

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: July 28, 2022

Members via Zoom: Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Brittany Bearden (MC Farm Bureau), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Walter Deemer (League of Women's Voter of MC), Emma Haydocy (Surfrider Foundation), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus).

Members in person: Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Blair Wickstrom (Florida Sportsman), Jim Moir (MRC and IRK), Mike Glynn (Locks Landing), Ken Parks (MRC), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Rich Hall (River Warriors).

Non-members via Zoom: Joseph Bonasia (FRONN), Adnan Alghita, Deb Drum (PB County), Mitchell Roffer, Regina Wood, Max Chesnes (TCPalm), Douglas Ashley, Abbie Flood (FOS), Robert Mathias, Tiare Fridrich (Save the Manatee Club).

Non-members in person: Merritt Matheson-Becky Bruner (Stuart City Council), Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch (SFWMD), Dianne Hughes-John Maehl (Martin County), Brian McGann, Alan Schilk, Paul Laura, Emanuel Vernon, Barbara Osborn, Joe Gilio, Newton Cook, H.M. Ridgely, Ivana Sears, SueAnne Hall, John Baehre-LTC Todd Polk (USACE), Mike Knepper, Harvey Alligood, Chris Englund.

Charles Grande called the meeting to order at 11:06 am. There were 29 attendees in person, 22 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

Opening Comments: Charles Grande recognized Mayor Merritt Matheson and also Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch of the SFWMD in attendance.

Presentation: ELECTIONS MATTER FOR STOPPING TOXIC DISCHARGES TO THE ST. LUCIE ESTUARY

Charles Grande, Vice President of Rivers Coalition and former St. Lucie County Commissioner, discussed the importance of being, and how to become, an educated voter, and voting for those who share the same mission goals versus voting a straight party ticket. He mentioned various resources.

Blair Wickstrom, Rivers Coalition Board Member and Vice President of VoteWater, discussed why the primaries may be more important than the general elections and that the water issue is a political problem that needs a political solution. He emphasized the importance of finding those representatives who prioritize clean water, and gave examples of some local leaders who are doing so. Elections matter but political will is more important!

Joseph Bonasia, Chair and SWFL Regional Director of the Florida Rights of Nature Network (FRONN), introduced us to his organization and the "Right to Clean and Healthy Water" amendment to our state constitution that his organization is advocating. He explained in depth what this amendment would do and why it would be more effective than a Rights of Nature law. More information on the proposed amendment can be found at: <https://fronn.org/the-right-to-clean-water>. The petition needs 900,000 signatures by 11/30/2023 and can be read in its entirety and printed out and signed here: <https://www.floridarighttocleanwater.org/>.

Q&A session followed the presentation.

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

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Discussion: (summary of discussion-not verbatim)

Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: John Maehl announced that Dianne Hughes is retiring and thanked her for her decade of service to environmental programs in Martin County. He acknowledged and thanked the USACE for their decision to work with SFWMD and also their operations at the C-44 canal. Current level of Lake Okeechobee is 13 feet. We are in a good place this week! He said that this morning the county submitted its 20-year water-quality assessment to the Florida legislature, which will be used to determine future funding requests. The county is currently reviewing the extensive draft of the USACE's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

City of Stuart/LOSOM- Mayor Merritt Matheson gave an update, as Ben Hogarth was unavailable. He also thanked the USACE for their work, stating the C-44 reservoir buys recovery time for our estuary. Mayor Matheson mentioned that the USACE would be holding a virtual meeting the evening of 8/17/2022 for public comments on the LOSOM draft NEPA documents.

SFWMD: Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch began by discussing the proliferation of wildlife in the ecological band, showing photos of spoonbills at Moonshine Bay, Lake Okeechobee, and emphasizing that we need to be thankful for the victories. She also discussed the interconnect canal that is due to start this year or next year and would connect the C23 canal to the C-44 reservoir. Discussion ensued between her and Lt. Col. Todd Polk of the USACE about the benefits of the interconnect canal, and also the Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP).

USACE: Lt. Col. Todd Polk expounded further on the Corps' efforts to get WERP started. He discussed yesterday's news release from the USACE regarding the public comment period for the draft EIS, which will be in effect until 9/12/2022. The release includes links to the various virtual meetings that will be held to accept public comments. Click here for more information: [USACE news release](#)

Lake O Update: *Dr. Paul Gray not present.* Lt. Col. Polk (USACE) mentioned that the lake level is currently at 13 feet with no water being pushed south and no discharges.

State and Federal Legislation: *Not present.*

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: *Not present.*

Speakers Bureau: *Not present.*

Water Quality Report: *Speaker not present.* Click here for the latest report from 7/20/2022: [Water Quality Report 7/20/2022](#)

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow showed current lake views on his site www.eyeonlakeo.com, showing a small northern bloom on 7/14/2022 that has dissipated. He has added a direct link to LOSOM information on his site. Current seagrass photos show it is coming back, with sand dollars, birds, and other "critters" reappearing.

Indian Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir reminded us that the Sailfish Flats area in Todd's photos used to be home to more than 55 species of fish and reiterated the importance of bringing the seagrass back. Jim said the Indian River Lagoon between here and north of Melbourne shows signs of recovery all over, emphasizing we need to "keep the pressure on." Of note, the recent volunteer trash pickup/cleanup of the Jensen Causeway yielded about 112 pounds of trash consisting of mostly cigarette butts.

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Public and Closing Comments:

Ken Parks of the Marine Resources Council announced the upcoming Low Impact Development Conference on October 21st and 22nd in Rockledge, FL. A toolkit will be presented at the conference on conversion to low impact development. More information can be found here: [LID conference](#)

He also mentioned that Dr. Leesa Souto will do a presentation on 8/8/2022 on the topic above.

At their annual awards on 11/4/2022, the MRC will be inducting the first Legends of the Indian River Lagoon into the IRL Hall of Fame. More information here: [MRC Awards](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 12:47 pm.