

Conversations on Diversity & Equity in Natural Resources & Conservation Careers

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Conservation organizations, natural resources agencies, and local government resource management departments recognize that values-based challenges, such as climate change, freshwater usage, and development, require both novel and creative thought leaders as well as buy-in from all community stakeholders. These same agencies also recognize the current workforce and typical pool of candidates often do not represent the diversity of Florida communities. This NRLI Practicum project focused on outreach to marginalized communities, specifically the students of a Historically Black University (Florida A&M University), as a means to understand student perceptions of careers in natural resources and conservation. We hosted a focus group with 8 FAMU students interested in career development with questions designed to illustrate challenges affecting workforce diversity. Students spoke with panelists for 1.5 hours, and themes included: exposure to career options, representation pressure, and family dynamics. Other lessons learned relate to the virtual format of focus groups, established resources to reach minority communities effectively, and the wide range of ages to focus outreach. Practicum members recommend next steps to include: continuation of focus groups to incorporate a larger number of students, as well as employer and FAMU faculty focus groups; develop and encourage paid career development internships and a coordinating job board, and share out common findings with networks of natural resource and conservation employers.