

Cleveland State University



Maxine Goodman Levin
College of Urban Affairs

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An Assessment of the Coastal Training Program Needs of the ANERR Region



The Ohio Urban University Program

2121 Euclid Avenue Cleveland, Ohio 44115

<http://urban.csuohio.edu>

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of the ANERR Region***

The contributors and project staff within the Great Lakes Environmental Finance Center (GLEFC) and the Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University involved in this project were Kevin O'Brien, Executive Director; Claudette Robey, Assistant Director; Kirstin Toth, Project Manager; Michael Tevesz, Ph.D., Professor and Research Fellow; Daniel Baracsckay, Ph.D., Research Associate; Michael McGoun, Research Assistant; Vivian Tucker, Office Coordinator; and John Storey, Sarah Hudecek, Rebecca Salak, and Matthew Sattler, Graduate Assistants. Any questions regarding this report should be directed to The Great Lakes Environmental Finance Center, (216) 687-2188.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A series of focus groups were conducted throughout northwest Florida to obtain input from coastal decision-makers into the design and development of a coastal resources management training program for the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve (ANERR). The focus groups were comprised of a cross section of coastal and environmental professionals who make decisions affecting coastal and watershed areas. The focus group decision-makers were primarily employed in the public sector (federal, state, local, governmental, nonprofit, or academic), with nearly half of the participants having between six and 15 years of professional experience.

Discussions within the focus groups centered on responses to questions concerning the current state of knowledge, training experiences, and training needs. The dialogue among participants focused on the quality and structure of the training environment, the content of training desired by decision-makers, and the types of information needed to assist decision-makers in their professions.

A top issue of concern that coastal decision-makers felt should be addressed through coastal resources management training venues is water quantity and quality. Additional topics that decision-makers indicated should be considered for training are sustainable economic and coastal development, land use planning, growth and economic development issues, shore erosion protection/management, and conservation lands management/acquisition.

The decision-makers identified issues emerging in the field of coastal resources management for which they desired training. In addition to land use planning, the primary emerging issues are land management and acquisition, growth and economic development, shoreline development/recreation, and development versus preservation.

The focus group decision-makers have received training within the past year on a variety of topics, including mitigation strategies for flood control and environmental issues, natural disasters, Master Naturalist Program, wetlands/sea grass, water quality and management, managing growth and development, and beach nourishment and restoration. Multiple modes of delivery were utilized to deliver these forms of training.

While the participants viewed their training experiences as opportunities for keeping up-to-date on information relative to their profession, they indicated that training sessions, at times, did not meet their expectations. The participants viewed one-on-one discussions targeted to smaller audiences as their most favorable training experiences. Shorter training sessions involving group interaction and hands-on activities were

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considered the best scenarios for training.

Impediments to training most commonly expressed by focus group decision-makers are budgets and costs, and scheduling and location. Due to limited budgets and resources, participants are concerned about the costs to attend training sessions. As such, the location of the training event becomes a factor in determining the degree to which these decision-makers participate – the farther the distance, the more costly the training event, and the more difficult it becomes to take time from their work schedule to attend. Many of these employers have limited coastal resources management staff, thus further inhibiting participation in training events. There is an overarching concern among these decision-makers as to who will conduct and implement this type of training, due to the fact that there are too few experienced staff in this field.

The focus group professionals felt that there is a strong need for training in the field of coastal resources management. The participants stressed that a variety of audiences need to be educated on issues, options, consequences, and impacts at all levels. The general public, consumers and users of recreational services, tourists, contractors, home and property owners, and developers were some of the audiences cited by decision-makers as needing to be educated on coastal resources management activities.

Educating the general public was a top concern for coastal decision-makers. The participants felt that the public should receive training on the link between the sustainable environment and quality of life situations. The public should also be informed of the resources available to them for questions concerning coastal resources management topics and issues.

Coastal decision-makers desire access to coastal resources management information and research, particularly examples of best management practices and case studies that they can apply to their local situations. A repository of knowledge from which these decision-makers and training providers could obtain information is considered necessary to these professionals. The participants suggested that better coordination, marketing, and dissemination of training materials and information would improve the overall coastal resources management training environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The Great Lakes Environmental Finance Center (GLEFC) was engaged by the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve (ANERR) to conduct a needs assessment to evaluate the training needs and skill requirements of coastal decision-makers as part of the development of the ANERR's coastal training program (CTP). The needs assessment is the second phase of the CTP development process to identify and assess coastal resources management training needs in the ANERR region.

The primary mission of the ANERR's CTP focuses on providing coastal decision-makers within the Apalachicola Bay watershed and adjacent watersheds in the region, with the science-based information and skills that will enable them to increase understanding of the environmental, social, and economic consequences of human activities and decisions on coastal ecosystems. This is achieved through education and training, which provides information and resources to various stakeholders throughout the Reserve's communities. The ANERR is currently developing a coastal training program for coastal decision-makers and policy-makers that would provide comprehensive, science-based training on managing coastal environmental and policy issues. The ANERR seeks to develop training activities that build upon the existing capacity of the Reserve's training initiatives and collaborations. The coastal training program will be designed to assist coastal decision-makers and policy-makers in developing the skills that are needed to make and implement better-informed decisions about how to use, manage, and protect the important coastal resources.

The GLEFC conducted a series of four focus groups across the ANERR region. The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain input from coastal decision-makers into the design and development of a comprehensive coastal resources management training program for the ANERR. The objective of the focus groups was to convene a forum of coastal decision-makers to measure their perceptions and receive input as to their "needs and wants" regarding coastal training information, and how they want that information delivered. The focus group participants included professionals who make decisions regarding coastal and environmental policy issues. These participants were comprised of decision-makers who were previous and potential users of coastal resources management training, as well as those who currently provide this type of training.

This report relates the issues identified by and the discussions resulting from the focus group participants. The report is organized into six sections, which are described below:

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1. **Executive Summary** – The Executive Summary consolidates the overall findings and relates these findings in summary format.
2. **Introduction** – The Introduction discusses the purpose of the ANERR needs assessment report provides definitions of terms, and an explanation of the geographic scope of the project.
3. **Methodology** – The Methodology section describes the approaches and processes applied by the GLEFC in development and delivery of the needs assessment.
4. **Profile of Focus Group Participants** – This section of the report discusses the results of the questionnaire completed by focus group participants prior to each session.
5. **Focus Group Dialogue** – This section of the report includes the discussions and results of the focus group sessions of coastal decision-makers conducted throughout the ANERR region.
6. **Appendices** – The report contains __ appendices that were used to detail the development and facilitation of the focus group process.

Certain terms are defined as a basis for the focus group process and for consistency throughout the needs assessment process. These terms are:

1. **Coastal Resources Management** – Coastal Resources Management is defined as the overall practice of coastal decision-makers to make and implement informed decisions affecting the human, economic, function, geography, and health of coastal ecosystems and coastal resources.
2. **Coastal Decision-maker** – An individual who makes decisions regarding coastal resources on a regular basis in a professional or volunteer capacity. Coastal decision-makers include elected officials, land use planners, regulatory personnel, coastal managers, agricultural and fisheries interests, volunteer boards, contractors, consultants, nonprofit agencies and organizations, and others.
3. **Training** – Training includes instruction and learning experiences that expand the understanding of coastal decision-makers and allow them to better understand the context of Coastal Resources Management. Training enhances the base of knowledge and skills of coastal decision-makers by allowing them to interact with experts in the field while networking with other professionals well versed on coastal management issues and tools.

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4. **Course** – A non-degree seeking program, formal or non-formal, that may include special information days for elected officials, seminars, workshops, and other formats, which may or may not provide certification or credit.

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METHODOLOGY

A needs assessment of coastal decision-makers was conducted to determine the perceptible needs of those participating in coastal training courses. The focus groups were held to convene a cross-sectional representation of individuals engaged in coastal and environmental decision-making activities in an effort to identify the types of scientific and technical training needed to make informed decisions on coastal matters. The focus groups also helped to define the approach, format, and delivery of coastal resources management training desired by decision-makers.

The focus groups were held in four separate locations in northwest Florida. The locations of the focus groups were identified from within the ANERR geographic study area. These 16 counties were used as a geographic base because of their geographical relationship to the Apalachicola River, watershed, and the Florida coast. The geographic study area for the needs assessment included 16 counties within the ANERR region:

- Bay County
- Calhoun County
- Citrus County
- Dixie County
- Franklin County
- Gadsden County
- Gilchrist County
- Gulf County
- Jackson County
- Jefferson County
- Lafayette County
- Leon County
- Levy County
- Liberty County
- Taylor County
- Wakulla County

The targeted focus group audiences were identified by the ANERR CTP coordinator and Steering Committee. These decision-makers consist of members of homeowner associations, boards and commissions, Chambers of Commerce, tourism development councils, economic and community development councils, and conservation groups; eco-tour and marina operators, planners, landscape business professionals, developers and realtors, and timber industry representatives and land managers. A database of 850 coastal decision-makers representative of the target audiences was determined by constructing a list based upon research and consultation with the ANERR CTP coordinator. This database served as the resource for potential participants for the focus groups. After several draft iterations in consultation with the ANERR, a final database of 402 focus group invitees was developed.

Each of the 402 focus group contacts in the database were contacted by

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telephone and invited to participate in the focus group sessions. A script was devised by the GLEFC for administering the telephone inquiries (see Appendix A). The contacts who expressed an interest in participating in the focus group sessions (yes or maybe) were emailed and/or faxed a formal letter of invitation (see Appendix B) that further explained the project and offered times, dates, and locations for the sessions. From this broader group, the GLEFC managed the responses from the invitees and developed an attendance list for each of the sessions.

To determine the focus group locations, the database of focus group contacts was sorted by city, with each city then being grouped into its respective county. A total number of focus group contacts were then identified by county. Four focus group location counties were identified based upon the best geographically accessible location for the focus group contacts. Specific focus group location cities within these four counties and focus group sites within each city were designated by the ANERR CTP coordinator. In some instances, these locations provided optional opportunities for those invitees unable to attend at another location. The final focus group locations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS	
Port St. Joe, FL, Gulf County	Focus group invitees from Bay, Calhoun, Liberty, Gulf, and Franklin counties
Tallahassee, FL, Leon County	Focus group invitees from Jackson, Gadsden, Leon, Wakulla, and Jefferson counties
Perry, FL, Taylor County	Focus group invitees from Taylor, Jefferson, Lafayette, and Dixie counties
Chiefland, FL, Levy County	Focus group invitees from Citrus, Levy, Dixie, and Gilchrist counties

The focus groups were designed for a cross-section of between eight and 14 participants invited from the database that was representative of the identified target audiences. The feedback generated from this setting provided a multi-disciplinary perspective of the training environment across the ANERR region.

The focus group sessions were 90 minutes in length. The GLEFC staff facilitated each focus group session using the same format and series of questions to ensure consistency and comparability across all groups. The comments of the focus group participants were recorded onto flip charts and other written notes to serve as a summary of each session. The flip chart comments and notes were used to assemble the data and information from the sessions.

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Information in the focus group sessions was obtained through a structured discussion format to identify the issues and areas of concern that need to be addressed through coastal resources management training. A single facilitator conducted each of the four sessions, with a total of 31 individuals participating (for all focus groups).

The GLEFC designed a script of questions to serve as protocol for conducting each focus group session (see Appendix C). The questions were designed to obtain information on the current state of knowledge and training participation, and the information and knowledge needs of the participants. A questionnaire (see Appendix D) was also designed by the GLEFC to obtain professional information on the focus group participants. The questionnaire contained a section asking the participants to rank in order of priority the topics they perceived as needing to be addressed through coastal resources management training sessions. This questionnaire was distributed prior to the commencement of each focus group session, and collected at the conclusion of each session.

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PROFILE OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

The focus group participants were asked to complete an information questionnaire prior to the beginning of each session seeking professional background information. The rationale for this instrument was to confirm the organization and professional experience of the participant, and to serve as a source of information on their training needs relative to their professional and volunteer activities. The summary of frequencies provides a snapshot of the relative importance participants attach to training concerning a range of topics. The questionnaire (see Appendix D) asked for the contact information of the participant, the name and type of organization (public or private), and the number of years in their profession or public service. These data were used to establish a profile of the focus group participants.

The individuals participating in the focus group sessions represent a cross-section of multi-disciplinary professions across the ANERR region. Professions and expertise represented through the focus group participants include those of conservationist/ecologist, wastewater treatment plant operator, extension agent, planner, biologist, building inspector and code administrator, municipal official and staff, environmental specialist, tourism promoter, grants coordinator, trade association member, development director, and the media (see Appendix E).

The questionnaire asked participants to identify and rank the top 10 issues or topics they perceived as needing to be addressed through a coastal resources management training program. Participants were asked to rank their 10 selections in order of priority, with number one being a top priority for training. Not all of the participants ranked their topics in order of priority, but the participants did select 10 topics from the list. Therefore, the results for the topics are displayed as those most frequently indicated by the participants rather than by priority. The topics listed on the questionnaire are the same topics listed on question nine of the Market Analysis survey. These topics are:

- Agricultural uses (plans & livestock)
- Aquaculture
- Artificial reefs
- Beach nourishment/sand availability
- Beach health
- Biodiversity
- Boating
- Boating pump out
- Boating safety
- Brownfields redevelopment
- Clean Vessel Act & issues
- Coastal building codes
- Coastal hazards & emergency management
- Coastal parks & natural areas

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- Coastal protection regulation
- Coastal wetlands
- Commercial fishing
- Compliance & enforcement
- Conservation lands management/acquisition
- Cultural & historic resources
- Dredging & dredge disposal
- Endangered & threatened species
- Environmental regulations
- Environmental technology
- Estuaries
- Fisheries, fisheries management
- Global climate change
- Green practices (building, landscape, lodging)
- Growth & economic development issues
- Habitat restoration
- Heritage tourism
- Home septic systems
- Invasive species
- Land use planning
- Marinas
- Maritime/science museums
- Monitoring
- Nature-based tourism
- Oil & gas drilling/Mineral extraction
- Organizational development
- (funding, leadership, conflict management, etc.)
- Population shifts/Demographic changes
- Port facilities
- Protection of agricultural land
- Public access to shoreline
- Recreational fishing
- Riparian corridors
- Sewage outfalls/combined sewer overflow
- Shipping & shipping activities
- Shore erosion protection/management
- Shore (line) erosion causes
- Siltation management
- Surface water quality/non-point source pollution
- Sustainable economic & coastal development
- Sustaining estuarine ecosystems
- Toxic organisms
- Wastewater treatment methods
- Watershed planning
- Water levels & diversions
- Water quantity & quality
- Wildlife management
- Zoning
- Other (write in)

Participant Background

Organization

The majority of the focus group participants were from public organizations. Eighty-one percent of the focus group participants identified themselves as public sector employees (federal, state, local, governmental, nonprofit, or academic). The remaining 13 percent indicated that they are employed within the private sector, such as private academic institutions, private nonprofits, or private companies and businesses (see

Figure #1).

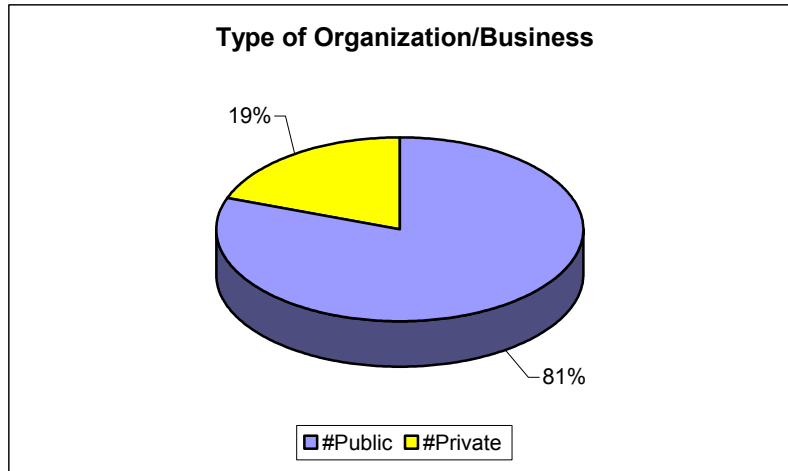


Figure #1

Length of Professional Experience

Slightly more than one-third of the focus group participants indicated that they have five years or less experience in their current professions (34 percent). Forty-two percent of the participants have between six and 15 years professional experience, while 24 percent of the participants indicated professional experience beyond 15 years (Figure #2). This is an appropriate cross-sectional mixture of professional experience, making the findings a strong representation of the coastal resources management profession. It is important to note that too many from one category of experience may have biased the responses from the participants.

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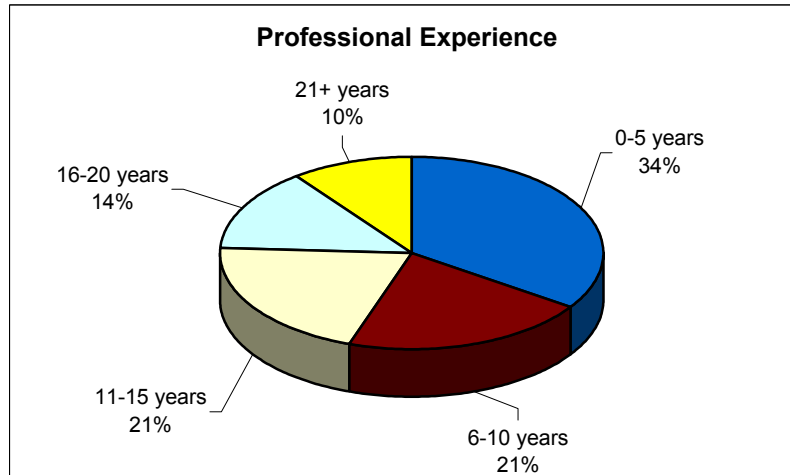


Figure #2

Topics and Issues

The focus group participants were asked to rank the issues and topics they considered priorities for coastal resources management training venues. Not all participants ranked the topics in order of priority; therefore, the results are presented as those most frequently selected by the participants (in terms of percentages of the total). The responses are discussed overall, and broken down by public and private sector employee responses.

The participants (20 percent) indicated that water quantity and quality is the top issue that should be addressed through coastal resources management training courses. Three topics noted by participants as necessary training topics are sustainable economic and coastal development (18 percent), land use planning (18 percent), and growth and economic development issues (18 percent). The topics of shore erosion protection/management (13 percent) and conservation lands management/acquisition (13 percent) were also indicated as important issues by focus group participants (see Figure #3).

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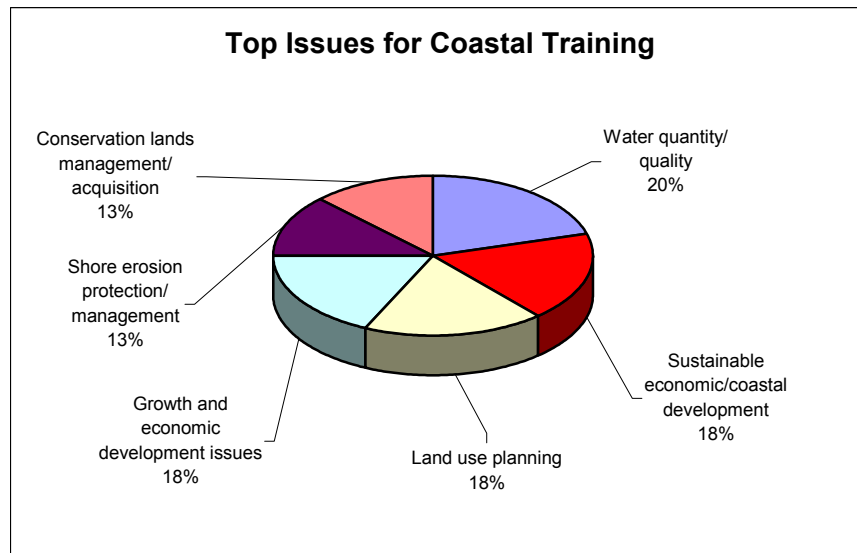


Figure #3

Topics less frequently noted by participants were environmental regulations, coastal hazards/emergency management, nature based tourism, surface water quality/non-point source pollution, aquaculture, biodiversity, coastal protection regulation, dredging and dredge disposal, endangered and threatened species, habitat restoration, sustaining estuarine ecosystems, and watershed planning.

The focus group participants were offered the opportunity to list “other” topics that they perceived of as needing to be addressed through coastal resources management training. Responses to the “other” category were storm water runoff and coastal dynamics (natural successional changes).

When viewed by type of organization (public versus private), the responses by those employed in the public sector are similar overall within this group but differ from those from the private sector. It should be noted that the overall number of individuals employed in the public sector (25) was substantially greater than the overall number of private sector employees (six).

The focus group participants employed in the public sector noted water quantity and quality as the major topic (25 percent) needing to be addressed through coastal resources management courses. The topic areas of growth and economic development issues (21 percent) and land use planning (21 percent) were also considered as needing to be addressed through coastal training programs. Issues of sustainable

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economic and coastal development (18 percent) and environmental regulations (15 percent) were also cited by focus group participants employed in the public sector (see Figure #4).

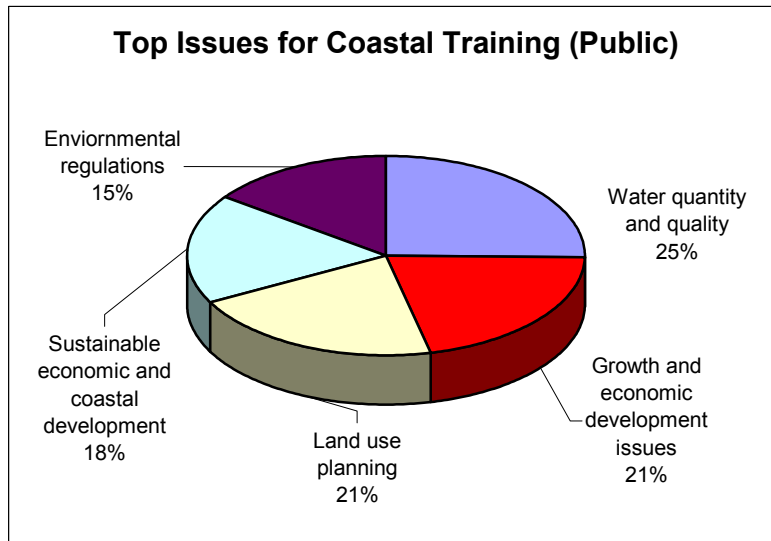


Figure #4

The focus group participants employed in the private sector considered three topics as issues needing to be addressed through coastal resources management training courses. Forty percent of the private sector participants indicated sustainable economic and coastal development as the major topic for training. Commercial fishing (30 percent) and biodiversity (30 percent) followed as topics to be covered through coastal resources management training (see Figure #5).

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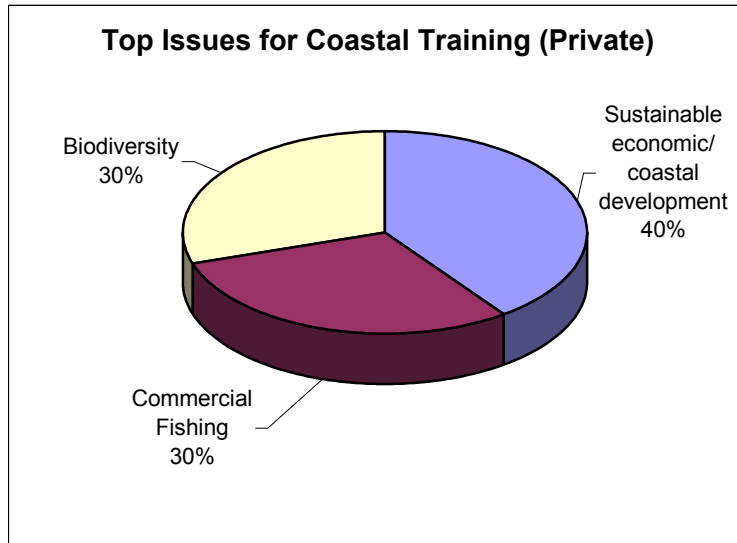


Figure #5

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FOCUS GROUP DIALOGUE

The coastal decision-makers participating in the focus group sessions represent a cross-section of multi-disciplinary professions within the ANERR region. These decision-makers are prior and potential users and providers of coastal resources management training. A coastal decision-maker is defined as an individual who makes decisions regarding coastal resources on a regular basis in a professional or volunteer capacity. Coastal decision-makers include elected officials, land use planners, regulatory personnel, coastal managers, agricultural and fisheries interests, volunteer boards, contractors, consultants, nonprofit agencies and organizations, and others.

Professionals involved in the coastal resources management arena are expected to formulate effective strategies and apply interdisciplinary approaches to solving problems and policy issues impacting the environments of coastal regions. Potential policy issues facing these individuals are loss of habitat, commercial fishing, pollution and the degradation of surface and ground water quality, coastal development activities, shoreline construction and erosion, and coastal hazards.

A broad spectrum of professional experience was evidenced across the focus groups. The participants were engaged in careers such as conservation/ecologist, wastewater treatment plant operator, extension agent, planner, biologist, building inspector and code administrator, municipal official and staff, environmental specialist, tourism promoter, grants coordinator, trade association member, development director, and the media. The majority of the focus group participants were employed in the public sector (federal, state, local, governmental, nonprofit, or academic). Nearly half of the participants have between six and 15 years of professional experience.

Information for the focus group session was sought in a structured yet informal discussion format to identify the types of training courses needed by decision-makers. This type of format helps to uncover information that would lead to an improvement in the quality of course work that would best meet the needs of coastal decision-makers.

The focus group participants were asked questions that would elicit information on the current state of knowledge, training experiences, and training needs. Discussion topics centered on the quality and structure of the training environment, the content of training desired, and the types of information participants needed to assist them in their professions.

Current Knowledge and Training Experience

Training Experiences

The decision-makers attending the focus groups have participated in a variety of training venues within the past year. The majority of these training venues are coastal resources management related courses, while others are safety courses (defensive driving, first aid) and technical training courses (Geographic Information Systems training). The common topical areas of training received by the decision-makers within the past year are:

- Mitigation strategies for flood control and environmental issues
- Natural disasters
- Master Naturalist Program
- Wetlands/sea grass issues
- Water quality and management
- Development and growth management
- Beach nourishment and restoration

The focus group participants learn of these training venues through in-person, electronic, and print modes of delivery. Personal information exchanges and presentations at professional conferences, meetings, business card exchanges and networking opportunities, friends and colleagues are also opportunities from which participants have learned of training activities. Printed media such as brochures, flyers, U.S. Mail, newsletters, and professional journals provide hard copy information on training courses using traditional mediums. Focus group participants also have accessed training opportunities through email, websites, electronic newsletters, email lists, and satellite conferences.

Necessity of Training

There were varying opinions from the focus group decision-makers as to the necessity of their participation in past training programs. The participants indicated that training sessions are opportunities for keeping current on events and obtaining knowledge within the profession. Conferences and seminars offer updates on state laws, mandated legislation, and policy changes, and afford opportunities to evaluate new products or programs. The training also serves as a professional development opportunity for learning new methods and approaches to the job.

The participants indicated that the best training experiences were small, one-on-

one discussions targeted to specific smaller audiences. According to the participants, some training instructors have difficulty in transferring academic knowledge into practice. Training venues that include demonstrations or “how-to’s” were helpful in communicating this knowledge.

While finding their training experiences helpful overall, the focus group participants stated that some of the training did not meet their expectations. The participants indicated that the expectations of the audiences, at times, differed from that of the trainers. Participants felt that training providers should try to get a sense of the needs of their audiences before conducting training. In some instances, the participants felt that the training experiences were not relevant to their profession. These decision-makers also indicated that some training courses were not well planned or well structured, thus they were only interested in portions of the agenda or course. Training providers, they said, should make every effort to market to the appropriate audience for the course being conducted.

Barriers to Training

Based upon the training experiences throughout their professional careers, the coastal decision-makers have observed what they consider to be barriers or impediments to training. The two common barriers identified by the focus group decision-makers were budgets and costs, and scheduling and location.

Training costs were a primary concern among the decision-makers. With limited budgets and resources, employers are restricting the number of individuals who can attend the training and the number of courses they are allowed to attend. The combined travel expenses for training sessions – meals, lodging, airfare, and other expenses – further inhibit participation in training programs. The participants indicated that employers are becoming selective in authorizing participation in training activities. In some cases, training activities are seen as “junkets” rather than as viable training for professional development. As such (and due to limited funding resources), employers must weigh the value of the training course against other operating and capital priorities.

The location of the training venue becomes a factor in determining the decision-makers’ level of participation in a training program. The farther the travel distance, according to the participants, the more costly it becomes to attend the event. Some training sites are located in cities that are more costly than others, thus increasing the travel expenses associated with the training venue. Farther distances also cause scheduling difficulties for participants. Limited coastal resources management staff resources inhibit time available to attend training venues. Coupled with limited funding resources, traveling longer distances to attend training sessions becomes less

appealing to decision-makers.

The Need for Coastal Resources Management Training

Despite the professed barriers to training, the focus group participants expressed a definite need for coastal resources management training in the ANERR region. Decision-makers felt that education was necessary on issues, options, consequences, and impacts at all levels. The participants indicated that coastal resources management staff appear to be well trained, but that those individuals and audiences the staff have contact with fail to understand the reasons for decisions and the science supporting these decisions. The decision-makers felt that training activities were needed with the general public to enable them to understand coastal resources management philosophies. Training is also needed for what they consider to be “hostile” audiences – those audiences and consumers with differing perceptions on environmental issues and concerns.

The participants expressed a need for education on environmental issues to general consumers and visitors. These consumers and users may not have a vested interest in the area, but their actions may have an impact on the coastal environment. Contractors, developers, and visitors to the area were cited as potential audiences in this instance.

The focus group participants felt that local communities, home and property owners, and the general public should be trained on coastal resources management related issues and impacts. Participants cited the White Trash Bash as an example. Rather than utilize the event as an opportunity for alcohol consumption and socializing, the Bash could be promoted as a local tourism event and training opportunities could be coordinated for home and property owners, environmentalists, developers, tourists, and the public. Involving and educating local officials was also expressed as a way to reach these audiences and enhance training efforts.

The decision-makers indicated a desire to borrow from successful best practices used in other areas, as well as a translation of these best practices into their local practices. They felt that training should be geared toward local needs and issues, as topical areas may be the same but situations differ by geography, ecology, and culture.

The focus group participants also expressed concern as to who will conduct the training and to the wide variety of audiences needing education on coastal resources management issues. The participants stated that currently there are too few experienced staff to address the issues and were concerned as to how these training activities would be implemented. These decision-makers suggested organizing small

groups of professionals or volunteers who felt a sense of ownership and enlisting these “stewards” to help manage training venues. The participants suggested that the ANERR staff could coordinate and manage these stewards and volunteers with regard to coastal resources management training activities.

Some additional audiences suggested by the participants as needing coastal resources management training are the military, the construction industry, inland citizens, small towns, and local commissioners.

Desired Information and Knowledge Needs

Knowledge Needs

The focus group participants were asked about the types of information and/or technical assistance that they feel is needed within their role as a coastal decision-maker, and why they feel that information is essential. The majority of their responses focused on the knowledge needs of the general public (as a target audience) on several aspects of coastal resources management efforts.

The decision-makers stated that coastal resources management significantly involves quality of life situations due to strong economic and community connections. With this thought in mind, the participants felt that training for the general public was needed on the concept that the economy is “not based upon the destruction of natural resources.” The coastal decision-makers stressed that the public should be encouraged to understand the linkages between the sustainable environment and their actions. They felt that the public should be educated on the “bigger picture” and longer time scale view of the impacts and consequences of their actions. Coastal resources management training providers should help the public to understand coastal dynamics (e.g., the natural successional changes of the coast), with the emphasis that the coast should remain “natural,” and, in the opinion of the participants, that there is a tendency to “over engineer.”

The general public should also be informed of whom to contact as a resource for knowledge on coastal resources management questions and issues. The participants felt the public should understand where to go for information on environmental and coastal issues of concern.

The focus group participants felt that most audiences have little or no basic knowledge on the “science” of coastal resources management. They felt that the

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scientific aspects of coastal resources management could possibly be better conveyed by demonstrating the impacts and linkages between land use, ground water, the habitat, drinking water (what gets in and gets to the water) and its uses, and other environmental concerns. Training for the target audiences should also include non-technical explanations of various coastal resources management topics, and explanations of environmental organizations and their functions.

Decision-makers are concerned with establishing and having access to coastal resources management information for their own use and research. The participants indicated that a repository of resources should be available to decision-makers from which they can have access to expertise on coastal resources management topics. The focus group participants indicated that examples of best management practices and case studies would be helpful to their professions, and stated that these could be incorporated as part of their knowledge base.

Additional examples cited as basic knowledge needs for coastal decision-makers are:

- Stewardship values
- Growth and growth management (planning)
- How to deal with and resolve conflicts
- Habitat fragmentation and wholesale habitat destruction
- Erosion protection

The focus group participants indicated that decision-makers and training providers should educate all audiences on the importance of coastal resources management. The participants stated that there is a tendency (in the coastal resources management arena) to primarily react to issues and crisis level situations, with many individuals assuming that the issue or crisis is a “one time event.” The decision-makers emphasized that the field of coastal resources management is constant and that long-term planning and education is needed.

Access to Information

The decision-makers participating in the focus group sessions were asked how access to information on training and relevant coastal resources management training topics could be improved. Overall, the participants indicated that better coordination of the dissemination and marketing of training information, and educating through grass roots initiatives were effective methods to improving access to coastal and environmental training information.

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The participants indicated that better coordination and dissemination of training activities and information was needed for decision-makers and training providers. A concern of the participants was making sure that various audiences had access to training courses and information, and that training be as least costly as possible. One possible solution offered by participants was to conduct training online and market the availability of this training through organizational websites. For example, tourism websites could be utilized to market training activities and disseminate training information to visitors, as well as to educate visitors on the consequences and impacts of coastal and environmental situations. Training sessions could be converted to CD-ROM or user-friendly formats (web, video, etc.) to enable easier access, especially across long distances.

The participants felt that training could be made easily accessible by coordinating transportation to and from training sites (bus, carpool, shuttle), and by conducting mobile training sessions at various locations. Training providers felt that “taking the training to the student” would ease time constraints and scheduling problems, as well as decrease costs to the audiences.

The focus group participants proposed involving children and parents in the education process at the grass roots level. The decision-makers felt it was important to reach out to younger audiences in an effort to stem pre-disposed concepts of coastal and environmental concerns. They felt that parents could help to educate their children through the convenience of web-based training activities. The parents and general public could participate in public forums and focus groups on coastal and environmental issues relative to their localities in an effort to inform and educate them on coastal resources management issues.

Additional methods brought forth by the focus group participants for improved access to coastal resources management training events and information included utilizing non-traditional partners to convey and market information (bank mailings, Chambers of Commerce, visitor centers, etc.), and marketing information through organizational memberships, community colleges and educational institutions, and the local media.

Training Settings

The focus group participants were asked to identify what they perceive as the best settings for experiencing training, such as training facilities, locations, frequency, duration, and timing of sessions. The majority of the responses from the focus groups indicated that shorter training sessions involving group interaction and hands-on activities were the best scenarios for training.

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The participants indicated that small, short-timed, sequential training sessions extended over periods of time provided the best settings for conducting coastal resources management training activities. Delivering training to mobile sites and local locations were also recommendations for convenient training scenarios.

The participants stated that they preferred interactive training environments to lecture methods. The decision-makers indicated that peer-to-peer networking opportunities and group interaction should be components to training delivery. Training sessions involving a combination of classroom and “dirty” training (lab and field activities) are preferred delivery mechanisms. The decision-makers also expressed a desire for face-to-face contact with consumers or users (fishermen, real estate agents, etc.), such as through focus group situations, within training sessions.

Potential Topical Areas for Training

The focus group decision-makers discussed what they perceived as issues emerging in the field of coastal resources management for which they desired training. The overall emerging topical area was growth and land management issues. The participants cited a variety of issues for which they would like training, particularly:

- Land management and acquisition
- Growth and economic development
- Shoreline development/recreation
- Land use planning
- Development versus preservation

Additional issues perceived by the focus group participants as areas for training include erosion control, stormwater runoff, public access to the shoreline, coastal parks and natural areas, hunting and fishing regulations and limitations, surface water quality, nonpoint source pollution and options for the agricultural community, environmental requisitions, sustainability and natural resources versus human needs, watershed planning, and coastal protection regulation.

APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Telephone Script to Obtain Focus Group Participants
- Appendix B: Letter to Focus Group Invitees
- Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol
- Appendix D: Questionnaire for Focus Group Participants
- Appendix E: Professions of Focus Group Participants

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Appendix A: Telephone Script to Obtain Focus Group Participants

Hi, I'm _____ calling on behalf of the Apalachicola Research Reserve. The Reserve is developing a coastal training program for coastal decision-makers and would like your help in identifying strategies for strengthening coastal training opportunities in and across the Florida Panhandle, Northwest and North Central Florida.

The Reserve will be hosting focus group sessions in your area, and would like you to be part of one of these sessions. The purpose of the focus groups is to help to evaluate what coastal management resources exist, what is needed, and how these resources can be strengthened. The session will last for 90 minutes. You will have an opportunity to be part of a broad group of planners, board members and commissioners, developers and realtors, marina operators, economic and community development professionals, conservationists, landscape business people, eco-tour operators, and homeowner representatives from a multi-county area.

Would you be available to participate in one of the focus group sessions? To provide you with the best opportunity to participate, we are offering four sessions from Monday, July 26 through Wednesday, July 28th. *(You can list out the sessions for them here or explain that you will send them a letter with the schedule and details).*

We would like you to confirm your attendance at one of the sessions. We will be sending you a letter providing some background on this initiative, the focus group schedule, and details. Please RSVP your attendance as soon as possible.

Thanks for your time.

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Appendix B: Letter to Focus Group Invitees



This project is supported by the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration

The Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve (ANERR) is located in the Florida panhandle within the 19,600-square-mile Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Watershed. The Reserve is currently working to expand and improve its coastal training program for coastal decision-makers. Because many of our important coastal resources are shared throughout the region, our training program aims to serve the needs of decision makers not only within the Apalachicola watershed, but also in adjacent coastal areas of the Big Bend and eastern Panhandle.

We are inviting you to participate in a focus group that will help us improve coastal training across the coastal watersheds of the Apalachicola River, Big Bend and eastern Panhandle. We would like to obtain information from you on existing knowledge and skills, as well as the priority topics, formats, and delivery methods that will best serve your needs. We also want to hear about your preferences for receiving coastal resource management information, training products, and services. Our goal is to provide the best available science-based information through the most effective methods, so that decision makers can make informed and beneficial choices about the management our coastal resources. Your perspective and ideas are particularly important to us.

Coastal decision-makers are defined as professionals or volunteers who make decisions on a regular basis that may directly or indirectly affect coastal resources. They may include appointed and/or elected officials, local and state environmental agency staff, land managers, business representatives, nonprofit organizations, consultants, nature-based tourism providers, and other stakeholders.

We will be gathering information from decision makers, such as you, to assist us in updating and improving our training programs. As part of this initiative, we have contracted with the Great Lakes Environmental Finance Center (GLEFC) at Cleveland State University to conduct focus groups that will help identify the training needs and skill requirements of coastal decision-makers in our region. Representatives from GLEFC may have already contacted you during their assessment of training providers for our region. Your participation in this effort to gather additional information about training needs would be greatly appreciated.

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The GLEFC will be conducting focus groups at various locations, and we are asking for your participation as a coastal decision-maker. The focus groups are 90-minute sessions. To provide you with the best opportunity to participate, we are offering four sessions from which to choose:

Monday, July 26, 2:30 p.m. till 4:00 p.m. at the Senior Citizens and Community Center, 120 Liberty Drive, Port St. Joe, FL

Tuesday, July 27, 9:30 a.m. till 11:00 a.m. at the Chiefland City Hall Commission Room, 214 East Park Avenue, Chiefland, FL

Tuesday, July 27, 2:00 p.m. till 3:30 p.m. at the Perry Extension Office, 203 Forest Park Drive, Perry, FL

Wednesday, July 28, 9:30 a.m. till 11:00 a.m. at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Douglas Building, 3900 Commonwealth Blvd., Conference Room B (just inside the main entrance), Tallahassee, FL

Please choose the session most convenient to you, and confirm your participation in this focus group to the GLEFC at crobey@urban.csuohio or by calling the GLEFC, at (216) 687-2188 no later than Friday, July 23rd. If you have any questions about the focus group sessions, please contact Claudette Robey at (216) 687-2188, or via email at crobey@urban.csuohio.edu.

Thank you for your help! We really value your participation and perspectives. Your input will go a long way to help us plan for future training for coastal decision makers.

Sincerely,

Rosalyn Kilcollins
Coastal Training Program Coordinator
Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve

Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol

Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve Focus Group Protocol July 26-28, 2004

Facilitator: Thank you for participating today. The purpose of this focus group is to determine the type of training that coastal decision-makers (like you) need in order to best do your jobs. We will explore various types of training requested, the content, how the training should be provided, and other preferences you may have about various aspects of learning for coastal decision-makers.

The focus group will last no more than one-and-a-half hours, and I am counting on everyone's participation. You were asked to join this group as a coastal decision – maker, or a provider of training to coastal decision-makers; let's define what "coastal decision-maker" means. A coastal decision-maker, for our purposes, is anyone in the local realm: [which includes] public and elected officials who are making decisions that may directly or indirectly affect watershed or coastal areas; and, anyone who is in the natural resources management professions that also has a coastal, river or other watershed aspect to their work. This would include both working professionals as well as active volunteers.

Let's begin by briefly discussing your position, and if coastal or related water issues are a major area of your work, or a secondary function in your role.... [round-robin each participant; also ask the providers if they consider themselves CDM based upon our definition]

Assessment Categories: Current State of Knowledge & Training Participation

1. What are the types of training sessions that you have attended in the past year, specifically, the topics?

Provider: What types of training have you offered? [List all on flipchart, and identify how many participants attended each kind of training. Identify those who have not attended and call on them to discuss why they have not attended.] For provider, What percentage of your time is devoted to training versus other responsibilities?

2. How did you learn about the training session, and why did you attend?

[such as for acquiring new skills, CEU credits, general info, etc.] For those that may have not attended any training, what barriers are there in attending training sessions- time, frequency, location, cost? For providers, how many would you say you provided, and were they to coastal decision-makers?

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3. **Would you say that that training experience was necessary to your job, as in ongoing training necessary to your specific job responsibilities?**
Describe for me the reason you attended and if you felt the training was useful or not. Were you required to? Did you ask to attend a specific session, and for what reason? What outcomes did you receive from attending training: continuing education credit, certification, academic degree, professional development, personal development...? (Pre-select some individual and call on them to get discussion started.) For the provider, *why* did you offer/what purpose did the training serve?
4. **If the training was not helpful, expand upon why not.** What were the factors that made it not useful to your job. [Significant weaknesses and impediments]
5. **From the other training session that you've attended, do you feel that there is a need for Coastal Resources Management Training in the ANERR region?**
6. **Who is NOT being reached by this type of training?** Who are the coastal decision makers that you know of that should receive CRM-related training? [Goal here is to identify the overall market we're missing; could be the people not in attendance at focus group- or maybe not.]

Assessment Category: Information/Knowledge Needs

Let's now discuss those training issues that can make a difference for you in your work:

7. **Is there a core base of knowledge that all coastal decision-makers should have?** What types (**content**) of information and/or technical assistance do you feel is needed and why? [seeking a dialogue of how people are getting their information now and where we can improve upon outreach to these people with information on what they need.]
8. **Are these needs being met currently; if so, how and by whom?** If not, can you identify who should provide the training you need/type of organization that would-should provide training? [goal is to gather perceptions and assess gaps in current and desired knowledge]
9. **How could access to information [about training and relevant topics] be improved?** For instance, not all public entities have adequate or significant access to the web or email; so, what would be the best ways to receive

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information- training and/or alternatives.

10. **What is the best setting for training?** Lecture room, local facility, at your office, in the field, electronic? How far are you willing to travel? What is the optimal length of time for a session?
11. **What topical areas do you perceive will be most vital in knowledge needs for the future?** What are emerging issues for you in your work that you would like training about?
12. **CLOSING:** Well, we've gained a lot of information today; thank you very much for taking the time to help us today. **Are there any closing remarks you'd like to add?**

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Appendix D: Questionnaire for Focus Group Participants



**Coastal Resources Management Training Needs Assessment
Questionnaire for Focus Group Participants**

Name _____	
Title _____	
Organization _____	
Type of Organization/Business (please check one):	
<input type="checkbox"/> Public (federal, state, local, governmental, nonprofit, academic)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Private (private academic, company/business, nonprofit)	
Mailing Address _____	

City, State, Zip _____	
Telephone _____	Fax _____
Email _____	
Number of Years in Current Profession/Service _____	

Please select what you consider to be the 10 top areas needing to be addressed through coastal resources management training programs. Also, please rank these in order of priority from 1 to 10, with 1 being a top priority training area, 2 being the second priority training area, and so forth. **Note: Topics are continued on back of page.**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural uses (plans & livestock) | <input type="checkbox"/> Brownfields redevelopment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aquaculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean Vessel Act & issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Artificial reefs | <input type="checkbox"/> Coastal building codes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beach nourishment/sand availability | <input type="checkbox"/> Coastal hazards & emergency management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beach health | <input type="checkbox"/> Coastal parks & natural areas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity | <input type="checkbox"/> Coastal protection regulation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boating | <input type="checkbox"/> Coastal wetlands |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boating pump out | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial fishing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boating safety | <input type="checkbox"/> Compliance & enforcement |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation lands |

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- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> management/acquisition | <input type="checkbox"/> Population shifts/Demographic changes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural & historic resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Port facilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dredging & dredge disposal | <input type="checkbox"/> Protection of agricultural land |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Endangered & threatened species | <input type="checkbox"/> Public access to shoreline |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental regulations | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational fishing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental technology | <input type="checkbox"/> Riparian corridors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Estuaries | <input type="checkbox"/> Sewage outfalls/combined sewer overflow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fisheries, fisheries management | <input type="checkbox"/> Shipping & shipping activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Global climate change | <input type="checkbox"/> Shore erosion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Green practices (building, landscape, lodging) | <input type="checkbox"/> protection/management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Growth & economic development issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Shore(line) erosion causes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Habitat restoration | <input type="checkbox"/> Siltation management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heritage tourism | <input type="checkbox"/> Surface water quality/non-point source pollution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home septic systems | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainable economic & coastal development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Invasive species | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining estuarine ecosystems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Land use planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Toxic organisms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marinas | <input type="checkbox"/> Wastewater treatment methods |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maritime/science museums | <input type="checkbox"/> Watershed planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring | <input type="checkbox"/> Water levels & diversions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nature-based tourism | <input type="checkbox"/> Water quantity & quality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oil & gas drilling/Mineral extraction | <input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational development (funding, leadership, conflict management, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Zoning |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (write in) |
-

Appendix E: Professions of Focus Group Participants

Public Sector Participants
Supervisor, Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District
Director of Economic Development, Taylor County Development Authority
Shellfish Extension Agent, University of Florida
County Planner, Levy County Planning Department
Building Inspector, Dixie County Building & Zoning Department
Building Code Administrator, Dixie County Building & Zoning Department
City Management, Cross City
Biologist, Suwannee River Water Management District
Planner, Gulf County Board of County Commissioners
Administrative Assistant, City of Port St. Joe
Mayor, Town of Altha
Communications and Development Director, Florida Conservation Alliance
Biological Scientist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
TMDL Basin Coordinator, NW Florida, DEP
Environmental Specialist, DEP
Professional Engineer II, FDEP
Environmental Specialist II, Florida Park Service District 1
Environmental Administrator, DEP
Ecologist & Coordinator of FL Gulf Coastal Program, US Fish and Wildlife
Environmental Supervisor, DEP
Grants Coordinator, Waterfronts FL Program Manager
Environmental Specialist II, FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Environmental Manager, DEP (Beaches)
Senior Planner, FL Department of Community Affairs
Outreach Coordinator, DEP
Private Sector Participants
Owner, Happy Ours Kayak and Canoe Outpost
Reporter, The Star
Volunteer Coordinator/Community Relations/Grants, The Nature Conservancy
Member, FL Trail Association
Vice President of Programs, Tallahassee Area Convention and Visitors Bureau
Associate Director of Protection, The Nature Conservancy

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