

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: January 27, 2022

Members via Zoom: Mark Perry -Zack(FOS), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Jim Moir (MRC), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores HOA), Blair Wickstrom (Florida Sportsman), Nic Made (River Kidz), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point HOA), Hillarie Davis (USSCMC), Eve Samples-Gil Smart-Allie Hartmann (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), Melissa Zolla/Tiffany Kincaid (Keep Martin Beautiful), Dan Merritt (Seagate HOA), Joann Swann (St. Lucie Sailing Club), Greg Braun (Guardians of MC),

Non-members via Zoom: Toby Overdorf (State Rep), Joe Planz, Joe Katz (Toby Overdorf 's office), Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch-Drew Bartlett-John Mitnik Sean Cooley-Jennifer Reynolds(SFWMD), Eva Velez-Kim Taplin-Tim Gysan-Jim Yocum-Lt Col Todd Polk-Col Booth (USACE), Eula Clarke-Merritt Matheson (Stuart City Council), Ben Hogarth (City of Stuart), Deb Drum (PB County), OZ Vazquez, Wendy Dick, Blake Faulkner, Terrie Bates, Adnan Alghita, John Amerling, Jeremy McBryan, Don Kurtz, Vincent Econmio, Renee Lessard-Moreshead, Melissa Burke, Pat Rose (Save the Manatee Club), Rebecca Elliott, Caitlin Neukamp, Laura Vennard, Pat LaBalbo, Lisa Krinsky, Robert Mathias, Anne Cox, Kelly Cox, Addison Testoff, Sarah Perry Kearney, Jennifer Smith, Erica Welch

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:00 am. 74 people on ZOOM call
Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

Presentation:

LOSOM Update by Eve Samples: At meeting of Jan. 12th, the SFWMD asked for control of a larger swath of lake water. She showed the USACE's operations chart and indicated where the additional 1.5 buffer would be. FOE's main concern was the possible political pressure that could be put on SFWMD to keep lake levels higher during the dry season than is necessary. The lake plan is a 10-year plan, while the leadership of SFWMD changes with election cycles.

Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch responded to various questions proposed by Eve, the main being one where and when the proposal had been generated. Her reply was that it was a communication problem and that the proposal had existed since July 2021, but no specifics had been discussed until recently. She passed the discussion over to Drew Bartlett, who replied that they were not trying to "add a line to the graph" but would continue discussions.

Col. Booth with USACE said they monitor Lake O for federal purposes, one of them being water supply. He said they are committed to continue working with SFWMD to draft operational policies and that there would be plenty of opportunity for further comments/communication. He went over the LOSOM schedule and said the next PDT would be sometime in mid-February.

Save the Manatee Club – Patrick Rose

Last year's manatee mortality rate was a record high of 1101 verified deaths. The trend is continuing this year (50 in January) due to cold stress and large-scale malnutrition leading to starvation. Patrick said around 20 manatees were trapped when the locks closed, and the USACE responded that they are aware and are heating the water for the manatees. Patrick said his club has rescue efforts underway and is providing supplemental feeding.

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: January 27, 2022

Patrick asked the SFWMD to review the removal of freshwater vegetation in canals because the manatees are going farther inland seeking food.

SFWMD Update – Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch

JTL talked about the C23/C24 groundbreaking ceremony scheduled for Feb. 18th. She said, “This is a magical time of progress.” She mentioned that they are still working on the EAA reservoir and that it “has to happen.”

Col. Kelly responded that the \$1.5 billion recently allocated to the USACE for Everglades Restoration is being used to fund projects that can be completed, whereas the EAA would require billions. He is confident the momentum will continue for the EAA.

Seagrass Mitigation Bill HB 349 sponsored by Toby Overdorf

(Toby had to leave the meeting before this discussion due to another obligation.)

Mark Perry said a letter had been sent by the Rivers Coalition to Toby Overdorf and the other bill sponsors indicating why the RC is opposed to this bill.

Eve summarized the bill and why the RC members opposed it. The bill would make it easier for developers to get permits, and according to a leading seagrass expert in Florida, “the bill is bad for lots of reasons.”

Mark Perry said that seagrass mitigation banking might sound like a good idea, but it is not, because it has been tried unsuccessfully in the past. He said RC would be tracking this closely.

ZOOM RC meeting recording can be seen at www.riverscoalition.org

Discussion: (summary of discussion-not verbatim)

Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: n/a

City of Stuart/LOSOM- Ben Hogarth said the city is focusing on legislation at this time and that they are working on their positions.

Mayor Matheson said that the lake levels are a direct reflection on the burden that the City of Stuart might bear in the rainy season. Staff is working on putting their position in writing. At the last city council meeting, they voted to apply for a matching grant for a living shoreline near the hospital.

SFWMD: Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch said SFWMD’s next meeting will be on Thursday, Feb 10th in West Palm Beach. She encouraged all to attend, stating that, “We have to keep fighting.”

USACE: LTC Polk reviewed the operations slide and said their intent was to try not to release water. Regarding the manatees, he reiterated that they are working on heating the waters. He reassured all that the USACE is in constant communication with the SWFMD.

Lake O Update: Dr. Paul Gray not in attendance.

State and Federal Legislation: Eve referred to the seagrass mitigation bill and then asked Gil to discuss the other main legislation.

Gil Smart discussed SB1000/HB1245 about “rate tailoring” which allows farmers to hire consultants to recommend customized fertilizer rates, aimed primarily at the citrus industry. The additional fertilizer would naturally lead to more runoff. The consultants would be enrolled in BMPs, but currently the BMPs are not working as intended, because if enrolled, there is a presumption of compliance, with no monitoring. Gil said the only outcome would be more nutrients into the watershed. For more info, see everglades.org.

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: January 27, 2022

The 60-day legislative session ends in March.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Nic Mader says she has a lot of River Kidz workbooks available and will deliver to anyone who needs them.

She said that there is a lecture at the Lyric on the night of Thursday, Mar. 24th sponsored by the ESC, with lecture by Patrick Rose of the Save the Manatee Club. Eve Samples will be a moderator. This is a free event.

Speakers Bureau: Todd Weissing said he is available for speaker bookings by request.

Water Quality Report: Mark Perry said current lake level is at 15.07. The latest water quality report shows grade of B+ and is available online. Also, the 2021 Impact Report by the FOS is available online and will be posted on the RC website.

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow said satellite imagery showed no seagrass on sand flats on Jan. 15th. Close-up photos indicated sprouts of paddle grass, shoal grass, and halophia Johnsoni, but nowhere near as thick as it used to be. www.eyeonlakeo.com

Indian Riverkeeper Update: Mike Conner unable to attend.

Public Comments: Zach from FOS mentioned the coastal lecture series. Mark Perry mentioned the water ambassador series. Walter Deemer wished Eve Samples a happy birthday. Mark thanked all for attending the Zoom meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 pm