Creating Watershed Partnerships: *Developing a Management Plan for the Blackwater River Watershed*

Florida Natural Resources Leadership Institute



Joshua Wilks

Environmental Planner Blackwater River Foundation, Inc.



Introduction

- Blackwater River
 - History
 - Ecology
 - Water and Land Use
- Management Plan Development
 - Purpose
 - Process
 - People
 - Value/Impact
 - Lessons Learned

Blackwater River Watershed

- Outstanding Florida Water
- Traverses Two States
- **Two Florida Counties**
- **Two Alabama Counties**
- Blackwater River State Forest
- Conecuh National Forest
- **City of Milton**
- Aquatic Preserve
- NAS Whiting Field
- **Eglin Air Force Base**



104 water body
 segments
 make up the
 Blackwater
 River
 Watershed



Historical Uses

1760s to 1980s used for Industry
Shipbuilding, lumber, transit (people & freight)

Today, used mostly for Recreation and Ecotourism
Canoe Capital of Florida
Florida Canoe Trail
Conservation Lands
State Forest
National Forest

Blackwater River State Forest and Park

'Black Water' river characteristics

Unique river system; Deep and slow-moving; Flows through forested swamps and wetlands; Coffee colored water due to vegetative decay; Much lower in nutrients than whitewater rivers; Unique composition of flora and fauna.





Upland pine community

Seepage Slope community

Wet flatwoods community



The Blackwater River Watershed consists of critical ecosystems and is within one of the most biologically diverse regions of North America with many endangered and threatened species.

Photos by Megan Brown

Land Use

- TWO Largest Land Uses:
- Forestry products including timber
- Agriculture soybeans, peanuts, cotton

- In the last 15 years:
- Loss of forest lands, agricultural lands, wetlands
- Increase of residential development

Water Use

Designated Usage

 Florida – Class III water body; Recreation, Propagation and Maintenance of a Healthy, Well-Balanced Population of Fish and Wildlife

■ Alabama – Fish and Wildlife usage

Water Consumption

- Florida not well constrained
- Alabama water use in 1995 (1 million gallons/day)

Water Quality



In 2001 TMDLs were established for fecal coliform in 7 water bodies, including the Blackwater River and six tributaries.

Alabama has no TMDLs established for the River or its tributaries within its boundaries.

Data Source: F.G.D.L. 2009

Potential Stressors to Water Quality

Potential sources of contamination to the River:

- Permitted Point Discharges
 - Sewer Treatment Facility
- Non-point Sources of Pollution
 - Road building
 - Urban/storm water runoff
 - Septic Systems
 - Silviculture/Timber
 - Sedimentation
 - Nutrients
 - Dissolved Oxygen
 - Harmful Bacteria



NRLI

PROBLEM(S)

No homogeneous understanding for management needs related to water quality; Duplicate efforts among agencies/NGOs; Conflicting state and local management goals; No unified/watershed-based coordination of activities related to stewardship; and Jurisdictional challenges (Alabama vs. Florida vs. County vs. City)

PURPOSE

- Create a Blackwater River Watershed Management Plan
- Get stakeholders to the table
- Steer efforts in the same direction
- Gather existing resources to develop resource directory
- Monitor changes occurring in the watershed
- Identify potential water quality stressors
- Identify unified methods for water quality sampling
- Develop watershed management recommendations

PROCESS

September 2009 – March 2010:

- Convened Blackwater Watershed Stewardship Committee;
- Identified issues via Roundtable Approach;
- Situation Analysis (Identified Stakeholders, Positions, Interests)
- Gathered resources from stakeholders
- Developed recommendations

March 2010 - Ongoing

Develop sustainable solutions to protect and restore the natural systems of the watershed so ecological, cultural, and economic integrity will be preserved for future generations.

Initial Partnerships (2009)

- Blackwater River Foundation
- The Nature Conservancy
- Santa Rosa County
- Santa Rosa Clean Community System
- University of Florida/IFAS

Existing Partnerships (2010)

- Santa Rosa School District
- Blackwater River Foundation
- Santa Rosa County
- Yellow River Marsh Aquatic Preserve
- The Nature Conservancy
- Northwest Florida Water Management District
- City of Milton
- Northwest Florida Aquatic Preserve
- UF-IFAS Extension (Sea Grant)
- Santa Rosa 4-H Program
- Santa Rosa Clean Community System

- Division of Forestry
- Santa Rosa County Tourist Development Council
- Bay Area Resource Council
- Water-dependant and water-related business owners
- EPA Watershed Management Office
- Florida Public Archaeology Network
- University of Florida/IFAS
- University of West Florida
- West Florida Canoe and Kayak Club
- Citizen and Stakeholder Groups
- UF-Law Conservation Clinic

Developing Partnerships

- State of Alabama
- Conecuh National Forest
- Okaloosa County
- Alabama Clean Water Partnership

OUTCOMES

Expected:

- Goals
- Recommendations
- Stewardship Coordination
- Unexpected:
 - Public School Curriculum Updates
 - Watershed Education Committee
 - Online Resource Library
 - TDC involvement (budgeted outreach participation)

VALUE/IMPACT

- Communication among stakeholders
- Joint efforts re: Sampling and Monitoring
- Resource Library and Representative Directory
- Coordinated Stewardship Activities
- Educational Opportunities
- Identified projects to seek solutions
- Funding leverage- Changes occurring in the Blackwater Watershed
- Management Recommendations

LESSONS LEARNED

- Use 'Roundtable Approach' for program development;
- Keep meetings timely and organized;
- Offer alternative means of participation (i.e. Telecon)
- Continue to engage those who don't show up so they come back; follow-up missed meetings with a phone call to update them on what happened;
- Build in mechanisms to gauge involvement; and
- Don't be scared to use flip charts and visual aids!
- Accept the fact that timelines will change.

NRLI Tools

- Situation Analysis
- Understanding stakeholder interests
- Observation
- Meeting management techniques
- Meeting feedback (via SurveyMonkey)
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Visual Aids
- **FLIP CHARTS!**

In conclusion...

We abuse land [water] because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land [water] as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. ~*Aldo Leopold (1887-1948)*

THANK YOU, NRLI!

"A Healthy Ecology is the Basis for a Healthy Economy" ~ *Congresswoman Claudine Schneider*