

Florida Land Managers consider the “big picture” at a recent
Natural Areas Training Academy workshop,
“Working Across Boundaries to Protect Ecosystems”

On a beautiful spring day in March, 2007, twenty-seven land managers from around the state gathered around a storm drain in downtown Lake City in order to understand how the conservation land they manage is affected by activities within the encompassing ecosystem. “What could they possibly learn from a storm drain?” you might ask. Jim Stevenson, former Chief Biologist for the Florida State Park System and current coordinator of the Florida Springs Task Force was on hand to give them the answers and guide them through the Ichetucknee Springs Basin. Mr. Stevenson explained to the students that every activity that takes place within the Ichetucknee watershed affects the water within Ichetucknee State Park. When managing conservation land, Mr. Stevenson explained, you must look beyond the boundaries of your park or preserve at the surrounding land uses. Every activity that occurs within the ecosystem will have an impact on the land you manage, he said.



Jim Stevenson begins the day-long field trip in Lake City.

To illustrate his point Mr. Stevenson led the students on a full day excursion following a drop of water from the headwaters of the Ichetucknee in Lake City, tracing it’s journey through Alligator Lake, a livestock market, down Cannon Sink, past a motel on Interstate-75, dispersing at a wastewater sprayfield in Columbia County, into the mouths of children at Columbia City Elementary School, past limerock mines, and through farm fields, until finally reaching the Ichetucknee Head Spring within Ichetucknee Springs State Park. The students then boarded canoes and headed out on the Ichetucknee River to see the beauty of the resource firsthand and to listen to Jim Stevenson recount the innovative strategies he has worked tirelessly to enact to preserve the beloved resource. Mr. Stevenson instilled in the students the need to work with partners and raise awareness in order to rally the community to implement conservation strategies.



Jim Stevenson explains water quality issues regarding Alligator Lake.



The field trip culminates with a canoe trip down the Ichetucknee River.

The course participants, who represented eight Florida counties, one state agency, and three private entities, also heard from representatives from The Nature Conservancy, Kris Serbesoff-King and Eugene Kelly, Dana Bryan, Environmental Policy Coordinator for the Florida Park Service, and Lisa Moliore Gearen, a private citizen who inspired the students by relating her successful effort to preserve the Kanapaha Prairie in Gainesville. The instructors emphasized the importance of considering the protected natural area within the context of the surrounding area. Rafael Montalvo, Associate Director of the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium, gave students the understanding and tools they need to go out and work with partners to protect the ecosystem.



Dana Bryan, Environmental Policy Coordinator for the Florida Park Service, helps students to understand the role of different state agencies in dealing with complex environmental issues.

The “Working Across Boundaries to Protect Ecosystems” course is one in a series of courses offered by the Natural Areas Training Academy, a joint effort between The Nature Conservancy and the University of Florida. After completion of five workshops, a land manager earns the “Certificate in Natural Areas Management.” As of March, 2007, seventy-nine land management professionals have earned the “Certificate in Natural Areas Management”. For more information please visit the Natural Areas Training Academy web site at: <http://nata.snre.ufl.edu/> or call Linda Demetropoulos at (352) 392-3210.