

CHARLOTTE HARBOR FISHERIES FORUM: MEETING I SUMMARY REPORT



Photo by Thalita Ribeiro



CHARLOTTE HARBOR FISHERIES FORUM



6–8:30 p.m. on Nov. 19

Lashley Marina

120 Lashley Ct.,
Punta Gorda, FL 33950

Charlotte and Lee anglers: Your knowledge can help our fisheries thrive.

Join local researchers for the first meeting of the Charlotte Harbor Fisheries Forum — an independent, community discussion to help inform fisheries management and science.

FREE ADMISSION

Contact Jynessa Dutka-Gianelli, University of Florida | 352-392-9981 | jdgianelli@ufl.edu

Forum Partners:

UF UNIVERSITY of
FLORIDA



Sea Grant
Florida

Charlotte Harbor Fisheries Forum 1 – November 19, 2014.
Laishley Marina.
120 Laishley Ct., Punta Gorda, FL. 33950

Report

On Wednesday, November 19, 2014, Florida Sea Grant Extension, the University of Florida (UF) and Mote Marine Laboratory convened a first meeting to facilitate the development of a Charlotte Harbor Fisheries Forum. The meeting in Punta Gorda, Florida, was open to the general public and participants were invited through emails, local media, fliers distributed locally, and personal invitations.

In total, seven fisheries stakeholders attended the first forum meeting (“stakeholders” is defined as anyone who has an interest, or stake, in fish, fishing, and fisheries). Local Florida Sea Grant agents Captain Betty Staugler (Charlotte County) and Joy Hazell (Lee County) led and facilitated the meeting. UF researchers Dr. Kai Lorenzen and Dr. Jynessa Dutka-Gianelli and graduate students Chelsey Crandall and Thalita Ribeiro were also present.

The objectives of this first meeting were:

- To introduce the concept of a fisheries forum in Sarasota Bay
- To brainstorm how a forum could be implemented in Sarasota Bay

After research team and stakeholder introductions, facilitators Captain Betty Staugler and Joy Hazell explained the meeting agenda and objectives, and ground rules for the meeting were agreed upon. Next, as an icebreaker, stakeholders were asked to share how long they have been living in the area and their favorite target fish species, and then to discuss why they were interested in a Charlotte Harbor fisheries forum. In general, there was the perception of less fish over time, with anglers seeing less fish in the water and catching less fish as well; red fish was repeatedly mentioned as a species of concern, and habitat quality and the increase of anglers were cited as local issues (Table 1). Furthermore, participants felt that there is a disconnect between scientists, citizens, anglers, and decision makers, and highlighted the need to “translate” scientific information to all and the importance of having projects addressing the protection of local species and local fisheries issues.



Table 1. Reasons stakeholders were interested in participating in the Charlotte Harbor (CH) Fisheries Forum.

Reasons:
Fishing is going downhill
Concerned about fishing too and doesn't want to see fisheries degrade
Need to protect fish habitat (e.g., mangroves)
Habitat quality: without nursery, fish are declining, no protection to fish habitat on agencies plans (such as DOT, EPA), the agencies don't really address the loss of fish habitat, habitat is neglected in the permitting process
Fishing guide who lived his entire life in the area: economically and personally vested in local fisheries
Diving in the area since 2003, catches red fish
Interest in the red fish assessment
Hatchery program in CH
Burner boats running on fish schools
See less fish now and catches are declining (e.g., redfish are harder to find)
Fishing is the economic driver for the area
Local legislators ignore the economic importance of the fishing resource
There is a disconnect between the data collected by scientists and people who use the resource
Need to "translate" scientific information to all
Disconnection between scientists, citizens, anglers, decision makers
Need of projects that protect local fish, could get funding from Oil Spill/RESTORE ACT for local fisheries
Need funding for projects addressing local fisheries issues
Increase in number of people fishing

Following this, Dr. Kai Lorenzen gave a presentation summarizing a previous UF project titled *"Place-based fisheries workshops in Sarasota Bay and Charlotte Harbor"*, which worked with stakeholders to identify concerns and issues with regards to local fisheries. The results from this project inspired the idea of creating Fisheries Forums. Next, the following *"Fisheries Forum"* objectives were presented to outline the forums' overall goals:

- To provide a venue for long-term stakeholder engagement
- To promote in-depth consideration of important local fisheries issues
- To improve links between stakeholder knowledge and science
- To represent place-based perspectives to management agencies

The facilitators then started a question and answer discussion with stakeholders about the fisheries forums (Table 2). In general, stakeholders had questions about the forum structure, local fisheries topics to be discussed, how the information discussed during the meeting would be taken to representative and resource managers, who would represent the local diverse groups in communicating with management agencies (e.g., DOT, DEP, EPA, FWC), and how to avoid duplication of other group's efforts. Stakeholders suggested that one requirement for the forum should be to have local representation of diverse groups (scientists, anglers, managers) that would deal with local resources. Participants also mentioned that the forum is

a “noble concept, engaging the unheard (e.g., anglers, guides that don’t participate in clubs),” and that it is essential to have a clear action plan and specific objectives, to focus on local issues, and to keep it *fish* based.

Table 2. Stakeholder questions and comments about the fisheries forum.

Questions/Comments
Who is going to talk with agencies? Is it going to be one spokesperson or group?
If only have certain advocacy groups (e.g., CCA, bonefish tarpon) they would only advocate for recreational fishers, need to have a variety of representatives. Need to have diverse people from all groups to advocate on behalf of all interests and make sure meetings are not dominated by certain groups but represent all
Multiple groups based on specific topics
But to be meaningful, forum needs to work on individual fish basis, to focus on specific fish and associated issues (fish and habitat; fish and water quality; etc) = focus on fish and have the ability to piece other parts, information together
It would be a good approach to keep “fish species based,” and work around that specific species, with all other issues associated with the fish, such as “fish species” + habitat; “fish species” + water quality; “fish species” + fishing pressure; etc.
Meetings could be “species specific” with local issues focus; work on individual fish basis: starting with focus on fish species and have the ability to piece other parts with diverse information
Need clear and concise path, defined focus, specific objectives
Is this only a research project? Or will the research team do something with others to move this forward?
How much of the forum topics will move forward?
The forum could work similar to the previous snook workgroup
Forum is a noble concept, engaging the unheard (e.g., anglers, guides, people that don’t participate in clubs)
Forum will be a good opportunity for outreach, education, blending science and education, agencies and anglers
See different perspectives: including fish, water quality are well studied, regulated. But the user input is not clear
Maybe the forum concept is redundant with other agencies, groups working now.
Where is FWC? Suggestion of having a panel of FWC representatives present.
It would be good to narrow down issues and suggestions before presenting them to FWC

The participants were then split into six small groups to discuss the following details on setting up a local fisheries forum:

I - Who should be involved in the forum?

1. What groups should be involved?
2. What are their interests?
3. How should they be engaged?
4. How do we invite others?

II - We envision as part of the forum a committed group of diverse stakeholders who engage in the process through regular meetings:

- 1- Is this realistic? Why or why not?
- 2- Who from the above list?
- 3- What might a set up look like?
- 4- How do we keep the process inclusive and participants engaged?

Results from the small breakout groups were presented back to the entire group and are listed below:

Who should be involved in the forum?

Group 1	Group 2
WHO	
Someone with power	Guides and associations (livelihood from fisheries, FWC list, kids, other guides, local knowledge) Local elected officials (representatives elected) Conservation groups, those advocating improving environment DEP, FWC, CHNEP, others
Anglers: Charter captains	Anglers (boat and shore) Commercial fishers (Yes and No) License Recreational fishing clubs
Business owners: apparel (fishing), tackle stores, hotels, restaurants	Vendors: bait and tackle
Need someone with connections to move results through: high circle of influence, come up with a plan (resume) and make someone want to be part of it, politically involved	Home owners Newspaper, print media
INTERESTS	
Have to paint a picture of what is going on: -People are interested in the fishery and how it's changed; -Want to be connected to someone who can make things happen	
Pre-organized groups might not want other voices heard	
Political strength: leader and / or masses	
Tourists: -Why do they come here? -Educate about fisheries resources	
New residents: -Reasons they live here	
Public increased and fishing has decreased: -Boaters should be trained and held responsible	

We envision as part of the forum a committed group of diverse stakeholders who engage in the process through regular meetings:

GROUP 1	GROUP 2
Is this realistic? Why or why not?	
Yes -One step further to let people discuss issues and know their voice can be heard Needs to have action Has the potential to work "Pencil hasn't been sharpened"	Goal is valid and clear Mechanism is not clear
Who from the above list? How to invite others?	
Entire list FWC Media to spread the word: Waterline, Coastal Anglers, press On water law enforcement Social media: do a group, more would come Build facebook pages with mediators, make connections	
Set up	
Once a month At Laishley Marina Keep it simple, in one place Maximum hours: 6 to 8 pm Wednesday: church night Thursday: better Schedule & advertise 1 month in advance	
Process inclusive and participants engaged	
	Frame positive Example: Too much pressure What is it Source Solutions
	Goal come to consensus
	Focus on the fish

What topics should the forum explore?

Group 1	Group 2
What topics should the forum explore?	
Redfish, snook, tarpon declining Habitat is declining, specifically the pass No crabs this year Increase in sharks Training anglers: right way to release a fish Types of hooks to use and why	Would like to see red fish closed for a year Key species of concern Drives why people fish here Main target of their customers is redfish

The meeting concluded with a description of the forum's next steps as proposed by the stakeholders:

- UF team will send out the first meeting report to participants (about 2 weeks)
- Need to set up dates for next meetings: suggested late January/2015.
- Plan to meet once a month
- At the end of 1 year: forum should have the focus on target, well defined.

Forum evaluation and feedback:

The final activity of the meeting was a series of evaluation questions to assess the success of the meeting and to gather participants' suggestions on how to improve future meetings. All participants rated the meeting highly (between 3 and 4 out of 4) with regards to opportunities to communicate and share their ideas and being heard by peers. All participants expressed that they would or might be interested in participating in future meetings.