

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: June 23, 2022

Members via Zoom: Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Nic Mader (Dolphin Ecology Project), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Emma Haydocy (Surfrider Foundation), Hilarie Davis (US Sailing Center), Diane Goldberg-Kevin Hinkle (St. Lucie Audubon), Cheryl Bryson (Venture Three), Carol Ann Leonard-Gayle Ryan (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Melissa Zolla-Tiffany Kincaid (Keep Martin Beautiful), Rip Fisher (Indian River Plantation).

Members in person: Mark Perry (FOS), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Blair Wickstrom (Florida Sportsman), Rich Hall (River Warriors), Paul Gray (Audubon), Jan Robertson (Atlantic Point Yacht Club & Marina of Stuart), Jim Skeoch (Venture Three), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Brittany Bearden (MC Farm Bureau), Rosanne Ryba (Joe's Point HOA),

Non-members via Zoom: Caitlin Newcamp, Rip Fisher (Indian River Plantation), Charles Murphy, Max Chesnes-Ed Killer (TCPalm), Tom MacVicar, Douglas Ashley, Ernie Barnett, Christine Johns, Lisa Aley (USACE), Abbie Flood-Anthony Brunet (FOS), Allen Herskowitz, Bill Baker, Kevin Kerrigan, Lisa Krinsky, Robert Mathias, Laura Vennard, Nicole Kirchhoff, Tiare Fridrich (Save the Manatee Club), Pat Wille, Matt Mitchell, Kim Pependorf, Stacy Weller Ranieri

Non-members in person: Merritt Matheson (Stuart City Council), Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch (SFWMD), Dianne Hughes (Martin County), Brian McGann, Paul Laura, Sarah Pillion, Barbara Osborn, Blake Faulkner, Mike Knepper, Rob Lord, Renee Lessard-Moreshead, John Maehl, Ray Denzel, Bradley Watson-Sarah Perry Kearney (Everglades Foundation), Jim and Beth Jurgaitis, Chris Englund

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 31 attendees in person, 38 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

Opening Comments: Mark Perry mentioned that the City of Stuart recently hosted the Army Corps of Engineers for a boat tour of the South Fork of the St. Lucie River.

Presentation: TOXIC DISCHARGES THIS SUMMER? NEXT STEPS

Historic Perspective to Discharges: Mark Perry, Executive Director of the Florida Oceanographic Society, discussed the history of discharges from Lake Okeechobee and their cause-and-effect relationship with toxic algae.

Public Health: Rob Lord, former CEO of Cleveland Clinic Martin Memorial, talked about the health issues related to toxic algae. He discussed the steps Martin Memorial had taken during the past "toxic summers" and the need to improve the system, keep up the momentum, and not become complacent.

Government Response: Merritt Matheson, Mayor of Stuart, spoke about the importance of government getting the "toxic algae danger" message out and how to accomplish this, and also discussed the City of Stuart's plan of action, including signage.

Public Rally: Blair Wickstrom, publisher of Florida Sportsman, gave a rally call to those present and also the community, emphasizing the importance of being ready as a community with a plan of action.

Media Relations: Gil Smart, Executive Director of VoteWater and former journalist with TCPalm, discussed the media's role in getting public attention and that of politicians, and also the public's role in keeping the media informed of events, protests, etc.

Current Lake Status: Todd Thurlow, attorney and author of the website eyeonlakeo.com, discussed the current level of Lake Okeechobee and the relation of rainfall to lake discharges and basin runoffs. He talked in depth about the various charts and satellite images on his site and their significance.

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Q&A session followed the presentation.

The above presentation in its entirety can be seen at www.riverscoalition.org.

Discussion: (summary of discussion-not verbatim)

Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: Dianne Hughes gave an update on the southern IRL, St. Lucie River, and Estuary water conditions and gave an update on various projects in the county, including the Living Shoreline projects and the Old Palm City Ripple Project.

City of Stuart/LOSOM- Ben Hogarth gave a brief update on the status of the LOSOM process, mentioning they are currently in a holding pattern while feedback comes in. Ben talked about the City of Stuart being proactive in preparation for possible future impacts related to toxic discharges.

SFWMD: Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch stressed the need to prepare for possible toxic algae threats just as the SFWMD uses hurricane drills to be prepared. She discussed positive items such as the dike being almost completed, a good year for the ecological band in Lake O, and the algae-monitoring app that the USACE and SFWMD use to share data. She emphasized that she is making the EAA Reservoir a priority for her next 4 years in office.

USACE: *Not present.*

Lake O Update: Dr. Paul Gray said the lake level is currently 12.9'. He praised the Rivers Coalition for leading the charge for a culture of clean water.

State and Federal Legislation: Gil Smart of VoteWater discussed the Clean Coastal Waters Act proposed by Brian Mast and signed by President Biden last week, as well the Water Resources Development Act, recently passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and which includes NERP.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Nic Mader announced the 37-mile Toxic Trail Run taking place on Saturday, June 25th, from Port Mayaca to Stuart Beach. Proceeds benefit the River Kidz.

Speakers Bureau: *Not present.*

Water Quality Report: Mark Perry gave a water quality update, mentioning the good salinity but poor water quality due to sediment. *Also see presentation.*

Seagrass Update: *See presentation and also www.eyeonlakeo.com*

Indian Riverkeeper Update: *Not present.*

Public and Closing Comments:

Mark Perry discussed the seagrass planting volunteer project that the Florida Oceanographic Society is undertaking. Importantly, both the EPA and US Fish and Wildlife Service are visiting the seagrass nursery tomorrow.

Rick Hall of the River Warriors reiterated the need to get the message out to the community, stating he is constantly fielding questions from the public about water quality.

Mark Perry thanked the City of Stuart for their efforts to keep the public informed with signage, etc. in relation to the water quality. Mark hopes that that someday we won't have to have these signs on a permanent basis.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:52 pm.