

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR COLLABORATIVE DECISIONS, RESILIENT ECOSYSTEMS, AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES: WATER, LAND, COMMUNITY AND PEOPLE IN ESTUARINE WATERSHEDS

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Population growth, urban expansion, and the warming climate have and will continue to stress our coastal ecosystems. Decisions on how and when to respond with stewardship, adaptation, and mitigation are made by individuals, municipalities, states, and agencies. These decisions are made at many geographic scales, in the context of individual values and imperfect knowledge, perhaps with regulatory incentive. They affect water quality, water quantity, living resources, habitat functions, ecosystem integrity and human well-being. Currently, there is disparity in access to and use of technical information across the coastal areas of the United States. There is also variety in the organizational and governance structures that exist to educate, advocate, and regulate around land, water, and resource issues. Finally, there are often conflicting interests and values around resources held in common, and economic choices to go with them.

This Café Conversation will provide a forum to discuss the urgent need to build capacity across the public sector for collaborative decision-making, for common interest in creating or preserving resilient ecosystems, and for implementation of sustainable practices. The 2008 National Academy Report “Public Participation in Environmental Assessment and Decision Making” recommends that “public participation should be fully incorporated into environmental assessment and decision-making processes...as a requisite of effective action”. Management plans (e.g., land-use, stormwater, nutrients), stakeholder needs assessments (e.g., Coastal States Organization), regional action plans (e.g., climate change), and regulatory agency strategic plans all call for both technical information and improved methods to engage people and managers in using that information to restore impaired waters and adapt for future needs. This is especially true when choices about land use, waste management, and transportation must balance local

fiscal realities against needs to reduce nitrogen loadings, upgrade drainage systems for anticipated climate change (e.g., precipitation and sea-level changes), and accommodate increasing populations.

Our objective in the Café will be to consider the interface between people, technical knowledge, and environmental decisions and to discuss specific needs and practical tools (such as case studies, best practices, strategies, and best process templates) that will increase the capacity, capability, and motivation for decision-makers at all scales to make choices that support resiliency and sustainable practices. Participants are encouraged to bring examples of successes and challenges to this facilitated discussion, share their priorities, and take home strategies and tools that can assist in decision-making within estuarine watersheds.

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