

Collaborative Research Priorities for TNC Conservation

The Nature Conservancy's Florida Chapter (TNC FL) recently launched a research grant program to address critical science knowledge gaps that limit progress toward organizational land conservation and ecological management goals. To identify and prioritize the most impactful research needs, I designed and led a collaborative process centered on meaningful engagement with conservation staff from across the Chapter. A one-day, in-person workshop was developed to overcome three key challenges: securing staff buy-in, minimizing power imbalances, and ensuring confidence in how research priorities were selected. To build trust and participation, the project was framed around shared conservation metrics and illustrated with examples of previously funded research that produced actionable management outcomes. To create an inclusive environment, breakout sessions were organized by peer groups—stewardship staff, department and strategy leads, and outreach/education staff—allowing participants to contribute freely without hierarchical pressure. Finally, participants codeveloped objective criteria for evaluating and prioritizing science needs, ensuring transparency and fairness in narrowing a long list of ideas to a focused set of high-value research topics. Through this structured and collaborative approach, we successfully produced a vetted list of research priorities to guide funding decisions in the upcoming fiscal year, strengthening both the relevance and organizational ownership of future conservation science investments.