

## ***BOATING AND SEAGRASS: BALANCING COASTAL RESOURCE USE AND PROTECTION***

**T**hursday January 13 saw the temperatures drop as we arrived in Ft. Myers for NRLI Class X session 5. After catching up with each others holiday activities over lunch, Laila Racevskis welcomed us back for session 5. Laila opened session 5 with a review of activities from session 4 and focused our attention on the our upcoming activities. She introduced Dr. Charlie Vavrina, district extension director University of Florida IFAS. Dr. Vavrina gave us an overview of agriculture in Southwest Florida,



*Photo by Leslie Corcelli*



## Protecting the SeaGrass in Fragile Coastal Environments



Photo by Candy Kaswinkel



Photo by Leslie Corcelli

*Pictured Above top; Justin McBride provides background to the issue. Above bottom: Bob Swett explains the regional approach to public access and coastal environment protection.*

Justin McBride, Lee County, DNR-Marine Division and Dr. Bob Swett, Florida Sea Grant Boating and Waterway Planning, University of Florida provided a detailed context background. The main issue revolves around efforts to protect fragile coastal environments, especially seagrass beds, while providing safe access to these areas for the boating public. Their work has resulted in No Internal Combustion Motorized Zones (NICMZ) or 'pole and troll' zones in Estero Bay, Matlacha Pass, Pine Island Sound and Charlotte Harbor.

Dr. Swett explained how a regional approach was determined to be the best way to achieve the desired result of public access while protecting the coastal environment. The process started by gathering data related to waterways and what access was available to the 50,000 active boat owners in Lee County. Collaborating with Lee County and the West Coast Inland Navigation District, Florida Sea Grant entered the data for 650 miles of channels into a geographic information system (GIS). Analysis of the GIS data revealed that many of the channels of Lee County were beginning to become shallower resulting in restricted navigation for boat traffic.

Systematic dredging of the shallowest channels would improve navigation for public boat traffic but would impact sensitive marine preserve areas along the Lee County coast. After several meetings between the involved agencies a proposal was drafted that provided for mitigation of any disturbed areas of the aquatic preserves. The mitigation sites were the NICMZ ('pole and troll' zones) that will be set up as dredging moves forward. Public hear-

ings were held prior to implementing the plan but very little public input was generated. The Lee County Commissioners approved the dredging plan and an additional public hearing was held at which time opposition to the plan arose.

After the presentation we discussed the implications of earlier involvement of the public and how this could reduce opposition to the proposal.

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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 program and have not been formally peer reviewed.*

# Effective Meetings

## Agenda Process and Design

Joy Hazell, Lee County Sea Grant Extension Agent gave a presentation about designing an effective meeting. Joy asked us to recall a bad or ineffective meeting we had attended in the past. It was easy for all the class members to identify characteristics of “bad” meetings we had participated in. Through this exercise we were able to identify two important meeting

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issues that are critical to the effectiveness of the meeting; the meeting agenda and physical properties. The meeting agenda is a key part of the successful meeting for obvious reasons. If the topic is relevant to the attendees, provides opportunity for attendees to participate allowing the stakeholders to buy-in to the result, the meeting will have the potential for success. Physical properties that provide comfort and enable participants to see, hear and understand presenters are

aspects that should not be overlooked by the leader or the facilitator of the meeting.

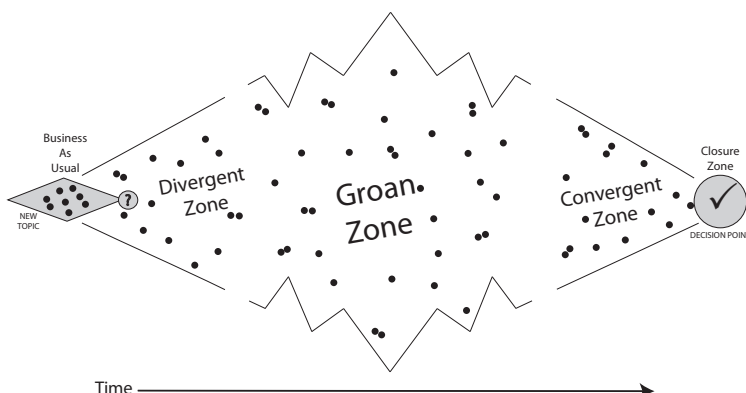
Development of a good meeting begins with a good process agenda which is a “road map” of what will be covered, when and how it will be presented, how the meeting will be closed and when to take appropriate breaks. Once the meeting agenda is set the next step is to facilitate the meeting to insure the meeting stays on schedule and that all stakeholders have the opportunity to participate. The key practices of good facilitation were outlined as:

- Stay Neutral
- Listen Actively
- Paraphrase
- Involve Everyone
- Ask Questions
- Synthesize Ideas
- Stay on Track
- Give Feedback
- Test Assumptions
- Collect Ideas
- Summarize Clearly



Pictured Above: Fellows work in small groups to develop process agendas to help them better identify key elements in agenda design. Photos by Candy Kaswinkel

## Effective Group Decision Making



Bryan Fluech, Collier County Sea Grant Agent, and Betty Staugler, Charlotte County Sea Grant Agent led the afternoon exercise on effective group decision-making. Betty talked about the challenges of the groan zone and how to successfully work through it to achieve group consensus. Fellows then participated in the Lost in the Jungle activity. This group exercise highlighted the difficulties of group decision-making, the roles of different facilitation skills, and the roles of task functions, maintenance functions and individuals.



## EXPLORING ESTERO BAY



Pictured Above L to R: Estero Bay Tour



Sea Grass Prop Scars



Photos by Lisa Krimsky

Bryan and Joy taking one for the team.

Day 2 started off with a boat tour of the NICMZ location in Estero Bay courtesy of Al Durret, owner of Fish Tale Marina. Heather Stafford, Manager of the Estero Bay and Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserves led the tour. We learned that the state aquatic preserves were legislated to be protected and maintained to be pristine and that new dredging of the channels in the aquatic preserve went against this mandate. The development of the NICMZ in the most heavily prop scarred areas allowed for appropriate public access and protection for seagrasses. Heavy prop scarring

and a wealth of wildlife were both apparent during the course of the boat tour due to the low tides.

Bryan Fluech, Betty Staugler and Joy Hazell, Sea Grant Extension Agents for Collier, Charlotte and Lee Counties, led a seine trip on Lover's Key to show some of the organisms that rely on seagrasses during their life. Though the cold weather scared most of these organisms away, we got to see a variety of bait fish, crabs, sea hares, and marine worms collected both on shore and in the seine net.

## STAKEHOLDER PANEL



Photo by Candy Kaswinkel

Above: Stakeholder Panel from left to right - Bob Leonard, Heather Stafford, Steve Boutelle, Al Durret and Roby Modys.

The Stakeholder panel was comprised of Al Durret, Heather Stafford, Captain Rob Modys, Steve Boutelle (Lee County Natural Resources division, Marine Program), and Bob Leonard (local fisherman). The general consensus of the stakeholder panel was that the process of developing the NICMZ and the reason for developing the NICMZ was wrong, however; the end result was successful and beneficial to all. The take home message of the panel was that general conflict between the boating community and the agencies could have been avoided if the public was included in the process from the beginning. The fellows believe that this was one of the more successful panels of the class.



Photo by Lisa Krimsky

Pictured above: Ft. Myers Stakeholder Panel led by moderator Leslie Corcelli

## Florida's Future

Dr. Rod Clouser, Food and Resource Economics Department, University of Florida gave a presentation on Florida's Future. His vision of the growth of Florida's population and its impact on Florida's environment was informative and reinforced the importance of preserving environmental quality. His presentation also provided ample evidence that planning for future growth and development is critical to sustainable land use, adequate water quality and environmental integrity.



Dr. Rod Clouser with the Food and Resource Economics Department speaks with Class X about the challenges facing Florida's future. Photo by Candy Kaswinkel.

## Ecosystem Services



Dr. Laila Racevskis, NRLI director, provided information about how ecosystems provide food and water, regulate climate, and provide cultural value. It is possible that these attributes will be recognized as ecosystem services and may provide new markets and revenue streams for landowners. Valuation of these ecosystem services could provide additional

data for planners to consider for future development. Ecosystem service is a new area with undefined parameters' and an uncertain method of valuation. Demand for ecosystem services will depend to a great extent on the willingness of populations to pay for the services as well as the policies set forth by law or regulation.



### Debrief and Feedback Panel-

Luke Langford led the session debrief in a casual yet informative question and answer session. Sherri Kraeft, Michelle Atkinson, and Kat Diersen utilized their NRLI tools and snacks to achieve a successful feedback panel that highlighted group functions, working with different personnel and the importance of process while providing valuable feedback to the program team.

