

Managing Public Lands in Florida

A Practicum for NRLI Class 22

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Florida has an extensive network of protected natural areas throughout the state, owned and managed by public agencies, non-profits and private companies. There are also numerous companies who provide contracted land management services.

Our practicum examined public/private partnerships in county and state land management with three goals:

- learn the needs of public agency land managers
- Identify barriers to land managers use contracting management providers and
- Identify training gaps for land management professionals

The process of engagement was to survey 116 land management professionals to gauge the needs, interests, and issues associated with the use of private contractors to achieve public land management goals. 71 people responded to the survey, and from their responses, a list of topics was developed to shape the process agenda. Finally, we invited the respondents to a meeting to dig deeper into the subject. 23 people responded they would attend the session, and 19 joined us.

The meeting convened with an overview of NRLI and the practicum process, an explanation of how we arrived at these objectives, and an introduction of the project team. We set meeting norms to encourage comfortable participation from everyone, asked participants to introduce themselves including why they joined the meeting. Presentations were followed by breakout groups sessions to provide opportunity for discussions on the presentations, conservation challenges, and opportunities for better land management.

The meeting concluded after 90 minutes with final thoughts and questions, a Mentimeter to express immediate impressions of the meeting, and a promise to share meeting notes and contact information with the group. Participants expressed thanks saying the forum was helpful for group think and learning new ideas for tackling common issues.