

Working Together, Sharing Water Across Government Lines

Dr. Hank Venema, Vice President, Science and Innovation, International Institute for Sustainable Development, Manitoba

John Stulp, Special Policy Advisor to the Governor, Colorado

Mark Masters, Executive Manager, ACF Stakeholders, Georgia

All three speakers shared one common theme when it came to sharing water across government lines, collaboration. While they recognized that collaboration on water issues isn't always easy, just getting the conversation started is a great first step that can eliminate a lot of preconceived differences of opinions that may not exist. John Stulp emphasized that "relationships are important in any water agreement. Dr. Hank Venema suggested that changing the conversation about water issues by "getting in front of the water challenges and framing them as an investment opportunity." Manitoba faces issues of large scale flooding from water coming from outside the province and is having to work across multiple borders to try to reduce future floods. He continued that it won't be easy to fix the problem but that the investment in solutions now would help prevent future costs and justified the upfront costs.

Mark Masters was able to provide an overview of the difficulty and rewards of getting disparate groups to work together through the work he has done with the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Stakeholders. As with many water issues, it started out with a barrage of lawsuits over two decades before an effort was launched to get all the stakeholders on the same page. Eventually they were able to get the 14 stakeholder groups to agree to a structure that gave each stakeholder four representatives representing different sub basins for a total of 56 members. Through this group they have been able to raise \$1.3 million to create a sustainable water management plan. It is still a work in progress but at least now they are all working towards a common goal, showing that it may be hard but disparate groups can learn to work together.