

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: April 22, 2021 Earth Day

Mark Perry called the ZOOM Meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

Members in attendance: 62+ people were present on ZOOM Call.

Chairman's Comments: Mark Perry said that they has been a a lot of activity in the St. Lucie river with the recent Lake Releases. Mark welcomed **Brian Mast**- State Senator, City of Stuart Commissioner- **Becky Bruner**, Martin County Commissioner-**Stacey Hetherington** and **Dolores** Johnson - State Rep from SLC.

Mark welcomed the newest member to Rivers Coalition, Sandhill Cove Retirement Living and **Louise Freeman** their representative who does water testing and oyster restoration for FOS at Sandhill Cove. Mark said that brings the RC members to 106.

Brian Mast gave opening remarks that we are at a once in a lifetime opportunity to rewrite LOSOM policy. It is important to contact your Rep and Senator and get everyone to write/email/phone USACE about this LOSOM policy. USACE PO Box 4970 Jacksonville, FL 32232 (561) 340-1527 LakeOComments@usace.army.mil Ask for 4C-1 3307 (22448) to be approved so there will be zero discharges to SLR

Presentation: **Jim Moir** introduced Patrick Rose, Executive Director of Save the Manatees.

Pat Rose gave PowerPoint presentation on "Manatees and their Seagrasses"

60% of manatees depend on warm water from power plants.

In the 1960's there were 800-1,200 manatees at 10 ft and approx. 1,000-1,200 lbs

They have one calf every 3-5 years. A baby is 3 ft at 70 lbs. and stay with mom 1-2 years.

Then there were low numbers due to the hunting of the manatees.

There are 600 now at Blue Spring and they were coming back regularly.

2017-2017-2018-new records broken due to mortality in boating accidents.

Main Manatee Public Policy Issues:

Red Tide/Habitat loss/Reduced Spring Flow/Degraded Water Quality and Nutrient Pollution/Seagrass Loss/Loss of Artificial Warm Water/Tourism/Loss of Manatee Access (locks)/Watercraft Strikes/Unusual Mortality Events

Manatees were down listed prematurely.

Too much water being drawn from aquifers.

The IRL is approaching the "Tipping Point."

Actual seagrass loss since 2011 has exceeded 90% to date. Especially in Mosquito Lagoon.

It is much worse than the actual info states.

2016 there was a Brown Tide

In Titusville most of the seagrasses are gone.

2021- 674 manatees dead 3 times the average deaths.

Only 1 in 3 are getting necropsied.

Partners with FWC, MRC, Zoos, SeaWorld to rescue 70+ this year.

Rescues are at capacity.

Next winter it could be much worse, no encouraging signs.

Next year there could be 100's of rescues and there has to be a plan to feed them.

Anticipate that 1,000 manatees might die this year.

FWC dropped the ball. Seagrass loss is due to too much nutrients.

All part of the problem is septic tanks and poorly treated wastewater, fertilizers from residential/Agriculture and Sugar Farming.

Red Tide is a "Natural Cause" but more virulent due to local pollution.

Cold Stress – man makes it worse for them

Manatees can live over 60 years yet they are dying now on average at 7-14 years.

Report any sick manatees to FWC hot line (888) 404-3922

We can't keep developing in Florida, The IRL is already at its tipping point.

All these are results of human failure.

We need to send a strong message to President Biden and the Senate.

To see ZOOM recording of presentation go to www.rivercoalition.org or *Rivers Coalition Facebook page*.

Martin County Report: **Dianne Hughes:** MC is working with FOS and FWC on a seagrass planting strategy. Lake O discharges stopped on April 10 but on FB live feed on April 12th there was a big bloom on Lake. The testing on the Lakeside of S-308 came back with 120 which is 15X higher than EPA safe level of .8 milligrams per liter. Salinity in the St. Lucie River North and South Fork is 18-19, Middle River is 23 and Jensen Beach is 32. **Katie Bowes** tested at Shepard Park and there was no alga present.

City of Stuart: **Ben Hogarth** had two slides (see RC website) Pareto Plans for Comparison. In the LOSOM process they have gone from 27,000 plans to 3 plans. S-308 regular flows to St Lucie Estuary Pareto Plan A-87.27; Plan C-10.79; Plan D-58.6; Plan G-75.22. Plan C was not in the final 3 plans considered. Ben said that we can start with Plan D but make #1-#3 "Perspectives to achieve a balanced plan" a priority. All three take into consideration the effects on the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee River.

SFWMD: **Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch** is out in the field with Governor De Santis at STA 5A. Mark Perry gave a report on latest SFWMD meetings.

Lake O Update: **Dr. Paul Gray** said that the Lake 14.25 feet. He wants it two feet shallower.

State and Federal Legislation: State session ends on April 30th. Senate Bill 1668 is Seagrass mitigation Bill. The seagrass is a statewide critical issue. We need to contact **Gayle Harrell, Toby Overdorf and John Snyder** to get it to the forefront and not get buried in paperwork at the end of the session.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: **Nic Mader** 5,000 copies of RK workbook to be printed and in the schools by Fall.

Speaker Bureau: **Todd Weissing** asked Barbara Osborn to read his report: *"After what seemed to be forever, the Speakers Bureau is back meeting with the public. On April 14th the RC was invited to address a the American Association of University Women outside at Halpatiokee Park. We are in the process of scheduling our next speaking event tentatively scheduled for May 5. The Speakers Bureau delivers the RC message to the public that does not attend our meetings. This is a critical time for the population to be informed and engaged as the USACE is in the final stages of selecting a new operating schedule. To schedule a speaker, click the request a speaker icon on the RC website."*

Local Issues & Estuary Water Quality:

Mark Perry -FOS Water Quality Report the water quality is B GOOD. But the seagrass habitat loss is tremendous. There will be more local runoff in the upcoming wet season.

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow showed comparison satellite images of seagrass mapping. There are no flows right now from the Lake but due to local rain runoff and excess water from C-44 basin the S-80 was opened. Todd shared JTL's aerial photos of March 5th-clear up to 35 days after discharges and the brown plume was through the inlet and into the ocean.

Paul Gray said that he saw algae on both sides of S-308 (Port Mayaca). Was just by Pahokee Marina and it is an enclosed marina with a raging bloom.

Jim Moir: The Marine Resource's Report Card for lower IRL is "F+." The water quality has not improved the habitat and overall it is failing. This shift may be irreversible and what is happening to the Manatees can happen to us.

Indian Riverkeeper: Mike Conner has been out on the Lake 4 times in the last two weeks. All boats coming through Port Mayaca drag the algae bloom in with them. Mike observed Hispanic people fishing for food in the algae bloom. It was like thick green paint. He contacted the authorities and insisted on Spanish health warning signs being placed where there is fishing.

Lake Worth Riverkeeper: n/a

Member Comments and Announcements:

Maggy Hurchalla: Two years ago the DEP said the water wasn't "too toxic." We know that it can turn toxic very quickly. We should demand more frequent sampling and have the Agencies tell the public immediately anytime the bloom is there- that was the recommendation of the Blue/Green Algae Task Force. We need to contact Indiantown to inform their residents of the danger of fishing at Port Mayaca or in the C-44 canal.

Paul Gray-We need to take care of our communities better and inform them of the toxins.

Greg Braun- Good news the LoxaLucie Headwaters project was endorsed by Martin County Commissioners.

Mark Perry- Showed the RC Advertisements of "Fix the FLO" and "Stop the Discharges" that were/are in Sunday's papers. Mark thanked the Advertising Campaign Committee. The next Adv will be on Human Health.

Delores Johnson- State Representative Thanked everyone and encouraged them to keep the info flowing to our legislators and the public. "Good Work-Keep it up."

Next RC meeting May 27, 2021 11:00 via ZOOM. We will focus on the economic results of the discharges.

Adjourned 12:34 p.m.