

# CHARLOTTE HARBOR FISHERIES FORUM: MEETING 9 SUMMARY REPORT



# CHARLOTTE HARBOR FISHERIES FORUM:

*Providing a venue for public engagement in local fisheries issues and building links between stakeholder knowledge, science, and management*

**August 27, 2015 Thursday, 6-8:30 pm**

Laishley Marina 120 Laishley Ct., Punta Gorda, FL 33950



Photo by Florida Sea Grant

**Charlotte and Lee anglers: your knowledge can help local fisheries thrive.**

**Join local researchers for the next meeting of the Charlotte Harbor Fisheries Forum**

**Meeting objectives:** to focus on education, land-use changes, and potential seagrass mitigation project

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**Forum Partners:**

**UF** | UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



**Sea Grant**  
Florida

**Charlotte Harbor Fisheries Forum 9 – August 27, 2015.**  
**Laishley Marina. 120 Laishley Ct., Punta Gorda, FL. 33950**

**Report**

On Thursday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Florida Sea Grant Extension and the University of Florida (UF) convened the 9<sup>th</sup> 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, media, fliers distributed locally, and personal invitations.

The Charlotte Harbor Fisheries Forum is a collaborative effort to provide a venue for public engagement in local fisheries issues and to build links between stakeholder knowledge, science, and management. Twenty three stakeholders signed in for the meeting, including recreational and commercial anglers, local fishing club members, charter captains and guides, business owners, researchers, natural resources workers and managers, and law enforcement. University of Florida researchers Dr. Kai Lorenzen and Dr. Jynessa Dutka-Gianelli, and visiting graduate students from Brazil, Alice Lima and Ariana Ribeiro, were also present.

After the research team introductions, Captain Betty Staugler explained the meeting agenda. Next, the stakeholders introduced themselves and summarized what they learned from previous fisheries forum meetings, or, for the newcomers, what they hoped to learn from the meetings.

**Learned and hoped to learn:**

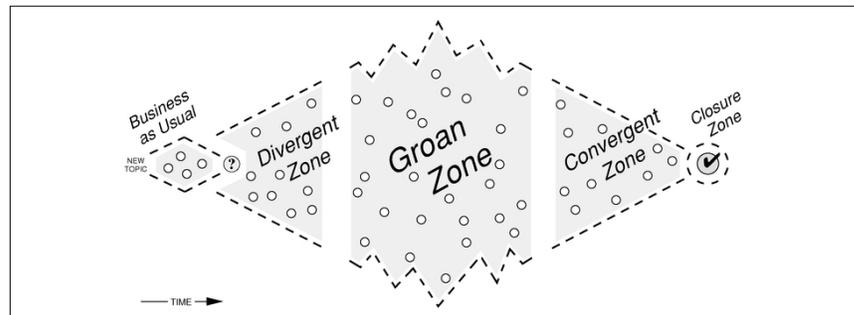
- Group consensus is challenging;
- Commercial inshore net fishermen are at great disadvantage;
- Group concerns;
- Want to find out what the law enforcement can bring to the table;
- Value of seagrass on East / West wall;
- Concerns with local issues;
- Process of improving the Harbor is long;
- Group represents a small percentage of those who use the Harbor;
- Want to move the process forward;
- Plight of commercial fishermen;
- Want to know what happened in the Harbor;
- Learned “nothing;”
- Want to learn how fishing has gone up & down from year to year;
- Negativity on charter captains
- Fertilizer run-off bigger concern;
- Surprised how complicated it all is;
- Scientists are professionals and have answers;
- There are giant obstacles to move process forward: direction, funding, mixed ideas.
- Charlotte County Government Utilities Department: want to know how they can participate and help;
- DEP CH Aquatic Preserves: want to assist in any way they can;
- Complications with the process: more issues than thought; happy that people care about the Harbor;
- Want to learn about heavy metals;
- The problems are complex: group needs to be more politically active to work among ourselves;
- People from different groups (user groups) all together;

## Looking Back:

Following this, a hand-out containing: an overview of the fisheries forum concept, description of the fisheries forum goals, and previous meeting summary was distributed to participants (Attachment 1). The objectives of this meeting were to move the process along and to re-evaluate the forum process. Then, Captain Betty reported on Action Items that were researched since the July's fisheries forum:

- **Seagrass Education:** ideas on how to create programs to create awareness for next generation and boaters;
- **Boaters Education:** ideas on how to send Boaters Guide to all registered boaters; safety boaters program; how to add information to the FWC Boaters ID card.
- **Land-use- Hog Island Harbor:** macroalgae and land-use changes in Hog Island; Manchester Lock removal, septic tanks and sewage facility information from the CH County website.

Next, facilitator Joy Hazel discussed the ideas that the forum is a complex process, particularly with a diversity of user groups and different points of view, which present challenges to the whole group. Joy explained the **Groan Zone** concept (Figure 1) and reminded all that it is part of the dynamic group process, and the research team would help facilitating the procedure.



Kaner 2007. Facilitator's guide to participatory decision-making, page 304

Figure 1. Diamond of participatory decision making.

## Forum Activities

### 1- Identify / define topic to work next (cards on the wall activity):

Facilitator Joy Hazell guided the participants through the next activity. The 4 major topics identified by stakeholders during previous meetings were presented in sticky notes tapped to the wall, with specific issues identified and potential solutions suggested previously. Participants were asked to stand by the topic they want to work on next.



**Topics for the forum to focus on, selected by participants during previous meetings:**

What they want	Specific Issue (s)	Potential solutions
Clear water	Too much algae Nutrient pollution	Education Reduction of storm water run-off Reduce septic Manage fertilizer
Courteous boaters	Buzzing other boats Buzzing the shoreline	Boater education •Optional vs. required Slow speed zones Pole and troll zones Increased law enforcement
Healthy seagrass		Pole and troll Boater education Increased law enforcement
Lots of fish	Too much pressure Boats scaring fish	Selective shut down of species Increase in permit fees Special closures

**2- Small groups activity: brainstorm activities for next meeting**

Next, Dr. Kai Lorenzen explained that this participatory process is long and suggested some ideas on how the researchers could help to move the process along. Some of these activities would involve some preparation and researchers might need time to organize all prior to presenting to the entire group.

Participants discussed in small groups a few options presented (mapping exercise, survey, and other activities for next step), and answered two questions:

- Do you agree?
- How could it be implemented?

**Mapping exercise:** One suggestion is to start working with a map of the local area, where participants would bring information and add their knowledge. The group would build together an information database based adding on their experiences and concerns on maps and work systematically and find factors of interactions and needs among the different user groups. One idea was to start working with a base map from the Harbor, add changes over time and overlay with information that stakeholders would provide.

**Survey:** Another suggestion is for researchers to build a survey with the help of forum participants, to gather information on local issues and possible action items. This survey would be distributed to local stakeholders, using the boater’s registration list and perhaps the license plate for Charlotte Harbor registry. It was highlighted that the forum participants want to help developing questions for this survey together with researchers, and participants would pilot the survey. Survey would be tailored to local needs and different user groups and bring the community together. The group needs a plan of action to design the survey questions. It would be important to have different user groups present to offer their input in the survey and assure questions are relevant to all and work in everyone’s needs.

**Other activities:** Other suggestions from the participants included:

- Education: create a K-12 education program; include outreach for children and adults, with effective ways to communicate with all; add information into the boaters ID card; add a requirement to take a test when renewing vessel registration
- Participants should bring their suggestions early in the process
- Bring experts to talk about different issues and answer stakeholders questions
- Have a lobbyist, need someone with authority
- Group could also participate in the weekly Charlotte county board of county commissioners meetings

3- **Fisheries forum process questions:**

The final activity of the meeting was a series of questions to gather the stakeholders input and suggestions for the forum structure. Participants were asked to write in index cards:

- What is going well in the forum?
- How would you improve the forum?

Overall, participants were pleased with the forum meetings and think that the process is moving forward, especially after this meeting. Participants agreed that the forum is a good venue for communication between groups, and they were able to identify common local problems. Some suggested that:

- the forum should decide on an issue and push hard on getting answers;
- need more people engaged, from diverse groups;
- increase the frequency and duration of the meetings;
- invite other scientists and experts to discuss local issues and educate participants;
- need to develop an action plan for each topic identified by participants;
- need to invite individuals from management agencies and provide their contact information;
- increase the discussions in groups during forum meetings;
- need to have more commercial fishermen and other user groups present in the meetings

**Looking Forward and Next Steps: where do we go from here?**

The research team will prepare baseline maps for the stakeholders to work on during next forum meeting. In addition, the team will start the procedure of assembling a survey and work with the forum participants.

**Next Forum: September / 24.**

## Attachment 1

### Looking Back: Overview of the Fisheries Forum Concept.

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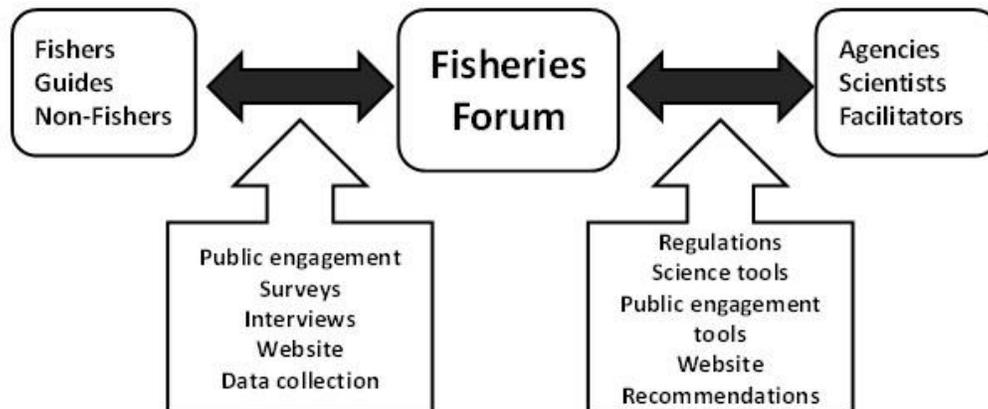
## **Background:**

### ***Why have a forum?***

- People care about “their” local fisheries
- Different places have different fisheries issues (and some shared ones)
- Stakeholders have in-depth knowledge complementary to scientific knowledge and data
- Stakeholders feel that opportunities for input to management decision making are limited, and that “official science” may be at odds with their local knowledge

### ***Fisheries Forum Aims:***

- Provide a venue for long-term engagement of stakeholders
- Promote in-depth consideration of important local fisheries issues
- Improve links between stakeholder knowledge and science
- Represent place-based perspectives to management agencies



Attachment 1 (cont.)

Looking Back: Previous Meetings Summary.

Forum 1 Nov/19/14	Forum 2 Jan/22/15	Forum 3 Feb/26/15	Forum 4 Mar/26/15
<p><b>Introduction to Project</b></p> <p><b>Who should be involved?</b> Stakeholder list</p> <p><b>Structure:</b> Meet once a month; Thursday, from 6-8 pm at Laishley Marina, Punta Gorda</p>	<p><b>Revisited stakeholder list</b></p> <p><b>Structure:</b> Keep open and inclusive, Work on getting more people involved</p> <p><b>Speaker:</b> • Dave Blewett, FWC FWRI – CH Field Lab</p>	<p><b>What are some issues that the forum could focus on?</b></p> <p><b>Narrowing down top topics from list:</b> Water quality; pole and troll zones; habitat; boating (education, outreach, licensing); tournaments; hatchery; commercial fishing; artificial reefs; law enforcement; research; water flow</p>	<p><b>Select potential topics for future forum discussions to focus on:</b> What does it mean? What can the forum do? What agencies are involved (who has the power)? Which stakeholders is this important to? Natural habitat alteration; selected closure zones; boater licensing; pole and troll; bait scarcity; conservation; fishing pressure; water quality; mullet fishing; etc.</p> <p><b>Speaker:</b> • Capt Betty Staugler, FL Sea Grant Charlotte County</p>
Forum 5 Apr/23/15	Forum 6 May/28/15	Forum 7 Jun/25/15	Forum 8 Jul/30/15
<p><b>Focus on one subject and drill down:</b></p> <p>Pole and troll zones Define goals Identify users and involve different groups How to get funding? How to enforce? Define place and designation of zones Education and outreach program How to get agencies and politicians support?</p> <p><b>Speaker:</b> • Capt Justin McBride, West Coast Inland Navigation District</p>	<p><b>Explore pole and troll case studies and discuss broader goals of a pole and troll zone:</b></p> <p>Pole and troll case studies Why create a pole and troll zone? <u>Concerns about pole and troll zone:</u> pros and cons; need to define goals; create a plan with different users input; representation from different groups and areas <u>Next:</u> Refine users needs and views. How the forum can address those needs?</p>	<p><b>Focus on define the needs and fisheries perspectives of different user groups in the Harbor and identify how the forum can address those needs:</b></p> <p>What would your ideal harbor look like? What negatively affects your everyday fishing experience? What is the cause? What are the possible solutions? What are the potential downside to the solutions?</p>	<p><b>Focus on water quality issues:</b> Learn more on water quality issues, macroalgae, and seagrass</p> <p><b>Speakers:</b> • Judy Ott, CHNEP • Melynda Brown, FDEP, CH Aquatic Preserves • Eric Milbrandt, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Found.</p>

**Attachment 2. Summary prepared by Gordon Roman:**

*(Note: these are comments and discussions that have taken place during the meetings; the opinions from numerous stakeholders were consolidated here, they don't necessarily reflect the author's personal feelings)*

**Charlotte Harbor Stakeholders Fisheries Forum - Meeting August 27, 2015**

We have been meeting, studying and discussing for 7 months. The FWC Commission meets quarterly with the next meeting November 18 & 19 in Tallahassee. I think our group should consider having a presentation of our findings to date ready for one of the upcoming Commission meetings. I suggest we move up our pace and the following prior stakeholder discussions or subjects be considered.

**SALT WATER FISHING REGULATIONS.** The FWC does a pretty good job managing the fisheries through seasons, size limits and bag limits. Suggestions:

1. Some localization of regulations would probably be beneficial for local estuaries/regions but no specifics at this time for Charlotte Harbor/estuaries.
2. Evaluate mortality of targeted "catch and release" fishing in closed and spawning seasons with consideration of regulations for this type fishing.

**HABITAT** There is not much individual fishermen can do to affect habitat degradation compared to the impact of population growth and loss of habitat from urban waterfront sprawl. We need to be more politically active through local and regional government agencies and similar quasi-governmental agencies such as Sea Grant, Estuary and Preserve organizations. The following discussions have taken place:

1. Establish possible mangrove, seagrass and fish "comfort" areas and regulations that help mitigate degradation. The following were discussed as possibilities for study and if selected to be installed on an interim basis with a limited time frame and sunset clause for further evaluation.
  - a. Create a "troll & pole", no internal combustion motor zones or similar in an area on the East Wall or Hog Island were discussed.
  - b. Create minimum wake and/or minimum distance/ maximum speed regulations in proximity to mangroves and shorelines ( 50 to 100 yards discussed). This also has an added safety component.
  - c. Create transit zones in some bays, appropriately marked with poles or buoys.
  - d. Mark areas experiencing significant degradation such as prop scarring, seagrass or shellfish restoration etc., with appropriate regulations.
2. Encourage restoration projects related to marine and wetland projects and related volunteerism.

**EDUCATION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT.** Many users of the marine environment are unaware of its sensitive nature and many laws concerning its use. Consider the following which are both educational and should contribute favorably to law enforcement.

1. Create a signage & poster program that would place creative but unobtrusive signs at public ramps, marinas, key ICW locations, fishing & boating retail outlets and protected habitat areas stressing proper use of the marine environment and related laws. Consider a signage program similar to that seen on some roadways where they might be sponsored by a specific person or entity.

2. The FWC already produces an excellent 4 color “salt water fishing regulations” brochure covering virtually all species. Consider producing similar materials/brochures by the type of fishing and/or the most frequently encountered 5-10 species one might catch on certain type trips. That is, fishing in local bays, estuaries, shorelines, piers, offshore species etc. Also include a section about care of the environment and courtesy while fishing, handling and releasing fish as appropriate. A similar “App” could also be created.

**RECREATIONAL FISHING LICENSES** The assumption that fishermen do not want more regulations and higher license fees is probably true. Our discussions indicated that some changes in the license structure might be considered to improve habitat and fishing through increased user funding.

1. Instead of the Sr. Citizen exemption, perhaps a lower rate should be considered. Sr. Citizens compose 18 % of Florida’s population.
2. Snook, lobster, tarpon fees and the free reef licenses could be reviewed, and all such funds should be dedicated to research for the related species.
3. **Tournaments.** There is already a Redfish culling permit for certain tournaments. Consider revising this permit or create new statewide or regional tournament permits for all or most inshore/bay tournaments. Perhaps a permit to have tournaments in certain estuary or preserve areas. A significant part of this permit should be earmarked for local habitat enhancement or projects. Structure and fees to be determined, but could be based on the # of participants, prize money etc. Exemptions or special fees should be considered for bona fide non-profit organizations, kids tournaments etc.

**COMMERCIAL FISHING LICENSES/PERMITS.** Local commercial fishermen, guides and charter fishermen commented that consideration of the following was significant.

1. If troll & pole or some slow speed/wake rules were made in some areas there had to be specific exceptions for transiting during certain times of their fishing season and during inclement (windy & stormy) weather.
2. Out of state commercial fishermen often cause significant fishing pressure and even some conflict in certain fisheries – especially mullet and tarpon. Florida should create out of state permits and fees that would help regulate out of state or out of region fishermen.
3. Shrimp. There were some concerns raised by recreational fisherman about the recreational bait and food shrimp fishery in Charlotte Harbor

both from habitat degradation and reduction of forage fish food availability. Not much was known specifically, but this fishery needs to be evaluated and regulated as appropriate.

**REDFISH HATCHERY** Recently there was a forum in Punta Gorda on this subject, and it has also come up at the stakeholders forums. Florida has some past redfish hatchery experience, but has since been in a study and holding pattern mostly due to cost and location problems. Science and data seems to indicate that a modern hatchery program might not contribute significantly to a healthy fishery, but might contribute to recovery from downturns in the health of a fishery. Hatcheries do have the additional benefit of raising public awareness while educating the public about the need to care for the marine environment. It's time for the FWC to conclude the studies and make a decision about whether a hatchery program is beneficial or not. Federal Sports Fish Restoration Funds may be used to fund hatcheries.

**FUNDS** Funding of FWC fisheries and related habitat management and law enforcement always seems to be a major issue. In reality there should be sufficient funds, and the real problem is a political one over allocation funds. Economics: (source – FWC website)

**1,612,102 salt water licenses** issued in Florida in 2014  
**\$29,073,573 in license revenues** generated in 2014

**\$10.3 billion the total expenditure by 5,554,000 participants** in just salt water fishing in 2012. (I couldn't find more recent data)

**\$12,000,000 in Federal Sports Fish Restoration funds** received in 2011 by Florida. (I could not find the figure for 2014, and this amount is allocated to salt water and fresh water.) If allocated by number of fishing licenses, ***Florida's salt water marine allocation would have been about \$7,000,000.***

Plus related jobs, sales tax and real estate values related to a healthy marine environment.

As mentioned previously, most fishermen and especially senior citizens would willingly accept additional licensing and permit fees if the funds were dedicated to specific fisheries or habitat trust funds.

Prepared by Gordon G. Roman, Stakeholder.