving coastal habitats, fish stocks, and economic development for the state's residents and visitors.

Rick Copeland, Founder AquiferWatch (a volunteer groundwater monitoring organization, Former Assistant State Geologist Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Florida Geological Survey

Rick Copeland is a Professional Geologist with the State of Florida who has spent more than four decades advancing groundwater and surface-water science. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in geology from the University of Florida and a Ph.D. in hydrogeology with a minor in statistics from Florida State University. After nine years at the Suwannee River Water Management District establishing groundwater quality monitoring networks, he joined the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), where he spent 41 years leading statewide water-quality monitoring programs and later serving as Assistant State Geologist overseeing the Hydrogeology Program. Rick has authored numerous technical publications on karst hydrogeology, water quality, land-use impacts, and saline encroachment, and contributed to the framework for the U.S. National Ground Water Monitoring Network. In 2011, he founded AquiferWatch, an independent volunteer groundwater monitoring organization that supports agencies and communities in interpreting water-quality data.

AquiferWatch is dedicated to educating Floridians and encouraging groundwater monitoring through citizen science. AquiferWatch facilitates hands-on participation in the management of Florida's water through well testing programs, citizen scientist training, and science outreach.

Stacey Day, Management Quality Monitoring and Assessment Program Manager. Pinellas County Division of Environmental Management Division

Stacey has a B.S. in Zoology from Texas A&M University and a Ph.D. in Biology from the University of Houston. Prior to moving to Florida, she worked for the Oklahoma Conservation Commission for 10 years as an environmental scientist focused on monitoring streams and implementing a variety of programs to reduce nonpoint source pollution. She currently is the Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Program Manager for the Pinellas County Division of Environmental Management. Stacey helps collect data from the County's coastal waters, streams/ditches/canals, and lakes. Her program also implements projects to reduce pollutant loads to surface waters, including raingardens, living shorelines, and stormwater pond improvements.

Pinella's County Environmental Management, a division of Public Works, is responsible for monitoring and protecting Pinellas County's environmental resources. This division conducts proactive monitoring and manages projects and permits for the protection of our natural and built environmental resources.

Madelaine Hart, Environmental Administrator, Office of Agricultural Water Policy (OAWP), Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS)

Maddy is a native Floridian who grew up in Plantation, Florida. She holds a B.A. in Political Science and International Affairs and an M.S. in Geography, both from Florida State University and an M.S. in Forest Resources and Conservation with a concentration in Natural Resources Policy and Administration from the University of Florida. Maddy has worked in the Office of Agricultural Water Policy (OAWP) within the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) since 2017. She started as an Environmental Consultant, covering policy in the St. Johns River Water Management District (WMD) and eventually the Suwannee River and Northwest Florida WMDs. Currently, Maddy is the Environmental Administrator for her section, where she supervises four staff members and works with agencies and stakeholders on agricultural water policy, including water quality restoration and water supply planning, statewide. She lives in Tallahassee, Florida with her husband and their two dogs.

FDACS' Office of Agricultural Water Policy works with agricultural producers, industry groups, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the university system and the Florida water management districts to develop and implement Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) addressing both water quality and water conservation.

Carolina Maran, Division Director for Flood Control and Water Supply Planning and Chief of District Resiliency, South Florida Water Management

Carolina Maran, is the Division Director for Flood Control and Water Supply Planning and Chief of District Resiliency at the South Florida Water Management District, where she leads one of the nation's most comprehensive programs dedicated to flood control, water supply, and climate resilience. With 25 years of experience in water and climate resiliency, flood risk management, and water resources planning, she has advanced science-based, collaborative strategies to address flooding, sea level rise, and evolving environmental challenges. Prior to joining SFWMD, Dr. Maran held leadership roles with Broward County and Brazil's Federal Water Agency and collaborated with international organizations. A Fulbright Scholar, she earned her Ph.D. in Civil and Environmental Engineering (Water Resources) from Colorado State University and serves on the Florida Water and Climate Alliance Steering Committee, the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Compact Steering Committee, and the Board of Directors of the South Florida Hydrologic Society.

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) manages flood control and water supply across a 16-county region, maintaining 2,175+ miles of canals and 2,130+ miles of levees, while developing five regional water supply plans.

Maite de Maria, Postdoctoral Researcher with Cherokee Nation Solution System in support of the U.S. Geological Survey

Maite De María is a wildlife toxicologist whose work centers on understanding how human activities affect marine mammals and other wildlife. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine, where she investigated the renal and immune effects of herbicide exposure in largemouth bass and manatees. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher with Cherokee Nation Solution System in support of the U.S. Geological Survey, while continuing her collaboration with UF's Center for Environmental and Human Toxicology. Her research explores the fate of globally relevant contaminants across Florida ecosystems—including water, sediments, manatees, and invasive pythons—and uses molecular tools to assess how stressors such as disease, poor nutrition, and pollutants impact wildlife physiology. Maite's scientific path has spanned studies of sea lion–fishery interactions, trace element accumulation in marine mammals, and the broader ecological consequences of environmental contaminants.

Cherokee Nation System Solutions LLC is a tribally-owned small business headquartered in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that provides a comprehensive range of professional services to federal government agencies.

Matthew Ross, Co-founder and CEO, OpenCurrent; Director of the Geospatial Centroid, Colorado State University

Matt Ross is an ecosystem and watershed scientist who integrates remote sensing, field sampling, and open-source data science to understand how human-altered landscapes affect water quality. He is the Faculty Director of the Geospatial Centroid, where he advances data democratization through open-source tools, R development, and interactive spatial applications. As Co-founder and CEO of OpenCurrent, Matt leads efforts to scale innovations like MacroSheds and AquaSat—datasets and modeling tools designed to harmonize disparate environmental data and democratize remote sensing of water quality—to better serve the water resources sector. His research and teaching focus on land use, hydrology, participatory science, and the environmental impacts of landscape change, informed by training in ecology at Duke University (Ph.D.) and the University of Colorado Boulder (B.A.).

OpenCurrent brings together diverse environmental datasets, harmonize them with care, and apply advanced modeling — from machine learning to physics-informed approaches — to solve critical water problems