

The Florida Natural Resources Leadership Institute

Seeking collaborative solutions for natural resource challenges

The Need for Effective Leadership

In Florida, time-consuming and expensive disputes often emerge over issues such as endangered species, land use, coastal and marine resources, and water quality and quantity. Effective leadership in managing such issues requires a specialized set of skills, tools, and strategies to build trust and promote collaboration among competing interests.

In recognition of this need, the Florida Natural Resources Leadership Institute (NRLI) was founded in 1998. Its mission is to bring together professionals from sectors that impact or are impacted by natural resource issues and provide them with the training required to find inclusive solutions to seemingly intractable problems.

NRLI Vision

NRLI seeks to impact decision making in Florida by creating a network of professionals with members in every county and across all natural resource sectors who can effectively address natural resource issues through collaborative leadership and conflict management.

Program Overview

NRLI is an eight-month professional development program. Each intensive three-day session is held in a different part of the state and focuses on a specific and contentious natural resource issue. Sessions include:

- ◆ immersion in the issue/topic through first-hand experience with the resource;
- ◆ engagement with stakeholders from diverse institutions/organizations and perspectives; and
- ◆ practical, experiential training in skills, concepts, tools, and strategies for effective collaborative decision making, conflict management, communication, and negotiation.

To assure that the skills learned in NRLI go beyond the classroom, a practicum is built into the program. Each fellow develops a project that allows them to apply skills and concepts learned in NRLI to actual conflict, decision making, or leadership situations in their organizations or communities.



“The program is beneficial on a number of levels. First, it provides an opportunity to learn about how localities around the state are dealing with resource management issues. Second, it provides the tools, skills, and confidence needed for one to successfully participate in or assume a leadership role in decision-making processes. Third, it offers excellent opportunities for collaborative networking.”

—NRLI Alumnus, Florida Sea Grant

Participants

Each NRLI class is composed of approximately 20 Fellows representing a broad array of natural resource professions and sectors. To date the program has trained 276 people from 102 organizations, including:

- ◆ Federal government: *the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration*
- ◆ State government: *the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Water Management Districts, and the Department of Environmental Protection*
- ◆ Local government: *elected officials and professional staff*
- ◆ Tribal entities
- ◆ Nonprofit/non-governmental organizations
- ◆ Community organizations
- ◆ Agriculture
- ◆ Industry
- ◆ Engineering, law, and consulting
- ◆ Academia
- ◆ Extension



“The program provided the safe space necessary to practice engagement and facilitation techniques. The exposure to the diversity of Fellows and communities helped me learn to place higher value on critical stakeholder processes, personal interactions and planning and preparation. The program absolutely improved my capacity as a leader in local government.”

—NRLI Alumna, Broward County Environmental Planning & Community Resilience Division

Impact

In 2016, a follow-up survey was conducted of alumni from NRLI classes XII, XIII, and XIV to learn about the impact of the NRLI program 1-3 years following their completion in the program. The survey was sent to 53 alumni, with a 94% response rate.

Some key findings from this survey are as follows:

- ◆ 100% of respondents have applied knowledge, skills, or tools acquired through NRLI to their work.
- ◆ As a result of their participation in NRLI:
 - ◆ 98% of respondents report they are a lot more or more effective at their job and
 - ◆ 96% report that their organization or business has benefited.

“NRLI has helped me improve how I assess my own interests and biases and how I interact with many other people who may have very different views. I think my ability to assess situations is better and I have new tools to use to try to work with others to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes.”

—NRLI Alumnus, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



“NRLI was a life-changing experience for me. After working in sharply polarizing environments for decades, I felt like I had finally found a community that could see a different way forward. I now experience the world differently both personally and professionally.”

—NRLI Alumna, Private Environmental Consulting Firm