



# SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL OF SARASOTA COUNTY

## **2011 Watershed Workshop for Policymakers and Decision-Makers Consensus**

The Science and Environment Council of Sarasota County (SEC) developed its fifth series of workshops related to watersheds for policy and decision-makers. The two-part workshop took place in late October and early November 2011.

The workshops examined how science and policy have come together in the past, and should come together in the future to help preserve Sarasota Bay and its tributaries. This consensus document summarizes discussion, priorities, and proposed solutions. Workshop participants are invited to share this document with others.

### **Executive Summary**

Recommendations for action coming out of the discussion include:

- Educating the general public about the importance of watersheds in their life
- Highlighting the economic and social benefits of improving bays and watersheds so that individuals hear about the value of clean water throughout the watershed in terms of the way in which they enjoy or use the bay
- Encouraging people to take action and do something that helps to change behavior, for example: the NEST Program and the SBEP Bay Guardians Program
- Partnering and networking among state, county and city government, homeowner's associations, and businesses
- Creating a citizen scientist training program to harness the talents of retirees
- Explaining the value for natural systems in economic terms and tying economic opportunity to environmental programs
- Encouraging consumer education regarding choices and impacts
- Branding local bays and watersheds as strongly as beaches are branded

### **Summary of Part 1**

During the first workshop, participants heard from two speakers regarding how science and policy have both come together and how science has informed policy to improve the health of Sarasota Bay.

- Mark Alderson, Executive Director, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, presented an outline and history of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program created to improve the health of Sarasota Bay. It was through the efforts of scientists and policy makers that these plans were successfully implemented and positive changes were seen in the bay.
- Pat Glass, former County Commissioner, Manatee County, spoke about the necessity of continued efforts being applied to accomplishments. She also emphasized the



## SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL OF SARASOTA COUNTY

importance of starting at the grassroots, getting local people involved, and collaborative communication among individuals at all levels. Inclusiveness, cooperation, education, and valid research are key requirements for successful implementation of policies.

Following the presentations, workshop participants split into two groups to discuss the following questions,

*“Where are the disconnects between science and policy in managing bays and watersheds?”*

Main points:

- Short-term economic considerations are easier to document than long-term environmental considerations leading to short-term political decisions
- The community’s concerns should be addressed along with the environmental concerns (i.e. the environmental message can only be heard if the concerns of residents are addressed)
- Politicization of science, where the emotional issue overtakes the scientific i.e. climate change and fertilizer
- Practicality of solutions
- “Not in my backyard” frame of thinking
- There is a need to strive for simplicity in communication while addressing complex issues (environment, economic, and social) in holistic manner. An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.
- Communication between scientists, policymakers, and the community is critical:
  - Lack of communication between scientists and policy makers
  - Distinguish between real science and science presented by paid experts
  - Understand how the general public, who does not always understand the science, influences policy makers
  - Visual communication tools can help get the point across simply

*“What are effective tools for change for public and private agencies and organizations in managing bays and watersheds?”*

Main points:

- Tying economic opportunity to environmental programs
- Looking for synergistic opportunities to have win-win-win impacts
- Encouraging consumer education regarding choices and impacts
- Educating the general public about the importance of watersheds in their life
- Creating a value for natural systems and producing a coordinated marketing strategy
- Branding local bays and watersheds as strongly as beaches are branded



# SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL OF SARASOTA COUNTY

## Summary of Part 2

On the second day of the workshop, participants heard from two speakers how science and policy are currently working together to improve the health of Sarasota Bay. Two case studies provided specific examples of successes.

- Gary Comp, Associate, WilsonMiller Stantec, Technical Advisory Committee, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, gave a presentation about the challenges and successes regarding tidal creeks and storm water retrofits. He also made some recommendations for future accomplishments, such as workshops, coordinate development, and having the local government partner with scientists and implement land development regulations to meet water quality requirements.
- Nora Patterson, County Commissioner, Sarasota County, spoke about the difficulties policy makers face, especially concerning the public. The public may not support projects because it is an inconvenience to them, because they are ignorant about the issue, or because scientists are not involved in the discussion at the grassroots level.
- John Ryan, Environmental Supervisor, Sarasota County Government, Environmental Utility, presented a case study regarding pollution removal by grassy swales. The study found that swales, which mimic the natural environment, were significantly better at removing pollution and keeping it out of the bay, than traditional curb and gutter.
- Judy Ashton, Environmental Specialist, FDEP Southwest District, Restoration Division; and Benny Parrish, Manager, Cannons Marina presented a second case study regarding Florida's Clean Marina Program, a voluntary designation program working to encourage environmentally friendly marinas and boating practices.

Following the presentations, workshop participants split into two groups to discuss the following questions,

*"How do we effectively address the challenges before us?"*

Main points:

- Making time for communication, especially before the problem escalates, for example: holding monthly library presentation that describe the processes needed and explain science in terms understandable to the public
- Involving students and professors
- Providing flexible alternatives
- Encouraging early involvement in the development of plans and public discussions of actions
- Nurturing passion by maintaining relationships with community members who care and inspire action
- Realizing the importance of communicating science to non-scientific individuals
- Increasing social marketing and getting people to change their behavior in positive way



# SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL OF SARASOTA COUNTY

*“How do we encourage partnerships and collaborations to move forward?”*

Main points:

- Seeking out common threads and asking: where are those shared interests? What do we enjoy? How do we use the bay?
- Partnering among governments and the relationships between states, counties, cities, and homeowner’s associations, as well as the role of the business community in these partnerships
- Engaging people to do something and change their behavior with physical actions, for example: the NEST Program and the SBEP Bay Guardians Program
- Utilizing mentorships, either community or business related
- Networking with existing organizations
- Highlighting the economic and social benefits of improving bays and watersheds
- Providing a citizen scientist training program to harness the talents of retirees

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The Science and Environment Council of Sarasota County is a collaboration of nonprofit and government organizations that operate or support conservation and science-based facilities with environmental missions.

SEC’s mission is to promote and advocate science, conservation, and environmental issues.

This workshop was sponsored in part by the Manasota Basin Board of the Southwest Florida Water Management District