

# Rivers Coalition

## Meeting Minutes: September 23, 2021

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Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. 76 people on ZOOM call  
Minutes taken by Barbara Osborn, Administrative Assistant

**Members Via zoom:** Mark Perry-Michelle Byriel (FOS), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Jim Moir (MRC), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores HOA), Mike Conner (Indian Riverkeeper), Hillarie Davis (USSCMC), Eve Samples-Gil Smart-Allie Preston (Friends of Everglades), Brittany Bearden (MC Farm Bureau), Walter Deemer (League of Women's Voter of MC), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Rip Fisher (Indian River Plantation), Ann Potts (TC Rowing Club), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Jeanette Hartzell (Assn of University Women), Kellie Dore (Everglades Law), Paul Gray (Audubon), Melissa Zolla (Keep Martin Beautiful), Kevin Hinkle (St. Lucie Audubon),

**Non-members via zoom:** Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch-Drew Bartlett-John Mitnik-Carolyn Ansay-Kathy La Martina Sean Cooley-Jennifer Reynolds- (SFWMD), Eva Velez-Kim Taplin-Erika Skolte-Tim Gysan-Jim Yocum-Lt Col Todd Polk (USACE), Eula Clarke-Merritt Matheson-Becky Bruner (Stuart City Council), Ben Hogarth-Caryn Hall (City of Stuart), John Maehl-Dianne Hughes (Martin County), Blake Faulkner, Rob Lord (Martin Health Systems), David Cross (MC Dem Club). Doug Ashley, Nyla Pipes, Stacy Ranieri, Terrie Bates, Pete Quasius, Bennett Buckles, Brian McGann, D. Thurlow, Stephen Chalmers, Adnan Alghita, Brian McGann, Carol Guthrie, Gerald Ward, James Schuster, John Amerling, Kellie Ralston, Rhonda Ruff, Jeremy McBryan, Jerry Snyder, Newton Cook, Don Kurtz, WPBF 25 News, WPBT Channel 5

**Via zoom** Brian Mast (US Representative), Lisa Aley-Jessica Mallet-Cal Neidrauer (USACE),

**Presentation:** South Florida Water Management District Presenters: Drew Bartlett, Executive Director; John Mitnik, Assistant Executive Director; Carolyn Ansay, General Counsel.  
Speaking on the "Constraints" of why the water can't move south to STAs.

*Drew Bartlett's PPT presentation and ZOOM RC meeting recording can be seen at [www.riverscoalition.org](http://www.riverscoalition.org)  
Also see [www.SFWMD.gov/sendingwatersouth](http://www.SFWMD.gov/sendingwatersouth) video*

### **Discussion: (summary of discussion-not verbatim)**

**Drew Bartlett:** There are legal water quality standards of water going from STAs to WCAs that need to be reached by 2025. Long term- 10 parts per billion and reducing phosphorus to 13 parts per billion.

**Mark Perry:** Are the constraints for "flood protection" or "crop protection?" The EAA farmers should have on-site retention of rain run-off. Why can't we require EAA to store the run-off instead of letting them put it into taxpayer paid STAs?

**John Mitnik:** Canal levels are codified by USACE.

**Drew Bartlett:** We have to follow these protocols. There are no dividing lines between towns and AG fields. AG holds their drainage until towns are drained and canals are leveled.

The AG operations in operation before the 1980's are grandfathered in so they don't need an ERP permit.

**Carolyn Ansay:** There are 289 permitted AG operations that are permitted to drain into major canals.

**Mark Perry:** Are these permitted or controlled by SFWMD? Does the Florida Forever Act regulate run-off?

**Drew Bartlett:** The Florida Forever Act was to reduce the phosphorous going into canals.

**Eve Samples:** What are the costs of STAs? What are the sources of funding?

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**Drew Bartlett:** The STAs are funded  $\frac{1}{2}$  by AG and  $\frac{1}{2}$  by Ad Valorem property taxes. \$25 per acre tax annually. Generates \$11-12 million annually in 15-16 counties. STA-\$2 billion construction effort nearing end. Annual cost to maintain is \$22 million.

**Eve Samples:** Taxpayers are paying most of the costs yet not getting any benefits.

**Todd Thurlow:** LOSOM modeling is basically East or West because “red lights” have been put on going South. The model puts constraints on going south so no water goes that direction.

**Carolyn Ansay:** The Water Resources Development Act puts on legal constraints.

**Todd Thurlow :** That is the definition of “Flood Control?” The SFWMD has another model for south of the Lake which is a “crop optimization model” to optimize water tables for AG but is that really a “constraint.” Webster’s definition: “Flooding is water overflowing on land” But is that really happening?

**John Mitnik:** The Design Documentation Report defines it as “Level of Service.” Broward County has the East Coast Protective which is  $\frac{3}{4}$ ” per day- 1 day to pull canals levels down to level of service. The level of service of EAA is  $\frac{3}{4}$ ” per day. The SFWMD models are 2 X 2. LOSOM’s new version is RSM “Regional System Model.” It is a hydrology routing model not constrained by  $\frac{3}{4}$ ” per day. Then the resulting water levels can be used to move water around.

**Mark Perry:** If we can’t send water south then the equity is not there with the basin run off taking a lot of that capacity. Can constraints be modified or changed to benefit the coasts?

Conclusion of Discussion: Mark expressed his appreciation that the SFWMD team is here today. Drew appreciates the Rivers Coalition and that it is a force to be reckoned with, which is a good thing. Change is happening and it doesn’t happen without public groups to help us make it happen.

### Government & Agency Reports:

**Martin County:** Dianne Hughes Ecosystem Mgt and restoration- grateful that there have been no discharges from Lake O since early June. There is 603 cfs but it is C-44 basin run off. There is 10,000 cfs into Caloosahatchee- no wonder they are not happy with us.

Salinity: decreasing due to local basin run off Middle Estuary is down to 10.

Enterococcus- no samples-no data. On Sept 13 it was looking good.

There is HAB Harmful Algae Bloom on lake as reported by Lock operators. The USACE has been discharging to C-44 but no Algal blooms yet.

**City of Stuart/LOSOM-** Ben Hogarth has been representing the East Coast in PDT workshops in discussing Iteration 3. Please participate if you can. Very positive in the direction it is going. Ben and Vice Mayor Merritt Matheson went out to C-44 Reservoir in August, and met the new Col. Booth. Thanks to Col Kelly for all the work he has done in getting that project completed even earlier than planned. Only concern is the run off due to the rain. Ironically the C-44 reservoir project is designed specifically for this kind of scenario but it won’t be on-line until early November. Prime opportunity to give the River a chance to recover.

**SFWMD:** Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch- Thanks to the SFWMD executive staff for this conversation. Jennifer Reynolds (SFWMD) puts out one-page “triangle report” with other agencies DEP-SFWMD-FDACS getting them all to work together and communicate. The surrounding basin run off is destructive to our estuary. Tons of hope on horizon if we can get reservoirs on line over the next 7 years.

**USACE:** Mark announced the change of command from Col Andrew Kelly to Col James Booth.

Tim Gysan- Thanked all the stakeholders sharing communication during LOSOM process.

PDT- Tim sent out yesterday an Update on the Optimization Process on the Deferred Alternative Plan . Been working on the Plan CC optimization of Iteration 3. On Oct 18<sup>th</sup> there is a PDT meeting. Operational Guidance of LOSOM on Nov 18<sup>th</sup> to finalize plan.

March 2022 is scheduled for review then Dec 2022 LOSOM will be completed to coincide with opening of improved Hoover Dike.

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Kissimmee Basin reconstruction near completion to see cleaner water coming into Lake O.

Eva Velez (USACE) noted in "chat" Integral Delivery System Schedule public workshop on Wednesday Sept 29<sup>th</sup> 9-12:30 [www.evergladesrestoration.gov](http://www.evergladesrestoration.gov)

**Lake O Update:** Dr. Paul Gray Lake is at 15'. The lake is "pretty buggered up" because IDA hit us- the lake went up to 16 1/2' then IRMA took it up to 17' now it is back to where we were.

Audubon has recommended that the releases be shared more equitably. Although Paul realizes that SLR is more "buggered up" than Caloosahatchee but the Audubon is a State group Audubon can't show favoritism. Audubon agrees with all that the water should be moved south.

Mark: The models should be sending the water south so the west and east are not at odds with each other. Stop all the harmful releases to Caloosahatchee and move that water south. We are questioning that today as to why we can't do that.

**State:** Mark Perry-Local FL House delegation meetings are happening, go to them. Committees start next week thru December. Session starts 60 day session Jan 11. Engage your state legislators.

### Coalition Reports:

**Water Quality Report:** Mark Perry- Salinity- below 6 parts per million-unhealthy for oysters. Water is murky and muddy.

**Seagrass Update:** Todd Thurlow- Lake O is at 15.24' and going up. Caloosahatchee is getting enormous discharges -12,000 cfs. The sandflats are not sand but brown algae mats sitting on the sandflats.

See [www.eyeonlakeo.com](http://www.eyeonlakeo.com)

Jim Moir: He has seen the manatees eating this brown algae and it is not good nutrition. This is a disastrous chain of events. The IRL is changing from a seagrass base to algae base.

**Indian Riverkeeper Update:** Mike Conner- There is ZERO salinity at Leighton and Frasier Creek launch ramps. He wouldn't get into that water at the ramps.

Slides of the ORCA project at Shephard Park's new Buffer shoreline. There are algae inside C-44 lock, he reported it to Drew Bartlett. The Tilapia is eating the cyanobacteria and then the fishermen are eating the tilapia. St. Lucie County is spraying herbicide at Green River Parkway. He is taking Charlotte Roman, gov board member of SFWMD, out on his boat to show her IRL, putting her up at Indian River Palms in JB.

### **Public Comments:**

JTL: Her heart hurts and gets furious when people compare Caloosahatchee to St Lucie River. SLR is a large stream, a teeny river not a huge estuary. You can't compare them.

Jim Moir: MRC-Marine Resource Council is hosting a low-impact development workshop Oct 21<sup>st</sup> in Rockledge.

Eve Samples: The St Lucie River is much worse off than the Caloosahatchee. Plan CC addressed that. Friends of Everglades support Plan CC with NO additional discharges to SLR. Col Kelly said that Lake O discharges is only a last resort. We hope that continues with Col Booth.

Mark: FOS is having an Oyster Restoration bagging tomorrow, continuing to restore the IRL.

Mark thanks the SFWMD in being open to communicate with us.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 pm