

## PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE EMERALD COAST: A REGIONAL VISIONING PROCESS



Photo by Emily Ott

The second NRLI session led us to the Northern bank of the Choctawhatchee Bay. Here fellows enjoyed the rustic beauty of Camp Timpoochee, a 4H camp in Niceville, Florida. Upon arrival, we greeted each other under twisting oaks with a view of the Mid Bay Bridge to the west and Miramar Beach to the south. After lunch in the camp mess hall, we relocated to the camp gallery, and were welcomed by NRLI staff members.

Gerald Edmondson, the UF IFAS Extension Director for Okaloosa County and former Timpoochee camper, introduced us to the ecology, economy, and political climate of the region. Mr. Edmondson touched on the key economic engines of the military, tourism, and the timber industry which has now refocused on property development. He also provided a historic overview of the region from Scottish settlement in the 1820's, through economic growth modes, to the current recession.

After Mr. Edmondson's informative presentation, the Fellows discussed the links between our first session's focus on Port Manatee and the current session's focus on regional visioning processes and the local implementation of conservation plans. Jon explained the practical tools we would learn and introduced our next speaker.

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*This report forms part of a series  
written by current NRLI Fellows.*

*Reports represent and are a product  
of the experiential learning process  
that is a highlight of the NRLI pro-  
gram and have not been formally  
peer reviewed.*

# Overview of the Sustainable Emerald Coast Initiative



*Michelle Anchors, former Chair of the  
Committee for a Sustainable Emerald  
Coast provides an overview of the project*

To learn about regional visioning processes, we had the pleasure of participating in an interactive presentation given by the entertaining and eloquent Michelle Anchors of Keefe, Anchors, Gordon & Moyle, P.A. Aside from being a founding partner of her Fort Walton Beach law firm, Mrs. Anchors has impacted her community significantly by presiding over many committees and boards ranging from the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, Fort Walton Beach Medical Center Board of Trustees, and Gulfview Hotel Committee of the Junior League of the Emerald Coast. Her involvement in so many organizations and her chairing of the Committee for a Sustainable Emerald Coast (CSEC), made Ms. Anchors a valuable resource as she spoke to the fellows about of the interconnection between economic, environmental, and social factors in CSEC visioning discussions.

Ms. Anchors candidly revealed that balancing economic and environmental interests was a major goal of the initiative as stakeholders worked towards a vision, including recommendations, for achieving a sustainable Emerald Coast by 2030. Ms Anchors was appointed by then Governor Jeb Bush which, she noted, gave her credibility with Com-

By Emily Ott

mittee participants, but was provided no funding for the project. The committee, established in September, 2006 consisted of regional stakeholders ranging from college presidents to developers, and were charged with "planning everything,".

With the Committee for a Sustainable Treasure Coast serving as an example, the first half of the Emerald Coast's fifteen month visioning process was spent listening to experts and educating committee members on the multitude of issues facing Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton counties. For the purposes of the CSEC, sustainability was defined as the intersection of environment, economy, and society (comprised of education, culture, and health). CSEC conducted day-long meetings and invited the full participation of anyone interested, including various community members and interest groups not initially part of the process. After months of hard work evaluating an initially generated list of 300 suggested sustainability proposals, the CSEC selected and prioritized recommendations producing a report that included a master timeline of forty-two short, mid, and long-term implementation actions designed to ensure Emerald Coast sustainability. The Committee delivered the report to Governor Charlie Christ in December of 2007-- just as our current economic recession began.

The drastic change in economic climate put brakes on dissemination of the report to the public and complicated the discussion of recommended projects.

CSEC Continued on page 3



*Above: Draft 2030 Framework for Sustainable  
Growth Map developed by the CSEC*



# A Framework for Understanding and Working with Conflict

By Emily Ott



Photo by Candy Kaswinkel

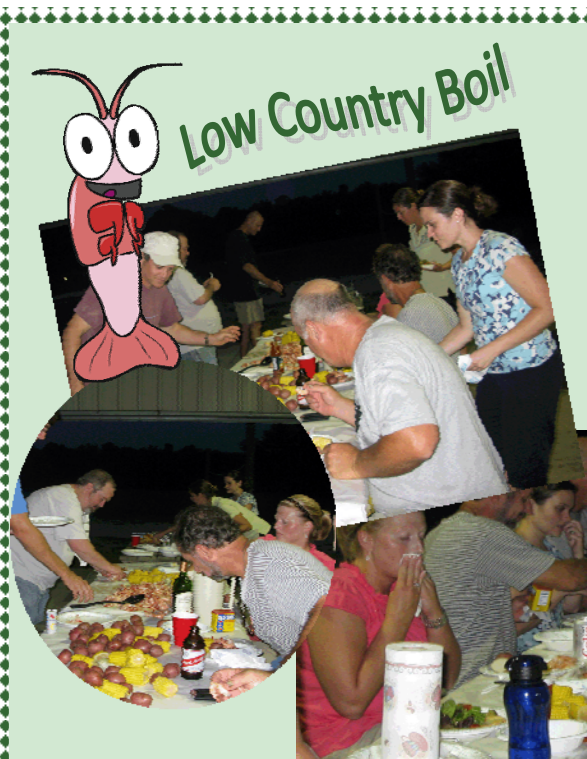


Photo by Ginger Adair

Fellows participate in a team building exercise to help understand conflict.

After a short break and a team-building “hurricane/evacuate” “energizer”, fellows were introduced to a framework for understanding conflict. In small groups, we discussed and defined the word conflict then reconvened compared concepts. Jon then discussed some of the different ways to understand environmental conflicts including scale, intensity, stages, and practical implications. Fellows then formed small groups and discussed examples of responses to conflict including adjudication, arbitration, coercion, avoidance, advocacy, mediation, negotiation, and facilitation. The groups subsequently considered why conflicts tend to arise in policy making, program planning, and project implementation. In closing, the group was challenged to consider conflicts as healthy opportunities for dialogue and creative thinking if managed effectively.

Later in the evening with bellies full of salad, pasta, and chicken fingers the group enjoyed a scheduled-but-informal discussion about panhandle history and current issues with the help of Fellows Tom, Josh and Scott under the camp’s “big top” pavilion. With a cool bay breeze blowing and the sun dipping below the horizon, we candidly shared diverse perspectives about the management of natural resources in North West Florida. The conversation covered a multitude of resource issues, histories, and ideas as we got to know each other and our perspectives better. After a stunning half-moon rise over Choctawhatchee Bay, a tired group bunked down in cabins, excited about our next day’s field trip, stakeholder panel, and classroom sessions.



After a long day of learning, we turned our attention to more important things, namely dinner. Thanks to the careful planning of Candy, we were provided with all the ingredients needed for a traditional low-country boil (and then some). As is NRLI tradition, the preparation of the meal was the responsibility of the fellows; while the guys tended the fire (surprise!) under the big-top, other fellows washed, cut and prepped the rest of the meal. After much negotiation about proper boil order, the appropriate level of spice and how to accommodate different dietary restrictions the cooking went smoothly with good-natured cooperation all around. In proper low-country fashion the boil was poured out onto the tables and the feast began. The conversations were stimulating, the meal was delicious and the setting couldn’t be beat. It was a fun and relaxing end to a very productive day. Many thanks to Candy for the coordination and to all who helped with preparation and cleanup!

Photos by Candy Kaswinkel

CSEC from page 2. Lack of funding remains a major challenge to CSEC’s vision of sustainability for the region. Ms. Anchors challenged NRLI fellows to develop into the kind of leaders who take issues on as their own and inspire people to action rather than leaving important planning and implementation up to others.

# NRLI Fellows Visit the Eglin Air Force Base White Point Recreation Area

By Ginger Adair

Due to unexpected changes at Eglin AFB, our field trip location was changed to the White Point Recreation Area at the base of the Mid-bay bridge. The recreation area is owned and managed by the Department of Defense, under the capable hands of Eglin's natural resource management division known as the Jackson Guard. Our interpretive guides were Jackson Guard's Bruce Hagedorn (wildlife biologist) and James Furman (fire ecologist). With the old growth coastal flatwoods of the recreation area as our background, the two ecologists explained that Eglin is comprised of 464,000 acres of land, and contains a large portion of the remaining long leaf pine ecosystem in the United States. The base has unique management requirements, including the need to manage an active military installation while protecting native ecosystems. Perhaps the most interesting information provided during the field trip was the genesis of a unique partnership called the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Support Group (GCPEP). As if channeling our discussion from Day 1, James described how the creation of the

GCPEP was a positive result of conflict. Errant smoke from prescribed burning activities in the Gulf Coast region resulted in what James described as a "Significant Emotional Event" and the cancellation of flight activities at nearby Whiting Field. The need to coordinate prescribed burning, in addition to a need for coordinated red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) management, led to the conversations that were the precursors to the GCPEP. Officially organized in 1996, GCPEP has grown into a 10 member consortium consisting of the Department of Defense, the Nature Conservancy, the Northwest Florida Water Management District, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and other large public and private landholders. The group has become a successful way to coordi-

prescribed burning, and other management activities. See <http://www.gcpeppartners.com> for more information about GCPEP.

Our tour took us on a 1 mile hike through the forest where we discussed the various management issues faced by the Jackson Guard on the White Point site and the Air Force Base. Among the many issues is dealing with encroachment from adjoining neighbors. Surprisingly, many people see fit to



Photo by Ginger Adair

*Encroaching by adjoining neighbors is just one of the issue the Jackson Guard must deal with on management lands. Above, one neighbor uses the land to store his parade cart and other paraphernalia.*



Photo by Candy Kaswinkel

*James Furman, (right), Fire Manager with the Eglin Air Force Base Natural Resource Division, also known as the Jackson Guard, explains to the Fellows why the White-Point Recreation Area is a vital area for conservation as Bruce Hagedorn, the Jackson Guard Wildlife Section Chief looks on.*

nate the management of over 1 million acres of land in the region, and a way to pool limited resources and technical knowledge. The group has grown to include a permanent staff of resource managers called the "Ecosystem Support Team", who rotate among member agencies conducting ecological monitoring,

co-opt federal property to extend their backyards, and then react negatively to management actions (see photo). James and Bruce described the RCW management efforts on the base, including an inventory of all the cavity trees on the property, and even the creation of new cavities to promote colonization. The efforts have so successful that the base now exports RCW's to other management areas.

The trip was a great success, with everyone enjoying the great weather, knowledgeable company, and beautiful surroundings.



Photo by Candy Kaswinkel

*Long-leaf pine tree stand at the White Point Recreation Area. Open to the public, this area is maintained and protected by the Eglin Air Force Base Natural Resource Division.*



# Stakeholder Panel: Challenges & Successes of the NW Florida Greenway

By Ginger Adair

Our afternoon stakeholder panel focused on the development of the Northwest Florida Greenway, a cooperative effort to identify and protect an ecosystem corridor linking important protected areas. Our panelists included Mr. George Willson from Willson Consulting representing private landowners; Mr. Bill Cleckley from the Northwest Florida Water Management District; and Mr. Jesse Borthwick, Eglin Air Force Base's Director of Range and Airspace Sustainment. Absent from the panel was Dr. Richard Hilsenbeck, with The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

As moderator of the panel, NRLI Class IX fellow, Greg Lang started the discussion with introductions all around. Our panelists then gave an overview of their involvement in the greenway project.

Mr. Borthwick told the group of an incident in 1984 in which a \$5 million weapons test was cancelled due to potential impacts to RCW's on Eglin. This incident prompted the Department of Defense (DoD) to partner with TNC to conduct a full RCW survey. The problem also underscored a growing concern that without conservation of natural areas, large protected military lands could become "islands of biodiversity". That, and potential population growth and the attendant light pollution and noise complaints near military operations, has the potential to severely impact the ability to train the nation's fighting force. And so it became apparent that acquisition and management of additional conservation areas was a priority of the DoD. Not surprisingly, other groups in the region also have a stake in preserving natural areas, and so an unlikely partnership was born.

The water management districts in Florida are charged with protecting the source of drinking water for our citizens. One of the primary methods for this is protection of the water recharge areas in an undeveloped state. As Mr. Cleckley explained, the district's interests in managing growth in the region were complimentary to the interests of DoD. The partnership was codified in 2003 to identify priority lands for acquisition. The goals of the greenway are to connect important military flight routes, protect lands considered one of the country's top biodiversity "hot-spots",



Stakeholder Panel From Left: Jesse Borthwick, Bill Cleckley, and George Willson

and preserve water resources.

Many of the lands identified for protection are in private ownership. One of the ways to protect these lands is through partnerships with large private landowners. George Willson has been instrumental in negotiations with landowners for public acquisition, procurement of conservation easements, and development of innovative development plans. Mr. Willson told of the challenges in convincing property owners, many of whom have held title to the land for generations, to protect vital portions for conservation. He was particularly concerned about the lack of incentives available for these owners. Mr. Willson and the group had a lively discussion of

the value of "sector planning", a way to develop portions of the land while preserving the majority either in working agriculture or as preservation land. This type of development is becoming more popular as it offers the benefits of growth (economic stability) without the wholesale destruction of the landscape.

## Successes of the greenway project

The project has successfully identified the priority lands for preservation, and some of the methods to protect them. The partnership that developed through the process has highlighted the fact that seemingly diverse groups actually have much in common, and can work together to achieve mutual goals.

## Challenges of the greenway

One of the most enlightening portions of the panel was the frank discussion of the challenges and mistakes in the process. Mr. Borthwick readily admitted that the public involvement was limited at the beginning of the process. An untimely media report on the greenway proposal led to concern and distrust among landowners. The panelists also agreed that there was a lack of involvement of the local governments. This is a potential problem because the local governments are the entities that ultimately approve land use changes and development permits. Without land use policy changes at the local level the protection of the greenway is limited.

**Stakeholder** continued on page 6

# Practicum Overview and Feedback

By Emily Ott

Our Final morning together was spent working with tools for managing conflict and reviewing all that we had learned during the session. NRLI executive director, Bruce Delaney kicked the morning off with a brain teaser before presenting the “Situation Assessment” tool and leading a discussion about conducting successful meetings. The Fellows were divided into small groups and tasked with using the situation assessment matrix tool to analyze the Port Manatee and NW Florida Greenway cases. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying and understanding stakeholder interests and relationships. Completed matrices were presented and compared (including commentary on our different drawing skills...).

In addition to the Situation Assessment tool, we learned an interesting “speed-dating” like method for sharing information and networking, the “Margolis Wheel”. The technique was used to facilitate discussion of our practicum ideas by maximizing Fellow interactions. In a “Margolis Wheel”, participants sit facing each other in two concentric circles and rotate after short but intense periods of discussion. In this instance Fellows on the outer ring were given two minutes to brain storm, contextualize, and hone their practicum ideas and messages with the person facing them. Those on the inner ring of the wheel listened and, time permitting, provided feedback. Every two minutes the outer circle shifted one seat to the right and the process began anew.

With practicum ideas and advice swirling in our heads, it was time for our Debrief session. Led by Fellow, Josh Wilks, we split ourselves into groups and spent exactly ten minutes discussing what we had learned and how we would use it. Jon echoed Josh’s sentiment about applying what we had learned and encouraged us to jot down key ideas points in our “learning journals”. In the final session activity, Feedback Panel members, Staci Braswell, Chris Johns, and Tom Ostertag led us through a sincere yet very amusing gallery tour of the session, complete with feedback commentary. Paying homage to session highlights as well as to some of the “less engaging experiences” the Feedback panel left us laughing and looking forward

to the next NRLI session near Jacksonville. With thunderstorms looming the group was dismissed, and everyone left quickly for the long drive home.



Photo by Jon Dain

*NRLI Fellows use the Margolis Wheel as a way to help them share and receive advice on their Practicum ideas with other class participants.*

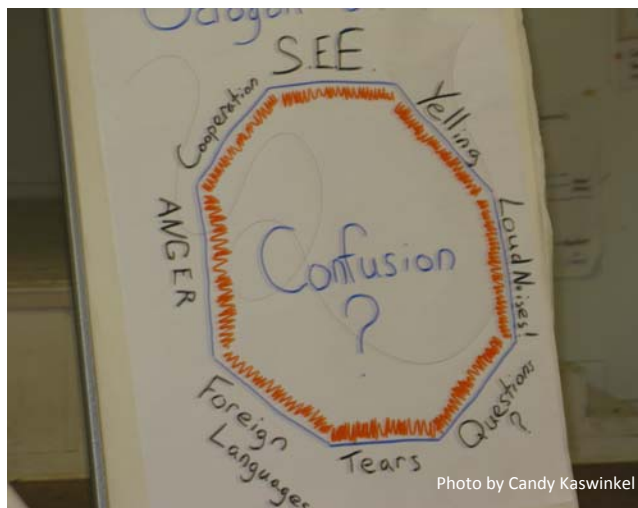


Photo by Candy Kaswinkel

*The NRLI Feedback Panel spoofed the “Circle of Conflict” framework” with their own “Octagon of Confusion”.*

## Helpful Links:

<http://florida4h.org/camps/timpoochee.shtml>  
<http://consensus.fsu.edu/emeraldcoast/index.html>  
<http://www.eglin.af.mil/>

**Stakeholder** from page 5

### Panel Conclusion

The fellow’s questions were well composed, and our panelists were extremely candid about both the challenges and successes of the project thus far. The conversation was lively, with all members participating and learning from each other. It was a refreshing way to learn about the ups and downs of regional partnerships, and to learn from the lessons of the past

