

COLLABORATIVE RESTORATION OF COASTAL WETLANDS

Ron Brockmeyer

St. Johns River Water Management District, Palatka, FL, USA

Coastal wetlands and their ecosystem services are key components of resilience because they mitigate loads of nutrients in runoff; enhance protection from flooding and erosion in extreme weather; provide habitat that maintains the diversity of crustaceans, fish, birds, and other animals; and sequester carbon (Blue Carbon). Unfortunately, people have manipulated wetlands on the east coast of Florida for more than 150 years. Direct impacts include dredging navigational channels and filling wetlands for development. Many of the remaining changes arise from efforts to interrupt breeding by saltmarsh mosquitoes through ditching, filling, and impounding. Rehabilitating damaged wetlands requires local, regional, state, and federal collaboration. In collaboration with partners, the St. Johns River Water Management District has led the reconnection, breaching, or rehabilitation of over 22,000 acres of impounded and impacted estuarine wetlands. This work involves restoring a more natural hydrology by adding culverts or returning dikes or piles of spoil to the elevation of adjacent, healthy wetland. Generally, there is no need for planting or subsequent maintenance as the restored wetlands recruit appropriate plants, exclude invasive plants, and are better able to maintain an appropriate vertical position relative to rising sea level. Much of the past work was completed prior to the increased focus on coastal resilience, and this focus has prompted the district to seek resources for acquisition and rehabilitation of a variety of coastal wetlands. Some examples will be present and more information can be found at [Bringing Back our Coastal Wetlands](#).

PRESENTER BIO: With nearly 40 years of research and restoration experience, Mr. Brockmeyer is responsible for development and implementation of coastal wetland projects on Florida's east central and northeast coast. He is co-chair of the Subcommittee on Managed Marshes and incoming chair of the multi-agency Northeast Florida Estuarine Restoration Team (NERT).