



# RESTORING THE ROOKERY BAY ESTUARY

*A PROJECT CONNECTING PEOPLE AND SCIENCE FOR LONG-TERM COMMUNITY BENEFIT*

**Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve**

## **ENHANCING AN ESTUARY-BASED COMMUNITY: FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO WATER MANAGEMENT IN FLORIDA'S ROOKERY BAY ESTUARY**

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# Introduction

- ▶ The project has encompassed two phases:
  - a) a systematic literature review
  - b) qualitative data collection and analysis involving stakeholder interviews
- ▶ Intended to inform the development and implementation of communication and engagement strategies to support the restoration of the Rookery Bay Estuary.

# Purpose of Case Study Research

- ▶ to understand attitudes and behaviors related to water usage among residents in the RBNERR watershed
- ▶ to explore community members' interest and experience in engaging in water-related decision-making in personal and professional contexts
- ▶ to describe community members' experiences of receiving and responding to information about water-related issues

# Themes

- ▶ Organized by these topics:
  - water-related attitudes and beliefs
  - water-related behaviors and decisions
  - perceptions and experiences of water management
  - receiving water-related information

*(see handout)*

**Participants highly value  
natural features of the  
local environment**

“I like going to the beach. I like the fact that we have Corkscrew Swamp so close, that we’ve got Rookery Bay, we’ve got scrub habitat.... There are opportunities to get out and enjoy nature here.” – conservation educator



**Participants perceive water  
to be a primary draw for  
the community**

- ▶ “What I like about it is obviously the weather, the beaches, the boating, the fishing, you know the same thing everybody else does. That’s what brings people down here.”
    - project manager; leadership program volunteer
  
  - ▶ “If we did not have relatively clean beaches and relatively healthy estuaries I think that would definitely make a difference on the number of people that would come here.”
    - county land use planner
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**Participants perceive  
tension between  
stakeholders**

- ▶ “I’m a capitalist and I understand people need to make money and farmers have to farm...but we’ve got to have a better balance and a better method than we have now as far as getting rid of that leftover residue from the farmers [upstream].” – realtor; HOA leader
  - ▶ “The environmentalists always think they are right one hundred percent, and the engineers we know we are right.” – engineer; member of county planning commission
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**Participants observe a lack  
of common ground  
between environmentalists  
and developers**

“People come out and they will protest some development or another then they will go back to their gated community and its like ‘where do you think your house was before like ten years ago?’ You know! It was wilderness and then they go out and complain saying someone else can’t build their home, you know, you already got to live in yours so...it’s a complicated issue, and all that plays a huge part of it.”

– environmental specialist in government agency



Participants consider  
economic factors when  
making decisions about  
water use

“The water bill. I'm not going to say, ‘Sweetie, shut off the shower’ if I'm not worried about my business and I can afford to pay another fifteen dollars. If I know that I can't pay that fifteen dollars, hey I'm not going to say ‘sweetie’ any more, I'm going to shut the water off for her.” – irrigation; landscaping

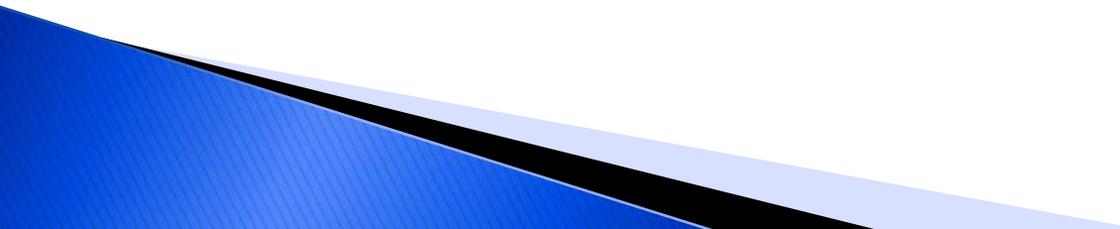
**Participants perceive water-related regulations as both necessary and frustrating**

- ▶ “We are under cost pressure all the time to reduce the amount of effort that they put in, and everything is perceived...lets say creating storm water run off facilities as being an add on, is not part of the essential facility and as a result there is always pressure to limit and reduce and cutback on the facilities... and the only way to solve that is detail permitting enforcement. Set the rules and then enforce them.” – project manager; leadership program volunteer

**Participants perceive unequal enforcement of water-related regulations**

“I’ve seen plenty of times where it’s this so and so person whose contributed this much money or has this much political influence with this particular representative or whatever wants their thing done, and they don’t care about the rules.” – environmental specialist in government agency

“Knowing the city manager doesn't hurt.... And I'm not saying that the other people don't get the same response, but I don't think everybody gets the same response.” – realtor; HOA leader



**Participants believe better communication would foster collaboration related to water management**

“I think the only way you can do it is through education. You can't go up against somebody and say, ‘Well, you have to do this.’ That doesn't work. Just through education and slowly trying to get people to change their minds. Find out what it is about Florida that they like and why they're here and kind of use that information to help them see why what they do and their homes and communities make a difference.” – conservation educator



**Participants would like to see  
more inclusive water  
management**

“And then they promised us they'd start a water review board. That was two years ago. They had one meeting.... The thing that scares me is that...they gave the city manager power without a vote to go in and shut the water off. That concerns me.” – irrigation; landscaping



**Participants prefer water-related information that is unbiased, convenient, personal, and electronic**

“I’d like to see both sides of the equation....  
What little bit we do hear about is, more or  
less, one sided.” – farmer

“Is it lack of looking on my part? I don’t know.”  
– golf course management

“Log on and see real time, you know, almost  
like a dashboard of what’s going on in Rookery  
Bay right now!” – conservation educator

# Implications of Case Study Findings

Appeal to sense of “place”

Emphasize appeal of water-based features of region

Appeal to positive emotions associated with local environment

Appeal to belief systems that support conservation

Link restoration and conservation efforts to economic benefits

Target business and professional audiences

Include more scientific data in information

Support regulations that would enhance RRBE project

Promote more consistent and impartial enforcement of existing regulations

# Implications, cont.

Broaden PAG to include more stakeholder groups (e.g., farming, mining, diversity)

Initiate collaboration with upstream neighbors and politicians

Promote personal distribution networks of restoration/conservation/RBNERR info

Utilize additional electronic channels of communication

Increase access to raw, live, streaming data

Target adjacent properties with data on water conditions

Promote shared values approach to restoration/conservation efforts

