

FUTURE FORUM ON THE ENVIRONMENT

REPORT

people who give
safeguard health **nurture** wetlands expand literacy
promote culture **defend** peace
celebrate music **preserve** coral reefs alleviate asthma **adopt** pets
support the environment
build museums **cultivate** gardens **protect** dunes **rescue** turtles educate youth
foster community **cure** illness
pursue justice **feed** children connect families
protect wildlife comfort infants **shelter** runaways save whales
seek a higher standard for living

*Community Foundation of the Florida Keys
April 2013*



Future Forum on the Environment Executive Summary

On March 14th, more than 60 environmentalists and community leaders met at the Eco-Discovery Center to discuss steps the community is taking to preserve and protect the natural environment. Strategies discussed included making Key West a national model in implementing green initiatives that will attract tourists and make residents proud. The panel discussed the need for leadership in this effort, and the importance of individuals and businesses in changing their behaviors concerning recycling and reusing resources to affect positive results.

CFFK Vice Chairman Todd German facilitated the Forum, which included presentations by a panel comprised of Historic Tours of America CEO, Chris Belland; Monroe County Sustainability Program Manager, Rhonda Haag; City of Key West Sustainability Coordinator, Alison Higgins; Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent, Sean Morton; and Environmental Consultant, Edward Russo.

The Environment Forum is available on YouTube, divided into seven video segments.

Among ideas and strategies discussed by the panel and the audience:

- Make Key West a national model in implementing green initiatives.
- Need for leadership in changing laws, such as mandatory recycling, commercial recycling, reduced use of plastics, conservation and water usage, and others.
- Need for city and public leadership in supporting green businesses, initiatives and incentives.
- Need for collaborations among city and county governments and all environmental groups, tourism, government, and education interests.
- Importance of individuals and businesses in changing their behaviors concerning recycling and reusing resources.
- Reduce the carbon footprint of the Keys by changes in visitor services, business recycling, landscaping and pool water usage, and other activities.
- Provide incentives for businesses to become involved in green initiatives and simplify green certification standards.
- Successful campaigns, such as smoking bans, were attached to medical research and health issues. Define health benefits and issues regarding environmental concerns.
- Address issues of public restrooms and public recycling bins.
- Increase advocacy with city and county commissioners.

As a result of the Forum, CFFK is using the ideas and issues discussed to guide the direction of its strategic planning. It is also working with local nonprofits on many of the issues discussed. The Forum encouraged cross-sector conversations and collaborations among other types of organizations, including the city and county, businesses, education, and tourism.

The community-wide discussion was the second in a planned series of Future Forums. CFFK will convene future discussions involving other key sectors of the community, such as education and quality of life.

Future Forum on the Environment Report

*Convened at the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center on March 14, 2013
By the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys*

Introduction

One important role for community foundations across the country is to convene community-wide discussions to help identify needs and plan future initiatives to address those needs. The second in a planned series of discussions on key sectors of the community was the Future Forum on the Environment. Convened by the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys (CFFK), the Forum was held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on March 14, 2013, at the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center. More than 60 city, county and environmental leaders, donors, and interested citizens gathered to discuss the future of the natural environment in the Florida Keys.

CFFK Vice Chairman Todd German facilitated the Forum. Todd was one of the key developers of the City of Key West's Strategic Plan, adopted in May 2011.

The meeting included presentations by a panel comprised of Historic Tours of America CEO, Chris Belland; Monroe County Sustainability Program Manager, Rhonda Haag; City of Key West Sustainability Coordinator, Alison Higgins; Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent, Sean Morton; and Environmental Consultant, Edward Russo (*see page 8 for bio information*).



Environment Forum panel (left to right): Ed Russo; Sean Morton; CFFK Vice Chair Todd German, who facilitated the discussion; Alison Higgins; Rhonda Haag; and Chris Belland.

The Environment Forum is available on YouTube. The Forum is divided into seven segments, including the introductions, panelists' remarks, and highlights from the audience discussion. Here is the introduction segment URL – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9biz5lkVAfg>. Access all seven segments on YouTube with keywords: Future Forum, CFFK, Environment Forum, Community Foundation of the Florida Keys, or AV in Paradise. Special thanks to CFFK Friend and Legacy Society Member Kelly Friend for her work on the videos.

The panelists were asked to address two questions in their remarks:

- 1) What steps are we taking to protect and preserve our natural environment to enhance the “Key West experience” for residents and visitors alike?
- 2) Thinking five years ahead, what environmental issues do we foresee as challenges and opportunities?

Panel Presentations

The Florida Keys comprise more than 1,700 islands, 96 bodies of water from canals to oceans, 190 native and endangered animals and plants, and 2,900 nautical miles of the National Marine Sanctuary with coral reefs, seagrass beds, and fisheries.

Todd German kicked off the Forum by discussing its purpose – to talk about the natural environment as it relates to the “Key West experience,” particularly as we look at the opportunities and challenges in the next five years. Key West is the only Caribbean island you can drive to, he said, and remarked that the Keys have done a good job of balancing the arts, restaurants and bars, and visitor experiences, with the need to protect and preserve the natural environment.

Ed Russo began the panelists’ comments by discussing numerous high-profile national marketing campaigns that became successful and led to changed laws and government policies, including the formation of Mothers Against Drunk Driving and subsequent DUI laws, smoking bans, seat belt laws, local ordinances to pick up after one’s dog, and so forth. Ed spoke from a business perspective and discussed how these successful corporate marketing strategies could be used to achieve several of the environmental goals of Key West. He also discussed that Key West would be a good “test market” to serve as an environmental example for the rest of the country. Tourists would leave the Keys with proven examples and solutions to environmental concerns.

“We can control our own future,” Ed said. “We need to buy into a common set of objectives and then take actions ourselves by modifying behaviors.”

Sean Morton discussed the National Marine Sanctuary’s review of marine regulations and zoning. The Sanctuary has ongoing work and future objectives to protect and preserve the marine environment, including science and restoration efforts, enforcement, and education. Among new recommendations are conservation measures to protect shallow water areas of the Keys, facilitate ecosystem restoration activities, advance the science of coral reef restoration, and ensure adequate protection of marine habitats, spawning grounds, and key species which have dramatically declined in the last 100 years. Major challenges in the next five years include water quality, overfishing, poaching, marine deterioration, coastal development, and more uses of backcountry areas.

“Challenges and opportunities for the future lie in the community support for marine conservation and the need for public and private partnerships where there is common recognition of the link between the environment and the economy,” Sean said. “Almost 60 percent of the Keys economy is tied to marine-related tourism and recreation.”

Alison Higgins reviewed the City of Key West’s initiatives in energy, solid waste, transportation, and conversation areas. She discussed the city’s Climate Change Action Plan and the city’s new environmental sustainability marketing campaign called “Preserve Island Life.” The campaign is divided into 12 months of the year and features social media efforts, community activities, media features, “how to” guides, and a discussion of regulations and policies.

Challenges for the future include addressing the issues of 3 million visitors annually to the island as they relate to the preservation of the natural environment. “We need more advocacy efforts from the public,” she said. “The decisions we make now will affect changes in the future.”



The Future Forum on the Environment at the Eco-Discovery Center.

Rhonda Haag reviewed Monroe County’s initiatives in sustainability, including a recently-completed *Climate Action Plan*, and the Climate element of the updated *Monroe County Comprehensive Plan*. The Comprehensive Plan guides future growth and development over the next 20 years in areas such as land use, coastal management, conservation, and transportation. Rhonda also reviewed the recently-produced *Regional Climate Action Plan* of the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Compact team, a group representing Broward, Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, and Monroe counties in partnering to mitigate the causes and adapting to the consequences of climate change. She also discussed the environmental interests of the Seven/50 organization, seven counties in Southeast Florida working together to increase the economy and build stronger communities over the next 50 years.

“We need to continue to support green initiatives at the county level, support efforts such as recycling and the use of solar power, and advocate with county commissioners for policy changes,” Rhonda said.

Chris Belland concluded the panelists’ remarks by reviewing staggering environmental concerns and statistics that are affected by population growth, energy consumption, materials production (such as plastics and styrofoam), science, technology, politics, food production, farming and nutrition industries, and many other

local, statewide, regional, national, and global factors. He discussed the “Love Your Island” campaign that he initiated for individuals and businesses to participate in green initiatives.

“The problem is the companies responsible for some of the environmental issues are giving the public exactly what we asked for (in terms of cost, efficiency, convenience, and production),” Chris said. “I don’t see the leadership necessary to turn it all around.”

Audience Discussion

Following the panelists’ remarks, the audience participated in a discussion, commenting on points the panelists made and reacting to the two main questions. Among ideas and strategies discussed by the audience:

- Make Key West a national model in implementing green initiatives.
- As a community, set a list of goals and objectives for green initiatives, and then provide citizens with the steps to achieve them.
- Involve tourists in sustaining green initiatives in the Keys.
- Need for leadership in changing laws, such as mandatory recycling, commercial recycling, reduced use of plastics, conservation and water usage, and others.
- Need for city and public leadership in supporting green businesses, initiatives and incentives.
- Need for collaborations among city and county governments and all environmental groups, tourism, government, and education interests.
- Address water quality enhancements in canals.
- Importance of individuals and businesses in changing their behaviors concerning recycling and reusing resources.
- Reduce the carbon footprint of the Keys by changes in visitor services, business recycling, landscaping and pool water usage, and other activities.
- Provide incentives for businesses to become involved in green initiatives and simplify green certification standards.
- Successful campaigns, such as smoking bans, were attached to medical research and health issues. Define health benefits and issues regarding environmental concerns.
- Address issues of public restrooms and public recycling bins.
- Increase advocacy with city and county commissioners.

Outcomes

As a result of the Future Forum on the Environment, CFFK noted the following outcomes or impact of the discussion:

- 1) The Forum encouraged collaboration among environmental advocates, environmental organizations, the city and county, and among groups with non-environmental interests, such as business, education, and tourism.
- 2) The Forum added clarity to what has been done, what is currently being done, and what needs to be done in the future for the natural environment.

- 3) The Forum opened dialogue between and among a number of environmental and non-environmental interests.
- 4) CFFK will use the ideas and issues discussed to guide the direction of its strategic planning and its work with local nonprofits as it relates to environmental concerns.

CFFK has received many positive comments about the Forum. Key West Civic Leader Perry Johnston said: “I was impressed not only by the broad and long-range ideas that emerged at the Environment Forum, but also the important local perspective that the panel members advocated. Through looking at the issues from many viewpoints, the panelists certainly coalesced around the need and motivation for Key West leadership across environmental issues. The Environment Forum and the Forum on the Arts not only have furthered our thinking on the future of Key West, but together make a powerful force for a way forward.”

Art in Public Places Chair Michael Shields said: “Another excellent Forum and presentations...with a full slate of action in many quarters.”

The community-wide discussion was the second in a planned series of Future Forums. CFFK will convene future discussions involving other key sectors of the community, such as quality of life, recreation, and education.



The Forum was also broadcast on a video monitor in the Eco-Discovery Center lobby.

Future Forum on the Environment Panelist Bios

Chris Belland

Chris Belland is founder, CEO and a Director of Historic Tours of America. He is a past president of the Key West Attractions Association, which he founded in 1983; a past director of the Key West and Lower Keys Development Corporation; and a former board member of CFFK and the Key West Chamber of Commerce. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Economics from the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania. Chris was the founder of Love Your Island, a local environmental group that is an official committee of the Chamber. He is a lecturer on environmental issues as well as a columnist for the Key West Citizen. He served as the Chamber's representative on the city's Clean and Green organization. For his efforts in environmental activities and the Love Your Island program, Chris was awarded the Chamber's Billy Appelrouth Award, its highest recognition of an individual's efforts on behalf of the community.

Rhonda Haag

Rhonda Haag joined Monroe County in 2011 to manage a \$3.2 million grant from the Federal Department of Energy. She has since been named the County's Sustainability Manager, and is involved in developing numerous sustainability programs for the County, including energy management, waste management, composting, water conservation, energy projects, financing and grants. Rhonda holds an MBA in Management and a BBA in Finance and Economics. She previously resided in the Keys for several years, where she served as the Director of the South Florida Water Management District's local office.

Alison Higgins

Alison Higgins is the Sustainability Coordinator for the City of Key West where she has managed the development of the Preserve Island Life sustainability campaign and updated the city's comprehensive plan to include 54 new items of sustainability. She has a Master of Arts degree in Environment and the Community from Antioch University in Seattle, and a Bachelor's degree in Aquatic Biology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Previously Alison was the Executive Director of GLEE – Green Living and Energy Education – for six years, and Land Conservation Program Manager for the Nature Conservancy. She has also served as the chair of Friends and Volunteers of Refuges, a nonprofit organization supporting the Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges.

Sean Morton

Sean Morton has been the Superintendent of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary since 2009. As Superintendent, Sean is responsible for all aspects of management, operations, and policy implementation. Prior to coming to the Florida Keys, Sean held several positions in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. He served as the Management Plan Coordinator for the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and as a Program Analyst in the Office of the Director for National Marine Sanctuaries in Silver Spring, Maryland. He has also worked in NOAA's Program Coordination Office and as the Deputy Associate Director for Ocean and Coastal Policy at the White House Council on Environmental Quality. Sean holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and Environmental Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a Master of Public Administration from American University in Washington, DC.

Edward Russo

Ed Russo has an extensive background in working with environmental issues and organizations. He is an international environmental consultant. He is chairman of the Florida Keys Environmental Coalition, a board member of Reef Relief, a board member of Florida Keys EcoWeek, a member of Last Stand, and a board member of the Potomac River Healthy Waters Task Force, among numerous other organizations and activities.

Todd German (facilitator)

Todd German is vice chairman of the Community Foundation. He is vice president of Centennial Bank and has been a Key West resident for more than 20 years. He was one of the key developers of the City of Key West's Strategic Plan in 2011, serving as a planning committee member. Todd is a community leader and is involved in numerous organizations, including serving as President of the Key West Collegiate School, Vice President of the Key West Business Guild, Chairman of Hometown PAC, and as a member of the Key West Citizen Editorial Board, among many others.