

# Public Access and Recreational Use Policy Making for Chandler Slough Management Area

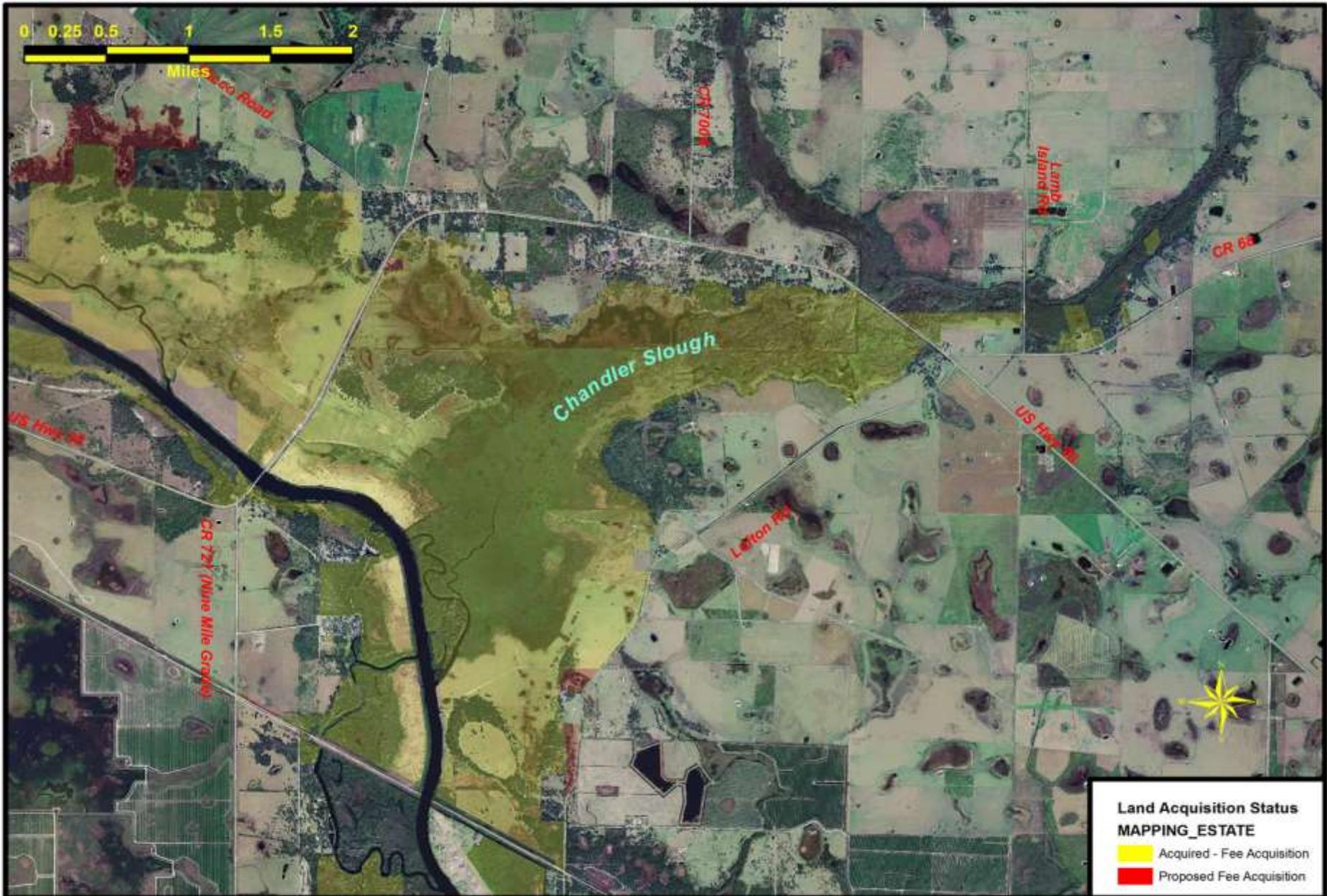
Part of the Kissimmee River Public Use Area

**Florida Natural Resources Leadership Institute  
Class VII, Session 8  
October 11-13, 2007**

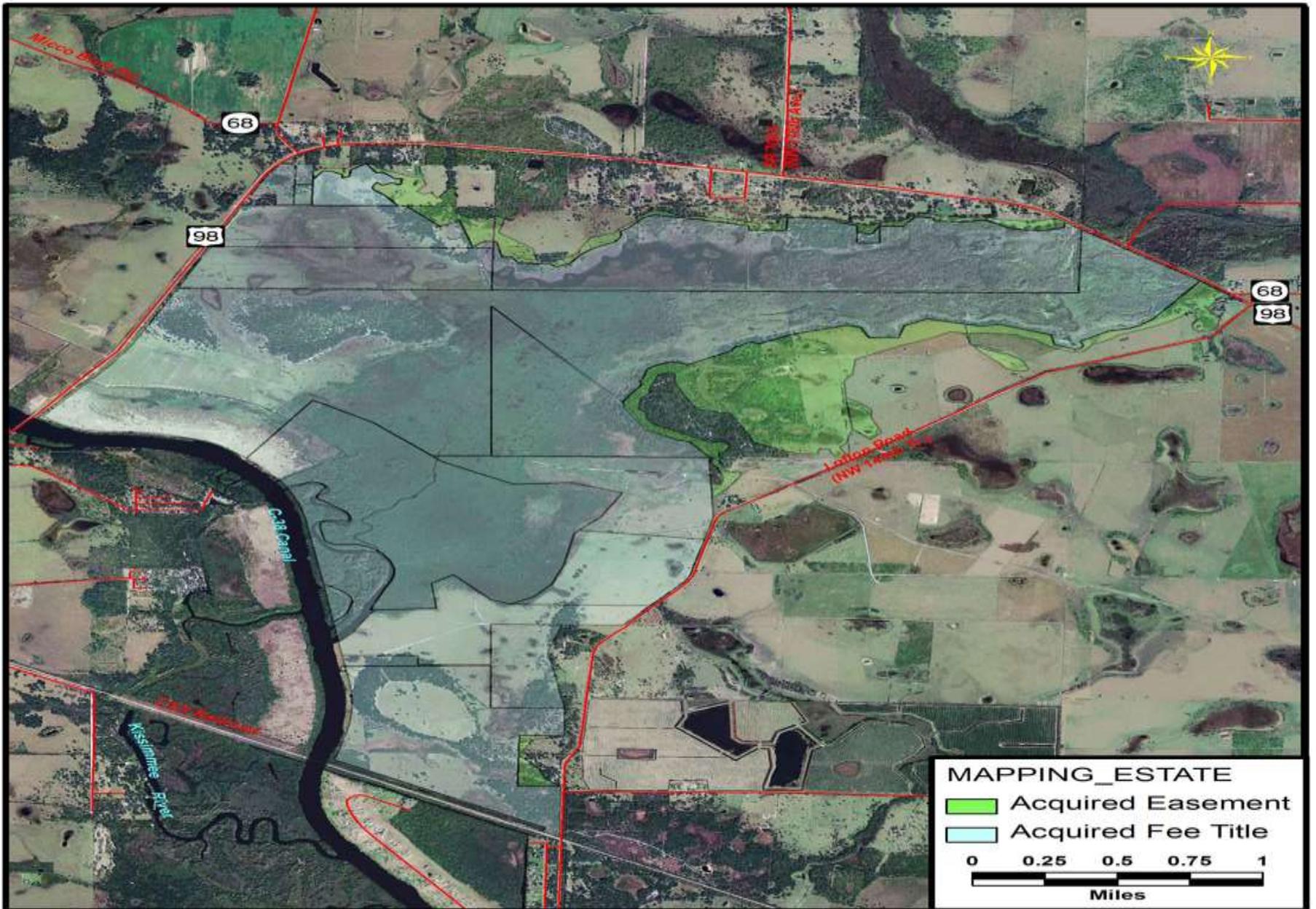
**Jeff McLemore, Kissimmee River Land Steward  
Land Stewardship Division  
South Florida Water Management District**

# Situation

- ❖ 3,700 acres of marsh and cypress strand habitat presently closed to public use
- ❖ Bounded by two roads and the C-38 Canal / Kissimmee River
- ❖ 30 adjacent residences
- ❖ Airboaters, hunters, horse riders, hikers, nature enthusiasts, bicyclists interested in using the area
- ❖ District needs to develop access and allowable uses policy



**SFWMD Acquisition - Kissimmee River - Pool D - Chandler Slough**  
(With 2004 1 Meter USGS 'Natural Color' DOQQs)



## Kissimmee River - Pool D (Chandler Slough) Ownership

(With 2004 1 Meter Resolution U.S.G.S. Digital Orthophotographic Quarter Quadrangles)

# Issues

- ❖ Hunting near residences and cattle
- ❖ Type of weapons allowed
- ❖ Use of hunting dogs
- ❖ Conserving wildlife resources
- ❖ Ample access for all recreational users
- ❖ Airboat use and noise
- ❖ Hiking trail location relative to residences
- ❖ Handicap and mobility impaired access
- ❖ Sufficient law enforcement presence
- ❖ Allow continuance of grazing leases
- ❖ Uniformity of hunt rules in Public Use Area
- ❖ Preservation and proper management of habitat
- ❖ Multiuse trails versus multiuse corridors

# Situation Assessment

Stakeholders	Desired Outcomes	Power, Roles and Responsibilities	Context/Conflicts
Horse Riders (Florida Cracker Trail Association)	Established horse trails	Strong advocate for horse riding. Have existing contract w/ SFWMD.	Conflict with hunters and hikers.
Hunters (Everglades Coordinating Council)	Full access to the area to hunt	Strongest advocacy group. Have to be respectful of private property and other users.	Larger conflict exists between hunters on the PUA and adjacent private land owners.
Hikers (Florida Cracker Trail)	Florida Trail Section on this parcel	They build and maintain their own trail system the length of the state. Have a contract w/ SFWMD.	Most adjacent land owners don't want the Florida Trail near their property boundary.
Airboaters (Florida Airboat Association)	Full airboat access	They are well organized, very vocal.	Feel they are discriminated against by the District and other user groups.
Fishermen/ boaters	Want more boat access (ramps)	Not well organized, but attend most PUA meetings.	Perceived paucity of boat access to the river. Demolished boat ramp has not been replaced yet.
Environmental Group (Audubon)	Want access to observe wildlife	Strong national group, know the issues well.	Audubon's larger role is in influencing policy decisions on publicly owned lands.
Off-road Bicyclists	Want bike access	Small unorganized group, can't establish their own trails.	Not welcome on hiking trails, or near hunters.
Grazing Lessees (six of these)	Want to keep their leases as long as possible	They have to maintain fences, have interest in the management of vegetation.	Not enthusiastic about hunting, public access on their leases.
Okeechobee County Parks & Recreation Department	Want maximized public use.	County involvement is essential to planning recreational activities in the region.	Don't want to duplicate recreational opportunities in county, want to take advantage of District lands.
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)	To maximize appropriate recreational hunting opportunities that are compatible with other uses, the resource and the adjacent neighbors.	A management partner of the District that provides hunting opportunities on District lands. They are a contractor to the District.	Want to address the larger issue of hunting adjacent to private lands on the Kissimmee River PUA and defuse conflict with hunters.
South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)	Find appropriate recreational opportunities that are compatible with Chandler Slough, all users, and adjacent neighbors.	Protection and proper management of the water related resources; all other considerations are secondary. As landowner, the District has the ultimate decision making authority.	Address the larger issue of recreation on District lands adjacent to private lands and defuse user and private landowner conflict District-wide.



Micco Landing

A-frame

cemetery

Cracker Trail Country Store

new stile by SFWMD

Florida National Scenic Trail  
CHANDLER SLOUGH NORTH  
completed 11 March 2007

-  orange-blazed FNST
-  blue-blazed side trail

# Florida Trail Association



# ADJACENT LANDOWNERS' LETTER

Concerned Landowners of Chandler Slough  
19645 US Hwy 98 N  
Okeechobee, FL 34972-3979

June 27, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

We are property owners along the proposed Chandler Slough public use area in Basinger, Florida. Many of our families have been in the Basinger area since the late 1800's and have enjoyed the natural outdoor atmosphere for many generations. We have seen the commercial encroachment and the devastation that has impacted the natural wildlife on areas surrounding the Chandler Slough area. As land owners, we have attempted to protect the wildlife on our own lands and have maintained a safety barrier to protect the game from other lands that have been opened to hunting. The wild game flourishes and moves through the properties with grace and surety as a result of many years of protection.

The property owners adjoining the proposed Chandler Slough public use area would like to present for your review the following issues that we have identified as areas of concern regarding this project:

1- Allowing this property to be hunted would endanger the residents along its borders. There are approximately 30 residences that would be affected by hunting in the Slough. These are families that live in rural environments. By allowing hunting, these families will be placed in danger of stray bullets and other types of ordinance.

Since the managed area will not be under continual surveillance by law enforcement, it is our belief that hunters will easily violate firearm safety zones and constitute a threat to the residences.

Hunters using unleashed dogs do not maintain constant control of these animals. Since these animals are trained to hunt, we feel that they also represent a danger to the livestock in the surrounding pasture lands AND to the human residences.

2- The impact to the existing wildlife would be detrimental. These animals have not been hunted in many years, and have not had to deal with an aggressive human population. Instead, they are cherished by the landowners, and considered part of the natural scenery. To allow hunters to predate on them would be tragic.

Additionally, the size of the Chandler Slough area is very small, and surrounded by land used as mostly cattle ranch and agriculture. This would allow minimal surrounding property to regenerate the wildlife population following the hunting seasons.

3- Wetland ecosystems are endangered around the country, Florida being no exception. The purpose of the restoration of the Kissimmee River was to restore isolated wetlands, to reduce phosphorous loads leaching into Lake Okeechobee and restore or create wildlife habitat, and to attenuate storm runoff. Most of the proposed land use area is wetland, and allowing public use of this property could be detrimental to these actions. While many tracts of this recovered land already are being used or are being proposed as public use hunting areas, there has been no impact study on the long term effects of heavy public use on these particular watersheds.

# MEETING AGENDA



## SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

OKEECHOBEE SERVICE CENTER 205 North Parrott Avenue, Suite 201, Okeechobee, FL 34972-2916  
(863) 462-5260 • FL WATS 1-800-250-4200 • Suncom 761-5260 • Fax (863) 462-5269 [www.sfwmd.gov/okee/](http://www.sfwmd.gov/okee/)

To: Grazing Lessees in Chandler Slough

The tour and meeting regarding the opening of Chandler Slough to public use is scheduled for **Saturday, July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007** at the **Alton Chandler Civic Center** (formerly known as the Basinger Community Center).

### AGENDA

**10:00-12:00 AM:**

#### Buggy Tour

Meet at Chandler Civic Center for buggy tour of Chandler Slough. Only one representative from each user group, one from the group of lessees, the county, and one from the adjacent landowners will be attending the tour.

**12:15 to 1:15 PM:**

#### Lunch

Casey Trent, of Riverwoods Field Lab, is looking into having a Boy Scout troop or other such group cook lunch (hot dogs, hamburgers, drinks, chips) as a fundraiser for that group. It will be about \$4 per person. You are free to bring your own lunch, of course.

**1:30 – 3:00 PM:**

#### Feedback Session

Loisa Kerwin, from Florida Atlantic University's Center for Environmental Education- Riverwoods Field Lab, will facilitate the meeting soliciting concerns, problems, issues, wants, needs, etc. from user groups, county government, and adjacent landowners. All interested citizens are welcome to attend this meeting but only their representative will be allowed to speak. After writing each group's comments on large poster-sized sheets of paper, each user group representative will be given 5 sticky dots to place next to the five statements, comments, positions, or concerns that are most important to that group. We'll then adjourn the meeting and the draft public use plan will be written by the District and the FWC. This draft plan will then be circulated to all parties for comment, after which a final plan will be written and approved by both FWC and the District.

#### GOVERNING BOARD

Kevin McCarty, Chair  
Debra M. Bagroff, Vice-Chair  
Mlysa Burt-Stewart

Allen J. Carlson  
Michael Collins  
Nicolas J. Gutierrez, Jr., Esq.

Lennart E. Lindahl, P.E.  
Harkley R. Thornton  
Malcolm S. Wade, Jr.

#### EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Carol Ann Wable, Executive Director

DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS: 5501 GGG Club Road, P.O. Box 24680, West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680 • (561) 686-8900 • FL WATS 1-800-432-2045

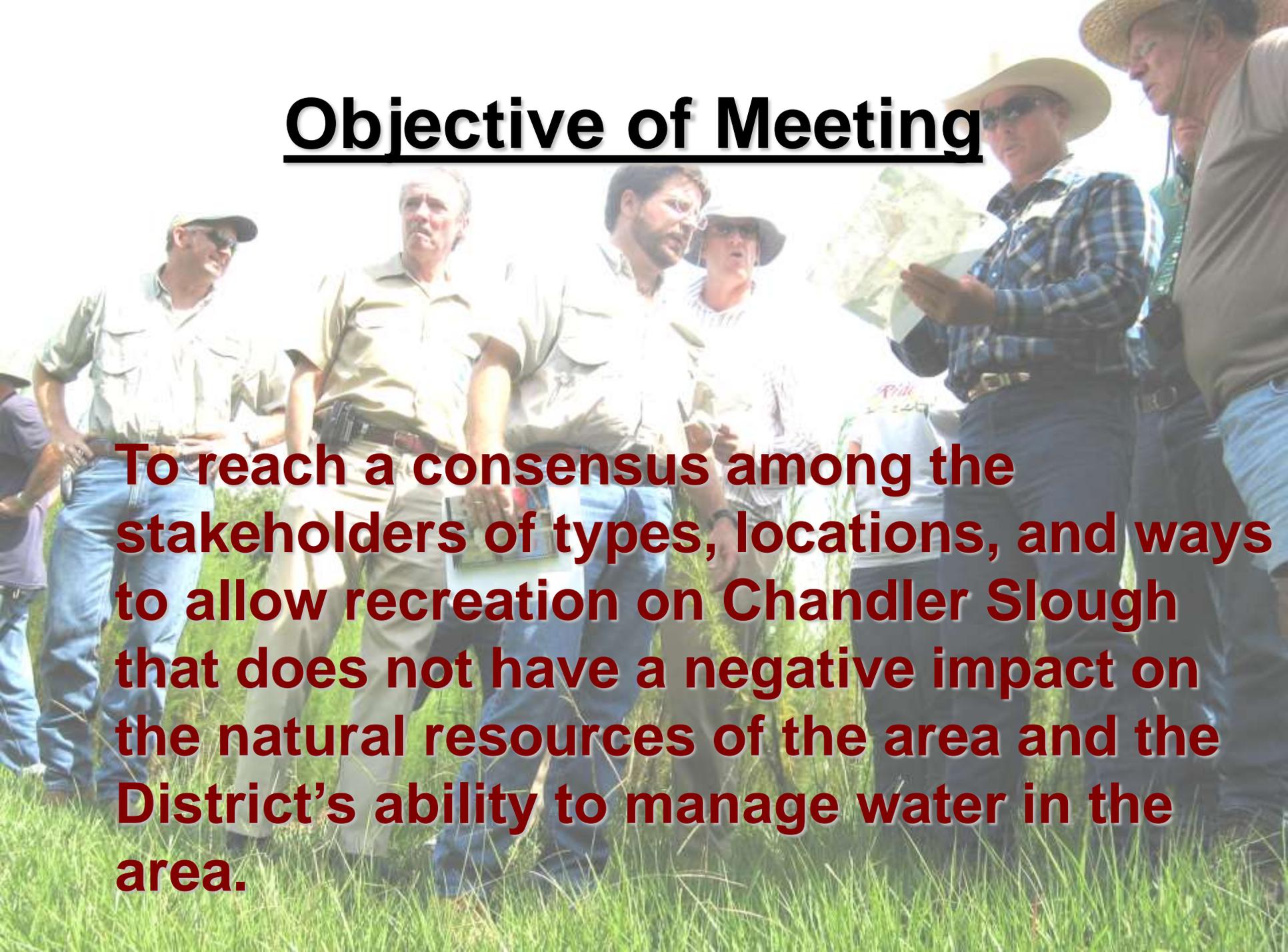
# Site Visit to Chandler Slough



**Food = Better Mood**



# Objective of Meeting

A group of about seven people are gathered in a grassy field. One person in the center-right is holding a large map and pointing to it. The others are looking at the map or talking to each other. They are dressed in casual outdoor attire like shirts, jeans, and hats. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with tall grass.

**To reach a consensus among the stakeholders of types, locations, and ways to allow recreation on Chandler Slough that does not have a negative impact on the natural resources of the area and the District's ability to manage water in the area.**

## ARTICLE IV. PUBLIC RECREATIONAL ACCESS AND USE

### Sec. 140-171. Scope.

This policy shall apply to lands of the South Florida Water Management District and to District involvement in the management of other lands or planning of other water resource related activities and facilities. Nothing in this policy shall negate, supercede or replace any existing statute, administrative rule, permit, license, subordination, delegation, agreement, contract or other non-recreational policy. This policy may be reviewed and approved by the District Governing Board at five-year intervals or earlier, and updated as required. Public comment shall be solicited as part of the review process. (Res. No. 2004-356, § I, 3-10-2004)

### Sec. 140-72. Purpose.

This policy establishes a commitment to the responsible planning, management, and promotion of public recreational access and use on District lands. This policy shall provide guidance for the South Florida Water Management District in decisions related to public recreational access and use of District lands, including stormwater treatment areas and Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects. It incorporates by reference, recommendations of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force in Strategy for Restoration of the South Florida Ecosystem, and reports from the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida. These references are set forth in appendix A.

(Res. No. 2004-356, § II, 3-10-2004)

### Sec. 140-73. Statement of Policy.

(a) *Generally.* Public recreational access and use shall be provided for and encouraged to ensure the public's opportunity for enjoyment and appreciation of the natural resources of south Florida. District lands shall be open to public recreational access and use activities as is practicable and in a manner consistent with legislative directives, intended uses, legal considerations, and resources. Land and project plans shall incorporate public recreational access and use.

#### (b) *Intended Uses.*

- (1) The intended uses of the property shall be given primary consideration.
- (2) A balanced mix of public recreational access and use shall be allowed except when specific activities are not in the best interest of the land.
- (3) Public recreational access and use shall be consistent with the protection of natural resources, ecological value and function of lands.

#### (c) *Legal Considerations.*

- (1) Public recreational access and use shall be consistent with the District's land ownership rights and environmental laws.
- (2) All access and use of District lands shall be governed by rules and policies of the District and/or other units of government in partnership with the District, and/or general laws of the State of Florida.

#### (d) *Resources.*

**RECREATIONAL STATUTE**

# Meeting Organization

- ❖ Each stakeholder group appointed a representative for the meeting
- ❖ The meeting was public so anyone could attend, but only the representatives were allowed to speak
- ❖ The facilitator asked each representative, in turn, to make a statement, raise an issue, or voice a concern
- ❖ An assistant wrote down statements on flip chart that was hung on the walls so all could read them
- ❖ When the representatives had an opportunity to express all of their concerns, like comments were combined
- ❖ Representatives were then asked to write down their top five concerns and give them to the facilitator
- ❖ Stakeholders were told that their input was important and appreciated but that the final decisions for recreational use would be made jointly by the managing partners.

# PANEL RESULTS

## ❖ Priority #1

Reasonable access for all users from Lofton Road, Highway 98 and the Kissimmee River

Preserving and managing wildlife habitat and water quality, while maintaining the cattle leases

## ❖ Priority #2

Oppose rules that segregate user groups and to have simultaneous uses without time or spatial separation

## ❖ Priority #3

Uncompromised safety for all users and livestock

## ❖ Priority #3

Hunting rules and regulations same as the rest of the Public Use Area with the exception of Starvation Slough

## PANEL RESULTS (continued)

### ❖ Priority #3

Access for air boating within the high water line 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week/ 365 days per year

### ❖ Priority #4

Construct an airboat ramp similar to ramp in Starvation Slough

Oppose hunting for safety and noise level

Multiuse trails allowed

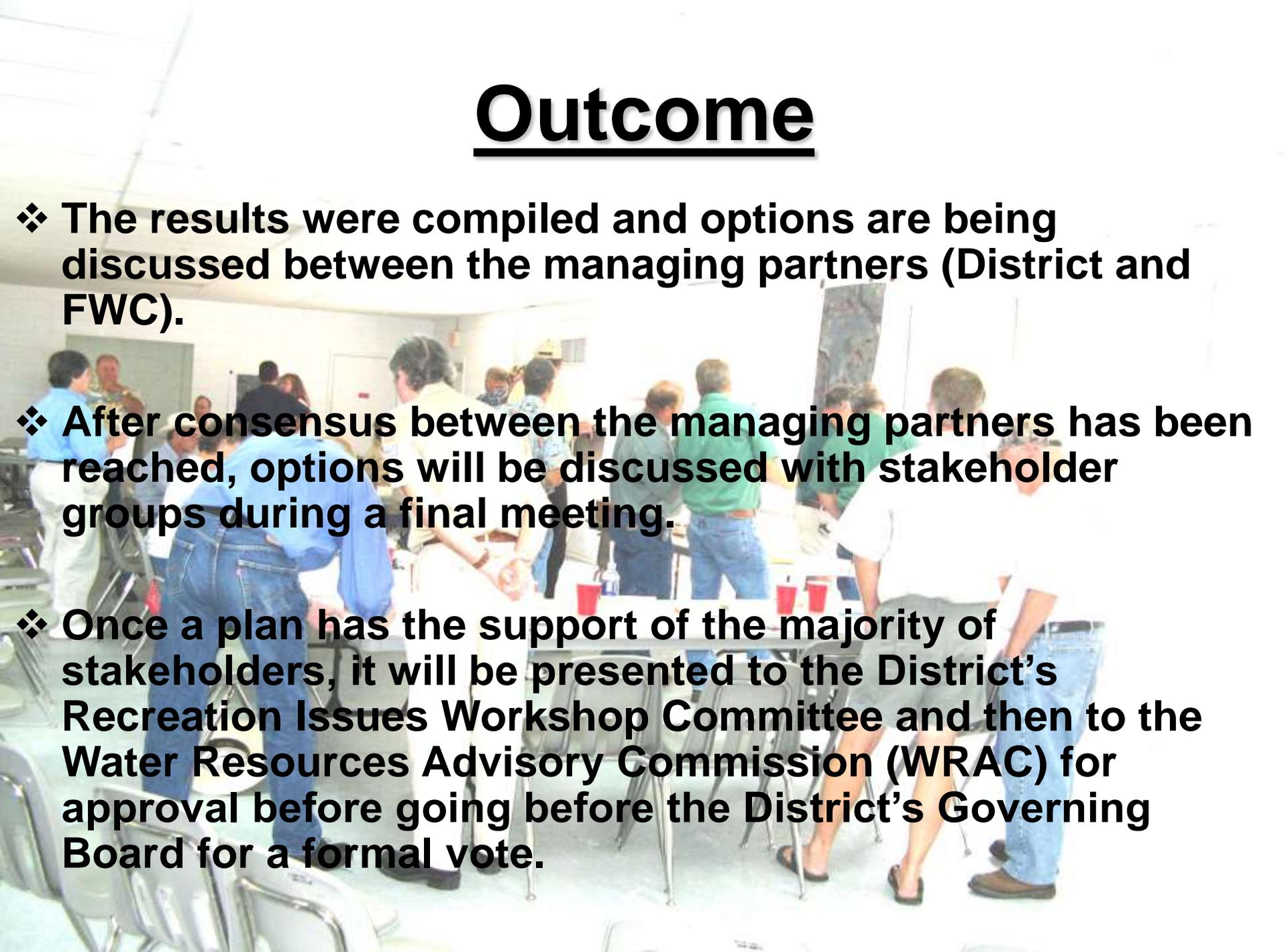
### ❖ Priority #5

Trails built away from the adjacent landowner's residences with a buffer

Allow archery and black powder

Preservation of the existing way of life for adjacent homeowners

# Outcome

- ❖ The results were compiled and options are being discussed between the managing partners (District and FWC).
  - ❖ After consensus between the managing partners has been reached, options will be discussed with stakeholder groups during a final meeting.
  - ❖ Once a plan has the support of the majority of stakeholders, it will be presented to the District's Recreation Issues Workshop Committee and then to the Water Resources Advisory Commission (WRAC) for approval before going before the District's Governing Board for a formal vote.
- 
- A photograph of a meeting room with several people. Some are standing and talking in small groups, while others are seated at tables. There are red plastic cups on the tables. The room has a white wall and a large window or glass partition in the background.

# MEDIA COVERAGE

## **Chandler Slough: Groups meet to discuss land use; SFWMD unveils new public use area**

By Pete Gawda, Okeechobee News

Basinger landowners and hunters squared off Saturday June 21 over the use of public lands recently acquired by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD).

An open house was held July 21, for SFWMD to unveil one of their newest acquisitions, a 37,000-acre parcel along Chandler Slough in the northwestern part of the county. Over a period of time, SFWMD purchased the property from several land owners. Recently they made the last purchase to complete the approximately five square mile area.

Morning swamp buggy tours of the area were provided to representatives of various groups with interests in the area. After a lunch furnished by area landowners, a public meeting to discuss use of the property was held at the Basinger Community Center. The meeting was hosted by Loisa Kerwin, from the nearby Florida Atlantic University, Center for Environmental Protection-Riverwoods Field Lab. Representatives of outdoor organizations supporting such activities as hunting, airboating, hiking, and horseback riding were present. The Audubon Society was represented. Commissioner Noel Chandler and Karyne Brass of the parks and recreation department represented Okeechobee County. There was also a representative of the area landowners. Each group was given a chance to express their concerns about use of the area.

Many of the groups expressed a desire that their particular group be granted access to the area and that accommodations be made for their group.

Bryan Maharrey of the Everglades Coordinating Council advocated reasonable access for hunters with no buffer zones.

It is currently the intent of SFWMD and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to allow hunting on the Chandler Slough property and to provide a buffer zone around each home adjoining the public use area. These areas would be clearly marked for hunters to avoid.

Dan Thomas, representing area landowners, noted that landowners would be affected daily by the uses of the Chandler Slough property. He said that historically the area has not been hunted. He said area residents oppose hunting because of safety and noise.

Mr. Thomas called Mr. Maharrey's suggestion on no buffer zones "cavalier." However, a challenge is looming over the area. SFWMD would like to open the area to hunters, hikers and campers.

"We're not opposed to it being open to the public," Debbie Clemmons, who lives adjacent to the Chandler Slough area, said in an earlier interview. "We just don't want people shooting near our property."



Steve Coughlin, Kissimmee River Steward with South Florida Water Management District, addresses the group gathered at the Basinger Community Center on Saturday, July 21 to discuss use of the district's recently acquired Chandler Slough property. Seated at the table are representatives of various outdoor groups that have an interest in the property. These representatives expressed their groups' concerns about the property. Okeechobee News/Pete Gawda.

# LESSONS LEARNED

- ❖ **Get organized early and include all stakeholders**
- ❖ **Use email, mailing lists, print media, or internet resources to contact all interested parties**
- ❖ **Be knowledgeable about the issues**
- ❖ **Try to anticipate as many viewpoints and potential conflicts as possible**
- ❖ **Feed the participants**
- ❖ **Have a centrally located, comfortable meeting place**
- ❖ **Let everyone express themselves-catharsis**
- ❖ **Conduct follow-up meetings as necessary**
- ❖ **Obtain the closest thing to a consensus as possible without compromising your core principles**

# Acknowledgements

- ❖ **The University of Florida's Natural Resources Leadership Institute Staff**
- ❖ **South Florida Water Management District**
- ❖ **Bijaya Kattel, NRLI Fellow**
- ❖ **NRLI Class VII Fellows**

*“Blessed are the Fellows, for they have made it.”*