

THE HUMAN DIMENSION IN WATERWAY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: THE FLORIDA PERSPECTIVE

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Managing waterways and waterfronts is a challenge that confronts coastal communities. In Florida, as in other U.S. states, recreational boating, a key element of the coastal lifestyle and economy, is an important part of that challenge. In 2007, the nearly one million recreational vessels that were registered in Florida exceeded the number registered in any other state. As Florida's once pristine bay, estuarine, and river systems are transformed into "urban seas," complicating factors arise, such as damage to fragile seagrass meadows, vessel collisions with manatees, increased congestion and conflict between waterway users, and more frequent boating accidents and related fatalities. This situation creates a compelling need for management and planning strategies based on reliable and current information *and* professionals with increased knowledge and experience in participatory and collaborative approaches to resource management. This panel session comprises four presentations that focus on integrating human dimensions research, outreach, and training pertaining to waterway resource management.

Spatial and temporal information on water use patterns is an important input to management decisions and policymaking. However, the currency, accuracy, coverage, and completeness of water-based data are significantly less than that available for land-based research. Cost is also a key consideration in government decision-making processes. Research will be presented that ascertained the reliability and utility of a state vessel registration database as a source of information for mapping boat locations and their characteristics.

Increases in boating-related conflicts and accidents led to numerous requests from the public and waterfront businesses for the imposition and enforcement of boating safety speed zones within intra-coastal waterways. A decision-support framework that incorporated a GIS-based risk analysis was developed and implemented to assist the state evaluate the establishment of boating safety zones, pursuant to the Florida Administrative Code 68-D-23.105. The risk analysis uses GIS 'linear-referencing' functionality, geospatial data compiled from multiple government agencies, survey data from subject matter experts, and public input from participatory workshops. The outcome was a numeric weighting and ranking of waterway segments according to perceived risk to

boating safety. The risk analysis guides the establishment of new and the revision of existing boating regulatory zones.

The National Sea Grant program in its 2009 – 2013 strategic plan identified decision-making processes that “build consensus around complex issues” as an important crosscutting goal. To that end, an advanced training program is being developed and implemented to build coastal resource planning capacity in Florida communities. The training is innovative in that it increases leadership capacity through participatory, collaborative approaches that participants learn within the context of a practical (real world) application. Training outcomes include outputs that are directly transferable to local stakeholders and professionals who are skilled in techniques such as public participatory approaches, group facilitation, and consensus building. Long-term benefits include strengthened public input and consensus-building capacity in coastal communities through the transfer of leadership and decision-making processes and skills to professionals and interested stakeholders, within the context of a practical application. The training framework and design will be presented and outputs, successes, and challenges will be reported.

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