

Seagrass Workshop
Everglades National Park

Welcome and Introductions

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Video Transcript

00 minutes :20 seconds

Carol Mitchell: Those things were kind of pulling us together and asking, what's the state of the science and what do we need. So of course in that discussion seagrass [indecipherable] as usual purpose to the talk, and we know there's been a lot of science done in the last five, six years, and we do need a summary and next steps. I also do want to say that as most of you all know we manage the Critical Ecosystem Studies Initiative program which funds restoration science here in South Florida associated with the [indecipherable; acronym?], and we have a need to continue to justify the science that we do and these kind of workshops where we pull together people who are basically the experts and doing the latest research, and we figure out what the state of the science is and what the next steps are. These kinds of gatherings help us to justify that program, so we really appreciate you coming and [indecipherable; giving?] the time. And I want to say thank you to Jerry and Tracy for organizing this and I think I will give David Hallac, our Biological Resource [indecipherable] Chief a couple of minutes.

David Hallac: Thanks, Carol.

Mitchell: Thanks, Dave.

David Hallac: I just kind of look back to about, it was over a year ago now, I was actually out fishing which had something to do with the genesis of this workshop and... I was out fishing with another biologist who works with the park and he's been working the park for about thirty-five years now and we were in northeastern Florida Bay and then north-central Florida Bay and we were trying to, we were actually fishing, were at a fishing tournament, and we were trying to catch a tarpon which we hadn't caught, we just got a sea trap, but it turns out that we wanted to go into a place called Rankin Bight-

Participant: [indecipherable], chuckling

David Hallac: And we couldn't get into, we couldn't get into Rankin Bight because there was so much dead, floating seagrass on the surface of the water. We couldn't boat in at all, it was completely impossible, and we were also dodging rafts of seagrass here and there and I've been at the park for about five years and I've seen similar things, but we'd never seen anything that great so I turned to my fishing buddy for the day who was also a fellow biologist here and said 'have you ever seen anything like this?' He said, 'I've been here, I've grown up here and I've been out here every year, almost every week,

I've never seen anything like this.' So we were sort of perplexed as to why there was so much dead, floating

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seagrass, we had heard a myriad hypotheses regarding why these things happen, and 'they happen every year and it's a normal [indecipherable] process and you don't worry about it,' And we started, so we started asking some folks as to what they thought was going on and how much was normal and how much was not normal, and I'll tell you we got answers, some over here that said it was completely normal, don't even think twice about it, and then we got some of the greatest seagrass experts in the world telling us, 'You see all the leaves falling off the trees right now?' Of course the answer was no, 'then this is not normal.' So we really weren't sure what was happening, and that was an interesting situation because two days later we got phone calls that there were tens or if not hundreds of thousands of dead, dying fish all throughout the Bay, the same area. So obviously there was some cascade of events that were occurring, and we're recognizing as we're digging into this more and more that these things do happen regularly, but the question really is how much of these events are caused by natural, physical factors that occur such as the cold event that we just had just a couple months ago, and to what degree can these events be moderated by water management and management of the system down in South Florida. So we're really curious about all those different questions. One thing that was interesting was that after all these dead fish popped up I talked to a couple of folks, Mike being one of them, Mike [last name] and he of course said, 'this happens all the time, don't worry about it.' And then-

Participant: Famous last words. [chuckle]

David Hallac: And then we start digging in more and more and that brings me to somebody that I'd like to remember and mention right now; I found an abstract in the Bulletin of Marine Science that was published about sixteen years ago now, it's called "Causes of Fish Kills in the Flamingo Area of Everglades National Park," and it was written by Tom Schmidt, many of you worked with or knew Tom, and Tom passed away last summer...

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David Hallac: Just by finding this abstract it immediately let us know that hey, what happened out there really wasn't that unusual; whether it should be happening every year or not is another question, but don't be too alarmed, so, I just thought I would mention Tom briefly. Next I'm just going to introduce Tracy, Tracy is going to go ahead and in more detail talk about some of the events that I gave you an introduction to, and we'll move forward with the workshop. Thanks.

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[credits]