

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES OF COMMUNITY SCIENCE: PERSPECTIVES FROM MULTIPLE PROGRAMS IN THE SOUTHEAST

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Community science is an efficient and cost-effective means to engage stakeholders, accelerate scientific research, provide hands-on learning, and build social capital. Coastal water quality monitoring has a long history of volunteer partnerships, and many recent peer-reviewed articles confirm volunteer collected data is equivalent to that collected by scientists. Training members of the public to collaborate and work with scientists to collect scientific information is incredibly rewarding for the practitioners and the volunteers. But there are challenges. It is important to involve the data end-users and volunteers early and often or volunteer retention can plummet. Even with training and equipment provided, community science is not a no-cost endeavor, and this can exclude diverse audiences. Recruiting from under-represented communities can be difficult if they do not have access to coastal resources. Continued program funding may be indeterminate, so having other options to continue to engage, recognize, and build stakeholder relationships are key. This presentation will discuss these, and other benefits / challenges of community science based on 10 years of coordinator experience from 3 water-based programs: Coastal Georgia Adopt-A-Wetland, Florida Water Watch, and Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease Underwater Observers.

PRESENTER BIO: Shelly Krueger has been the Florida Sea Grant Agent for the University of Florida IFAS Extension, Monroe County for 10 years. As an Extension agent and a marine biologist, Shelly provides excellence in marine and environmental science outreach, education, and research to conserve and protect coastal resources and enhance economic opportunities and quality of life for the people of Florida.