



## Agriculture and the Everglades Systems

### Welcome to Okeechobee

Fellows traveled from around the state and arrived in Okeechobee on Thursday amid balmy, rainy weather conditions for the fifth session of NRLI Class XIII, January 9-11, 2014. The objectives of the session were to 1) explore the role of facilitation and facilitative leadership; 2) identify the phenomenon of the “Groan Zone” and its importance for decision making; 3) visit a dairy and cattle ranch and speak to stakeholders about agriculture and the Everglades systems; 4) practice techniques for helping groups narrow down and prioritize decision options; 5) explore the concept of multi-stakeholder processes; and 6) practice applying the concepts of effective meeting design. The session began with lunch during which Fellows caught up after a one month hiatus over the holiday break. Following lunch, Jon Dain welcomed everyone to session 5, provided some context as to why we were in Okeechobee, and went over the objectives of the session and the agenda. We then went through the now familiar exercise of “looking back – looking forward,” reviewing what we did and learned during session 4 in Miami and receiving a glimpse into our next session in Ocala.



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# Day One

## Agenda Design for Effective Meetings

To begin this session, Joy Hazell and Bruce Delaney led us in a brainstorming activity to ponder the question, “what makes a meeting bad?”. We learned there are two main components to meeting design: content and process. Content is the “what” (i.e., the information you’re providing and what you need to get done); process is the “how” (i.e., facilitation methods and procedures, tools, rules and norms, physical and emotional climate, group dynamics, etc.).

Joy then introduced us to a tool called a process agenda which can aid planners in designing effective meetings. The elements of a process agenda are: 1) objectives (why); 2) times (when); 3) topics (what); 4) activities and materials (how); and 5) persons responsible (who). Important things to keep in mind while designing your agenda are the meeting goal, objectives for each activity/session, timing (ending on time is very important), and closure is critical (i.e., next steps, follow up, etc.).

Next, we practiced process agenda development in small groups using an example scenario of being tasked to facilitate a meeting and develop consensus among a broad array of stakeholders regarding developing plans for a new county park. The small groups worked together and developed draft process agendas on flip charts and then presented to the large group. Bruce wrapped up the activity with a discussion about what was difficult and what was valuable. Fellows noted that it was challenging to only have tidbits of information about the scenario and to fit all of the objectives into a 4 hour meeting. Everyone seemed to find the exercise valuable and many noted that process agendas will be a very useful tool in their work.



Fellows Jessica Ireland and Tonya Clayton work on their process agendas



Fellows Jaime Jerrels, Chelsey Campbell Crandall and Jynessa Dutka-Gianelli practice process agenda develop-

# Understanding Group Dynamics and Facilitation

To begin this session, Paul Monaghan passed out a “pop quiz” in which we had to respond to the statement when I am in a group, I generally: a) prefer to sit quietly and listen to others; b) feel quite at ease participating in discussion; c) find myself ready for some kind of leadership role; d) (sometimes) which I could take over and structure the discussion; e) feel ill at ease; and/or f) prefer to listen for a while and then participate in the discussion after I have a feel for the group. The purpose of this exercise was to get us thinking about the different roles that people play in a group setting and how these roles affect overall group dynamics.

Next, to demonstrate group task and maintenance functions in action, we participated in a role play activity called “Lost in the Jungle.” During the activity, half of the Fellows were tasked with playing different roles within the context of a scenario: Fellows were part of a research project in a heavily forested, tropical area. During the hike into the research area, the team gets lost and one of the team members falls and breaks his leg. With dusk rapidly approaching, the team has to come to a consensus on 5 items from a list of 18 to take with them on the treacherous journey through the jungle to find the nearest village and get help for their injured comrade. The rest of the Fellows were given a handout explaining the different group roles, including various task functions, maintenance functions, and challenging behaviors. The jungle Fellows acted out the roles, including encouraging, summarizing, curmudgeon, joker, and know-it-all, and the observation Fellows watched and tried to guess who was playing each role. To summarize the activity, we discussed that every group has an objective and patterns of behavior as well as the reasons for various behaviors. Jon and Paul led us in a discussion of “how groups work,” including a synthesis of maintenance functions (i.e., facilitating participation, setting standards, reducing tension, etc.) and task functions (i.e., proposing a task or process, questioning, clarifying tasks, summarizing, etc.). We discussed that, typically, when meetings don’t work well, one of two things are happening: either everyone is too focused on tasks, or there is too much maintenance, resulting in nothing getting accomplished.

To conclude this activity, we moved into a discussion of leadership and the role of a facilitator. Fellow Maria Sgambati facilitated a group discussion on “what a facilitator does.” We concluded this activity with a discussion of when a facilitator is needed (e.g., for controversial projects, large groups, when there is stalemate, etc.), and it was noted that a facilitator is not needed in every situation. Finally, we learned about and discussed the difference between a facilitator and a leader—a facilitator is in charge of process, not content, and is there to help the group do what it can’t do or do well on its own so that the leader can lead the group towards the path of achieving goals and objectives. A facilitator should always remain impartial!

## Reading Discussion

Maria led the reading discussion following our group dinner. We began by discussing the Susan Cain TED video, “The Power of Introverts.” Generally speaking, extroverts are recharged and introverts are drained by social interaction. Maria had us team up in small groups, guess whether other Fellows were introverts or extroverts, and present to the group. In most cases, we guessed correctly; looks like we know each other’s personalities pretty well at this point! Maria then led us in an activity to explore the differing characteristics of participatory and conventional groups/values. Next, we talked about the “diamond of participatory decision making” and the “groan zone” from the Kaner workbook. We discussed examples of the groan zone that we had personally experienced or observed, and it was noted that “groups that can tolerate the groan zone are far more likely to discover common ground.” –Kaner. We concluded the evening with a discussion of the phenomenon of decision fatigue. We shared examples of decision fatigue and discussed the importance of keeping this in mind in the context of meetings and group processes.

## Day Two

### Field Trip

Friday’s first stop was only a few minutes east of Okeechobee city limits off SR 70, at Larson Dairy Barn 5. As Fellows unloaded from the vans, Jacob Larson, a NRLI Class XII Fellow, welcomed us to his family’s dairy. A third generation dairyman, Jacob gave an overview of the Larson dairy operations in the Okeechobee area and provided informational statistics about the dairy. Barn 5 operates continuously, milks about 320 cows per day, and produces enough milk to fill three tanker trucks each day. The dairy raises Holsteins, which produce the most milk, but also require the most feed. The optimum temperature for Holsteins is 55° F, so the stalls must be shaded and cooled with fans and water misters to keep the cows comfortable and productive. Jacob led the group to the barn and took small groups into the milking parlor to see the dairy in action. While the workers attached the vacuum pumps, Maria’s curiosity was rewarded with the opportunity to milk a cow by hand. After all the groups had an opportunity to watch the workers and milking machines in action, Jacob led us outside to a cattle trailer outfitted with bales of hay for seating. We bumped and bounced around the dairy to see the silage/haylage (fermented grain/hay feed) storage areas, calf pens, and plenty of wild birds, including several different herons, Glossy and White Ibis, Killdeer, and a Crested Caracara.



From left; Jon Dain, Jacob Larson, Bruce Delaney, and Maria Sgambati



Jacob Larson leads the group through the milking parlor

## Fieldtrip Continued

The next stop was Williamson Cattle Company, a cow/calf and citrus operation located off US-441 about five miles north of the lake. John Williamson, a fourth generation rancher and citrus grower, led the two NRLI vans on a tour of the operation with several stops along the way. Unlike the dairy, where heifers were kept in shaded, cooled barns, the Brangus (a breed that is 5/8 Angus and 3/8 Brahman) cattle here were in large fenced areas of mixed pasture and natural scrub habitat. Exclusion fencing keeps cattle out of the watercourses on the property, which is one of the cow/calf best management practices. The grove portion of the operation uses reused water from Okeechobee to irrigate, in order to use less water from the Floridian aquifer. With citrus growers facing increasing disease issues, John stressed the importance of finding a disease-resistant root stock to maintain Florida citrus. John also told the group about the conservation practices on the ranch, which includes a 3,000 acre area that is under the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). The conservation area was previously enrolled in the Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Program (FRESP), a pilot project sponsored by South Florida Water Management District SFWMD and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to increase water storage and nutrient removal potential on ranchlands in the Northern Everglades, but the Williamsons decided to convert the land to the WRP.

Following the dairy and ranch tours, our class was treated to a fantastic cowboy camp lunch sponsored by the Okeechobee Agricultural Council.



NRLI Fellows and hosts enjoy a barbecue provided by the Okeechobee Agriculture Council and Florida Farm Bureau

## Context Speaker: Dr. Sanjay Shukla

Dr. Sanjay Shukla, with UF/IFAS Southwest Florida Research and Education Center, presented information on water and nutrients from agriculture in the Everglades, along with a brief overview of water issues and legislative history in the Everglades. The Everglades watershed (much larger than the Everglades National Park alone) covers 9,000 square miles and receives 52 inches of rain annually on average, but recorded drought and storm events have caused as little as 30 inches and as much as 108 inches of rain. Flooding from Lake Okeechobee into the Everglades caused six months of flooding and over 2,000 deaths in the aftermath of two severe hurricanes in 1947, and the Army Corps of Engineers constructed the Herbert Hoover Dike around the lake in the 1960's. The dike has allowed for agricultural operations to continue in the mucky soils to the south of the lake, and Florida now has a \$45 - \$100 billion per year industry that includes sugar cane, citrus, cow/calf, and winter vegetable production in the Everglades watershed. Environmental issues in the Everglades, including excessive phosphorous loads, led to the "Save Our Everglades" initiative in 1983, followed by the Everglades Forever Act in 1994. The EPA set a limit of 10 parts per billion (ppb) of total phosphorous (TP) for waters coming into the Everglades National Park, which led to the installation of storm water treatment areas (STAs) to treat incoming water. The DEP adopted a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for Lake Okeechobee of 140 metric tons of TP, but 2007 - 2011 monitoring data shows an average of 352 metric tons. Agricultural producers in the region are required to submit complete phosphorous budgets as part of their water management district permitting conditions to show that their operations are not contributing to the TP loads in the lake, but the legacy phosphorous in the soil and lake substrate are still major issues. Dr. Shukla then introduced best management practices (BMPs) for agriculture, defined as being technically and economically feasible measures that agriculture can implement to help protect water quality and conserve water resources.



Dr. Sanjay Shukla and Jon Dain

BMPs cover nutrient application, irrigation, drainage management, and other practices, and they vary by commodity. While some BMPs, such as water control structures or livestock exclusion fencing, are not economically feasible for producers to implement on their own, state agencies often provide cost-share assistance for these more expensive practices because the potential nutrient load reductions are significant and cost effective. The cost per pound of TP removed via cost-shared agricultural BMPs is often much less than the cost of removal achieved via STAs. Agencies recognized this benefit and funded, in conjunction with the WWF, the FRESP pilot project in the Northern Everglades. The program was successful and has been replaced by the Northern Everglades Payment for Environmental Services (NEPES) program, funded by the SFWMD. Through this program, farmers submit proposals for water storage and nutrient removal services that they can provide on their land, and SFWMD selects proposed projects to fund each year. The FRESP and NEPES projects have also helped improve relationships among the agricultural, regulatory, and environmental communities, as agriculture has been able to prove the environmental services associated with their land, especially ranchlands.

# Stakeholder Panel Discussion

The stakeholder panel consisted of Jeff Sumner, Director of Agricultural Programs at the SFWMD; Dr. Betsy Boughton, Director of the MacArthur Agro-ecology Research Center (MAERC); Donald Fox, Biological Administrator with the Habitat and Species Conservation Division at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC); Flint Johns, Ranch Manager at Lykes Brothers; Dr. Paul Gray, a biologist representing Audubon of Florida as their science coordinator; and our own Dr. Gina Ralph, Chief of the South Florida Section within the Environmental Branch at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Jaime Jerrels moderated the panel.

Dr. Gray kicked off the panel discussion by giving an overview of the Lake Okeechobee and Everglades ecosystem and the problems plaguing it. The Lake Okeechobee TMDL is set at 140 metric tons, but it is estimated that loading could be as high as 4,000 metric tons each year, with an additional 200,000 metric tons of legacy phosphorous to consider as well. The watershed is highly drained, and the water moves too fast for treatment, so we need to find ways to catch the water, store it, and clean it to reduce the TP loading. The conversation then turned to lake level regulation. Dr. Gray said that during the 2004 – 2005 hurricane seasons, lake releases totaled six years' worth of agricultural water use, but drought conditions from 2007 – 2008 led to the introduction of water restrictions and consumptive use permit reductions. Gina reinforced that overall, lake level regulation has shown benefits, and projects to recreate oxbows in the Kissimmee River have also helped increase water storage. However, until the water is cleaned to the EPA standard of 10 ppb TP, excess water from the lake must be stored and/or diverted, and even the proposed two million additional acre-feet of storage isn't enough capacity. The panel also touched on the two conflicting purposes of lake level management: keeping the water shallow for flood control and deep for water supply. However, the panel seemed to agree that the Tuesday calls for scientists from collaborating agencies have seemed to build better relationships, and some potential leeway in release schedules was noted as one particular success. Building trust has also been a key success of Buck Island Ranch at MAERC, which is a working ranch that shares all of its operational information, so area ranchers can learn about the agricultural and environmental interactions documented on the ranch. When asked about the agricultural perspective on their relationships with NGOs and regulatory agencies, Flint Johns said he thinks that overall they are good, and that Florida farmers tend to be more engaged in environmental issues in general. Flint and Jeff Sumner both agreed that agriculture needs to stay engaged and that if you're not involved in the discussion, you're not going to like what someone else comes up with for you.



Stakeholder panel

# Day Three

## Multi-Stakeholder Processes

Day 3 began with a session led by Jon Dain and Bruce Delaney on multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs). MSPs have multiple stakeholders and events, and there are two types of MSPs: self-organized and outside convened. There are plusses and minuses to MSPs, but even when an MSP doesn't work as planned, the relationships that are built are often just as important.

We talked about the 7 types of meeting goals as described in the Kaner workbook: share information; advance the thinking; improve communication; build community; build capacity; make decisions; and obtain input. It is important to recognize which of these are your goals and that your goals will change the way you think about and plan your meetings. We talked about the various categories of stakeholders that can be involved in MSPs (e.g., people who are affected, decision-makers, decision blockers, people with information or expertise, etc.).

Next, Bruce shared an MSP case study on the Alachua County Waterways Master Plan Process. In this case study, there were public concerns regarding increased use of limited water resources in Alachua County, and a UF research team received a grant to lead and facilitate a MSP on this issue. Bruce presented the framework that was used to guide the MSP, which began with 23-24 small group meetings with each of the major stakeholder groups to explain the purpose of the project and develop issues and proposed solutions. Bruce noted that an important part of these meetings was that the stakeholders were told that they can't complain about the issue unless they are able to come up with a proposed solution. Next, the project team identified 4 categories of issues which were then discussed at a number of large meetings with all stakeholder groups. Bruce noted that, in this case, a consensus was never agreed upon, but the fact that people had the opportunity to consult and share input had a positive impact.

We then broke into small groups and were tasked with planning a MSP to get consensus about what to do on Lake Okeechobee. The small groups then reported out to the large group and the Project Team provided input on our MSP plans. It was noted that a common item left out of our plans was defining the core team.

## NRLI Practicum

During this session, we met with our practicum mentors and team to discuss problems, concerns, and/or issues with our projects and share input and objective feedback.

# Session Debrief and Feedback

Fellow Chelsey Campbell-Crandall led the debrief session. As a group, we went over the activities and reviewed concepts from the Thursday and Friday sessions. Chelsey then led a discussion on facilitation issues and problems and approaches to deal with these.

At the end of each day during this session, the Feedback Panel (Lara Miller, Guy Carpenter, and Craig Faulhaber) got the group together to gather Fellows’ thoughts, ideas, and impressions. The panel did a great job of synthesizing this feedback and gave a recap of plusses and suggestions for things to change. There were a few clever reenactments from the session peppered within the feedback, which garnered hearty laughter from the group. One of the major suggestions offered was to provide context readings before each session and possibly have a fellow give a brief, high-level context talk at the beginning of each session (this could be an additional Fellow task for future classes).



NRLI Fellows provide feedback

## Wrap-up

Jon advised us to be thinking about the Burl Long award which will be presented at graduation—Fellows decide amongst ourselves who in Class XIII has gotten the most out of NRLI. We also need to select a class speaker for graduation.

We’ll be in Ocala for next month roughing it at an FWC youth camp; the issue focus for Ocala is “Managing Use and Protection of Unique Water Resources.”