The Need
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.

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.

The Institute
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.

“NRLI showed me that resolution is possible if constituents from different sides of the issue work together to solve the complicated issues and make decisions for the betterment of Florida and its citizens as a whole.”

--Deborah Burr, NRLI Class IV
Fellows
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 255 people from 95 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

Impact
In 2013, a survey of alumni from NRLI classes I-XIII was conducted to measure program impact. Results indicated that organizational and career advancement was directly linked to participation in NRLI (84% of respondents).

In addition, between eighty and ninety percent of respondents reported that NRLI helped them develop new skills in conflict management and collaborative leadership.

“NRLI has allowed me to see and understand issues from a variety of perspectives; to not just listen to clients, but to hear the “why” behind their thoughts and ideas; to know that consensus is a process and unanimity is a goal.”

--Lara Miller, NRLI Class XIII

“[NRLI] helped me understand the complexity of natural resource issues in Florida and gave me tools and skills...to help resolve environmental controversies...NRLI has given me a network of natural resources professionals who, together, can make good, informed decisions that will benefit our entire state.”

--Gregg Eason, NRLI Class XI

For additional information, visit the NRLI webpage at http://nrli.ifas.ufl.edu or contact Jessica Ireland, NRLI Program Coordinator, at jjtireland@ufl.edu or (352) 294-7643.