

Roundtable Discussion: "What Scientists and Managers Need From Each Other"

South Florida Restoration Science Forum

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(Excerpts from the edited transcript)

We have scientists and managers joined at the hip not doing too badly in a whole number of areas. I think I offer my remarks in context of a compliment at how many of the scientists stay at it and are as dedicated to the public purposes that the agencies are focused on as anyone. Scientists deserve high praise in that regard.

Scientists and managers definitely bring different expectations to the table when they communicate. They also bring different demands on the rest of their lives, and neither one of them wants to spend an extraordinary amount of time doing what is not principally what they do.

Scientists can no longer afford to produce the information and step away from it saying my job is done. They have to be there to make sure science is used appropriately. I think scientists can be asked to be better communicators.

The policymakers and the managers that we really want to make the link to are the busiest. I think if we can find a process to have that communication in a way that works for them, we might have some improvements.

The management culture is more 'I want the bottom line and I want it clear and concise so I can make a decision.' The scientist culture combines a great deal of uncertainty. It's a culture in which the uncertainty must be explored and quantified and in which the description of those uncertainties is every bit as important as the description of the bottom line.

The interpretation of uncertainty to a scientist can be dealt with because that's the process they work out. For the managers, it's a decision they will not proceed forward. There's a process we need to work on: How do we resolve that interpretation of uncertainty?

Have we identified what we need for 2020 in terms of science? Are we working toward that end and when we get there will we have a product that allows policymakers to make an appropriate decision because we developed the science or the information necessary?

If we are not visionaries and we simply synthesize what we know today, we'll be lacking in what we need to know tomorrow. We need to be looking to tomorrow in all of our discussions between scientists and managers.

The scientists on the roundtable discussion were:

Dr. Nick Aumen, Research Director
Ecosystem Restoration Department
South Florida Water Management District
[Dr. Aumen is no longer with the district.]

Dr. Brad Brown, Director
SE Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service
National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

Dr. Sarah Gerould, Director
Place-Based Science Programs
Geological Survey
U.S. Department of the Interior

Mr. Barry Glaz, Research Agronomist
Sugarcane Field Station
Agriculture Research Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Mr. Bob Johnson, Research Director
Everglades National Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Mr. John Ogden, Distinguished Senior Scientist
South Florida Water Management District

The managers on the roundtable discussion were:

Colonel Joe Miller, District Engineer
Jacksonville District
Corps of Engineers
U.S. Army (Civil Works)

Mr. Mike Slayton, Deputy Executive Director
South Florida Water Management District

Mr. Fred Rapach, Policy & Program Coordinator
Water Utilities Department
Palm Beach County

Mr. Dick Ring, Superintendent
Everglades National Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior