

SESSION 1

APALACHICOLA

Threats to a Productive Estuary



Introduction and Session Overview

The first session of NRLI's Class XIII took place August 8–10 in Franklin County, Florida. The objectives of the session were to introduce participants to each other to the NRLI program, to the concept of leadership in the context of conflict management and cooperative decision-making, and to the natural resource issues impacting the Apalachicola River and Apalachicola Bay. The session began with lunch at the Buccaneer Inn meeting room on St. George Island. This initial get-together gave participants an opportunity to interact for the first time in an informal social setting. Following lunch, NRLI Executive Director Bruce Delaney welcomed the new class and introduced participants to the Project Team of Jon Dain, Joy Hazell, and Paul Monaghan.



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Threats to Productive Estuary



WELCOME to NRLI

The introduction to NRLI began with the class dividing into pairs and discussing two competencies taught by the program. The objective of the exercise was to provide another opportunity for developing connections among class members while also introducing concepts to be discussed in more detail later in the session.

Jon Dain provided an overview of the curriculum, including the locations, natural resource issues, and competencies addressed in each of the eight sessions. Bruce Delaney briefly introduced tasks to be completed by Fellows at each session, including responsibilities for report-writing, collecting and summarizing feedback, providing a debrief session, leading discussions of readings, and moderating the stakeholder panel. Bruce then asked the class to brainstorm a list of group norms (i.e., code of behavior). Having the class develop its own list provided participants with a sense of ownership over the code of behavior.

Joy Hazell asked the class to develop a list of expectations of NRLI and the Project Team. Participants divided into small groups to brainstorm lists of expectations. The groups then convened to summarize expectations, identify commonalities among the lists, and discuss unexpected results.

"STEPS" to NRLI

Jon Dain led "Steps to NRLI," an exercise with the objectives of introducing and building connections among classmates. The program Fellows used masking tape to create large maps of the United States and Florida on the floor. Each Fellow then provided four pieces of information: (1) name, (2) birthplace, (3) three to four steps taken in life to get to the NRLI program, and (4) a scent that provides a reminder of home. When describing their birthplace and life events, each class member walked to the associated geographic locations on the map. This exercise provided an active, fun way for participants to introduce themselves. The "Steps" also identified commonalities and shared experiences, which, as Jon reminded the group, is key to working cooperatively on natural resource issues.

Introduction to the Practicum

Paul Monaghan introduced the practicum required of each NRLI Fellow. The practicum must fit with NRLI's objectives, be challenging but doable, and advance organizational or personal goals.



Dan Tonsmeire

Threats to Apalachicola River and Bay: Dan Tonsmeire, Apalachicola Riverkeeper

Dan Tonsmeire provided an illustrated overview of the importance of the Apalachicola River and Apalachicola Bay, the challenges facing the system, and attempted solutions. The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) River Basin extends from Georgia to the Apalachicola Bay. The Apalachicola River, which flows from the confluence of the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers, has the highest species diversity of any river system in North America and is recognized as a Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations and an Outstanding Florida Water by the State of Florida. The bay once produced 90% of Florida's and 10% of the United States' oysters. Additionally, 90% of commercially harvested seafood species spend at least part of their life cycle in the bay, and the freshwater flow from the river provides nutri-

ents to the Gulf of Mexico's commercial fishing grounds. Since 2007, the average flow in the Apalachicola River has been considerably lower than the historic average. In recent years, both the oyster and shrimp harvests have declined. Increased salinity from reduced flow allowed predators of oysters to invade the bay. In 2012, the salinity remained high and the oyster fishery collapsed. Overharvesting followed as oysters were found in fewer places in the bay. The reduced river flow lowered the river bed, disconnecting it from the floodplain. Drier conditions in the floodplain led to reductions in endangered mussel populations, less habitat for fish, and the loss of four million trees. Increased extraction of water farther north in the ACF system, exacerbated by drought is implicated in the river's reduced flow.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manages a series of reservoirs in the ACF for flood control, hydropower, navigation, and, more recently, water supply for drinking and agriculture. Attempts to control the allocation of water have led to litigation, legislation, and a recent cooperative decision-making process. After more than 20 years of litigation, the court system recently ruled in favor of Georgia's ability to extract water for drinking water. Attempts by Florida and Alabama to influence the allocation of water via legislation have not been successful. In 2009, stakeholders throughout the ACF basin formed ACF Stakeholders, a 501c3 organization. Employing a facilitator and making decisions by consensus, this grassroots group is working cooperatively to develop a plan for the river system.



Day 2:

Overview

Day 2 used a combination of field trips and formal and informal discussions with local stakeholders to expand on the issues discussed by previous speakers. The day's activities also included an introduction to the concept of leadership and an opportunity for class members to share what they do in their occupations.

Fieldtrip Part 1: Buddy Ward & Sons Seafood

At the start of the day, Bill Mahan, Franklin County Extension Director joined the class for a tour of the Buddy Ward & Sons Seafood Shrimp Plant. Class members viewed how shrimp are sorted by size, individually quick-frozen, and boxed for sale. During the tour, the class met with Smokey Parrish, a seafood processor and Franklin County Commissioner for an informal discussion of the shrimping industry and the threats facing the estuary.



The shrimping industry in Apalachicola Bay has declined drastically due to a combination of reduced productivity in the bay and changes in regulation. Other challenges include the high price of fuel and competition from foreign companies, which are not required to follow U.S. regulations. The Apalachicola company catches shrimp offshore from North Carolina to Texas and sells shrimp throughout the southeast. With a slow season from November to March the shrimping industry provides only seasonal employment. Workers typically shift from one source of employment to another on a seasonal basis (e.g., harvesting shrimp during the summer months and oysters during cooler months). However, this way of life has become increasingly difficult due to changes in the local seafood industry including the decline of the shrimping industry, regulations restricting the harvest of mullet and pompano with gill nets, and reduced oyster harvests.

The wide-ranging conversation also touched on the threats posed to the estuary by the reduced Apalachicola River flow and attempts to resolve the issue. A sample of the topics discussed included the importance of freshwater flow for the



delivery of nutrients to the bay and to spawning fish, a mid-August Congressional hearing on the area's oyster industry, and the need for government agencies to consider the

health of the whole system rather than just threatened and endangered species.

Fieldtrip Part 2: Boat Tour of Apalachicola's Working Waterfront

Next, the class met at the Apalachicola Maritime Museum to embark on a boat tour of Apalachicola's Working Waterfront. Joining the class on the river trip were Captain Larry, Apalachicola librarian Caty Greene, Bill Mahan, and NRLI alumnus Steve Allen.

The conversation covered a diverse array of topics. Caty provided an introduction to the history of the city of Apalachicola and its waterfront. Steve expanded on the Working Waterfront classification and its potential benefits for communities interested in applying for grants. Much of the discussion focused on the local economy and culture's dependence on the estuary; the impacts of



the bay's declining productivity on the community; the interplay among poverty, culture, education, and attempts to diversify the local economy; and the challenges posed by maintaining local culture while spurring economic growth.

Stakeholder Panel Discussion

After a waterfront lunch, the group headed to the Apalachicola Environmental Education and Training Center in Eastpoint. Lee Edmiston, manager of the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve gave a warm welcome. This 235,000-acre reserve is one of three such Federal–state partnerships in Florida. Its popular new training center, built according to environmentally friendly standards sits within a lovely coastal forest.

The class prepared for the stakeholder panel discussion by formulating questions to ask the local experts. As a final point of preparation, Jon directed the group to split according to personality type: introverts on one side of the room and extroverts on the other. Introverts were strongly in the majority (unlike the general population). Jon noted that NRLI provides many opportunities for class members to operate outside their comfort zones—starting with the panel discussion next on the agenda.

Six local leaders active in the ACF “water wars” generously participated in the Apalachicola panel discussion:

Lee Edmiston – manager of the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve

Shannon Hartsfield –president of the Franklin County Seafood Workers Association and a member of the ACF Stakeholders Governing Board

Bill Mahan – UF/IFAS Extension Director and Sea Grant Agent for Franklin County

Smokey Parrish – seafood processor and member of the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners

Joe Taylor – executive director of Franklin’s Promise Coalition

Betty Webb – Apalachicola City Administrator and a member of the ACF Stakeholders Governing Board

Consistent with NRLI principles, the questions and discussion focused not on the technical details of the river-flow controversy but rather on strategies to address the issue. The panel members articulated their desires and objectives for the bay by sharing their visions and hopes for the year 2023. They noted some challenges, as well as some factors that have helped in working toward those goals. Class members were curious about the ACF Stakeholders process specifically: what has worked, and what has not? The group also asked about Franklin County’s younger generations and the experts’ own sense of optimism regarding local conditions. Several major themes emerged. First and foremost was the need for increased river flow. Panel members talked about the importance of collaboration in working on this problem, both locally and at larger scales. The community has in some ways come together as never before. The resiliency and adaptability of the local people were particular points of emphasis. Historically, environment and culture have been inextricably linked in this region and high among local aspirations is a vital economic system that values and sustains that connection. One clear take-home message was the value of listening with an open mind to local perspectives and utilizing local expertise in water planning.



Break time gave an opportunity for smaller follow-up conversations among the panel members and NRLI Fellows. When the class reconvened, Paul introduced the concept and practice of debriefing—a staple of the NRLI program. The Fellows talked about their observations of the Apalachicola panel discussion, the practice of moderating panel discussions in general, and the use of stakeholder processes in their own work. Listening and observing were among the skills highlighted. Fellows will take turns as moderators in future sessions.

Introduction to Natural Resources Leadership I

Bruce kicked off what promises to be an eight-month conversation on “What is leadership?” Small subgroups brainstormed and then shared with the whole group their answers to “What is effective leadership?” and “What is ineffective leadership?” One of NRLI’s aims is to teach leadership skills that will be helpful not only within the context of natural resource issues but also more generally within our communities and families.

Special Events: Low Country Boil and “What do we all do?”

The return to St. George Island meant a relaxing stroll or a refreshing dip for most class members. Supper was a special event with local flair: a delicious low-country boil prepared by Roy Ogles and team.

During the evening’s “What do we all do?” circle, class members each gave a 2–3 minute description of their jobs back home. This year’s cohort, like its predecessors is professionally diverse. The lineup includes university affiliates (faculty, staff, graduate students, and extension agents), small-business owners, and federal, state, and county employees.



CAPTION

Day Three

Water Issues in Florida

Day 3 began with another spectacular island sunrise. Jon opened a discussion of water issues by directing the Fellows in a game of musical footsteps—first lining up in order of height, then according to distance traveled, and finally by age. The point? Just as there are many ways to characterize the NRLI cohort, so there are many ways to characterize Florida’s complex water issues.

This point was illustrated further in the many individual answers to “How is water important to you personally?” The group reflected on how Floridians think about our marine and inland waters; our urban, suburban, and rural water resources and uses; and the control of and access to those resources.

After another small-group shuffle (this one involving imaginary lifeboats), the groups listed specific Florida water issues on giant sticky-notes that later papered one wall of the room. There was no shortage of issues. The class grouped the notes into categories and found that many issues cluster around the questions of water quantity, quality, and value or distribution.

To place these issues on the landscape, class members marked their home locations on a big Florida map and identified some of the many water controversies facing their own communities. The objective of these exercises was to highlight the complexity of water issues at both large (sticky-notes) and small (map) scales.

NATURAL RESOURCES LEADERSHIP II

After a short break, Bruce resumed the Day 2 leadership training by having the group revisit their lists of leadership qualities. After some discussion, Bruce noted that the Fellows had for the most part listed organizational leadership strengths. NRLI, in contrast, focuses on those leadership qualities specific to conflict management and cooperative decision-making.

By now, the NRLI competencies introduced on Day 1 made a lot more sense. This list included items such as “Identify the stakeholders in a natural resource issue” and “Listen without judgment to those you disagree with or do not like.” These skills become competencies when they become second nature. The Fellows worked in pairs to revisit some of the competencies, sharing with the larger group their interpretations, their thoughts regarding relevance to the Apalachicola session and to their own interests, and their feelings about using the competencies.



Feedback and Debrief

To wrap up, Jon further developed the concept of debriefing noting that the practice helps learners to retain new material. He walked the group through the steps of (1) describing (what the Apalachicola session entailed), (2) analyzing (the ‘why’ behind the session locale and activities), and (3) generalizing (how to use the observations and principles in other settings).

Throughout the three-day session, the Feedback Panel (Matt Corby, Jessica Ireland, and Lara Miller) had been hard at work collecting Fellows’ impressions and opinions. The panel gave a clever recap of session pluses (lots of these), minuses (not many), and recommendations. The project team and their local contacts received especially high marks for seamlessly accommodating some last-minute field-trip changes.

Recommended reading: *Mirage: Florida and the Vanishing Waters of the Eastern U.S.* by Cynthia Barnett.