ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS TO ENHANCE RESILIENCE IN THE SUWANNEE RIVER BASIN

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Background

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Suwannee project is an interdisciplinary initiative that utilizes modeling to predict future outcomes in the Suwannee River Basin. To better understand the potential impacts of future climate and land use scenarios, the project team has worked closely with an advisory council comprised of local stakeholders. The council represents the interests of industries in the Suwannee River region such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, tourism, and natural resources management. Gathering local input has enabled researchers to address community concerns in the development of models and scenarios.

Methods

The advisory council was formed by identifying key opinion leaders in the region, who then referred the names of individuals who would be interested in contributing to the project. Referrals were contacted in early 2021 to confirm their willingness to participate. In April 2021, the first council meeting was held in Cedar Key, Florida. During the meeting, a focus group session was facilitated to understand the council's perceptions and concerns. After developing preliminary project models, the council convened for a virtual meeting in November 2021. A second focus group was conducted to collect input related to scenario development. As researchers implemented feedback in 2022, the council was updated on progress. In August 2023, a third council meeting was held to present the revised scenarios. Through a guided activity, council members identified additional factors to consider in the scenarios.

Next steps & implications

The advisory council will be instrumental in determining the best channels to disseminate results and policy recommendations. Sharing the scenarios with decision-makers and the public will create awareness for the social-ecological impacts of land use and climate change. Prioritizing the perspectives of stakeholders throughout the project has generated local buy-in, encouraging sustainable practices that will protect the future of the Suwannee River Basin and its resources.

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