

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: January 19, 2023

Members via Zoom: Jeanette Hartzell (Assn of University Women), Hilarie Davis (US Sailing Center), Melissa Zolla (Keep Martin Beautiful), Allie Hartmann (Friends of the Everglades), Annie Potts (Treasure Coast Rowing Club).

Members in person: Nic Mader (Dolphin Ecology Project), Mark Perry (FOS), Casey Kniffin (FOS), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assn.), Eve Samples (Friends of the Everglades), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Rich Hall (River Warriors), Paul Glynn (Locks Landing), Jim Moir (Indian Riverkeeper), Jim Skeoch (Venture Three), Bobbie and Walter Deemer (League of Women's Voters of MC), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove), Rip Fisher (Sailfish Point Yacht Club), Paul Gray (Audubon), Jim Snedeker (Guardians of Martin County), JoLynne Jensen (Rio Civic Club), George Jones (ORCA), Ken Parks (MRC), Merritt Matheson (Indian Riverkeeper Board), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.).

Non-members via Zoom: John Amerling, Paul Linton, Ernie Barnett, Debbie Culp, Tom MacVicar, Bill Baker, Kelli Dore, Doug Ashley, Pat LaBalbo, Stephen Chalmers.

Non-members in person: LTC Todd Polk (USACE), Mac Stuckey (TCPalm), Tish Gelineau, Gina Masters, Wayne Maxson, Anne Cox, Mike Berger, Mike Knepper, Susan Pearson, Nancy Gokee, Joan Bausch, Ben Hogarth-Chris Collins (City of Stuart), Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch (SFWMD), Joe Gilio, Renee Lessard-Moreshead, Barbara Osborn.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 41 attendees in person, 17 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

Opening Comments: Mark Perry welcomed everyone and introduced the new representative for Sandhill Cove, Paul Uttormark. Mark also reminded those in attendance that the Rivers Coalition needs help on its committees and that sign-up sheets are in the back of the room.

Marine Resources Council Presentation: Ken Parks of the Marine Resources Council talked about the MRC recently inducting the first legends of the Indian River Lagoon and presenting their annual conservation awards. Jim Moir presented Diane Goldberg of St. Lucie Audubon with the Marine Resources Council Volunteer of the Year Award for 2022 at today's meeting. Diane accepted the award and gave an update on the Right to Clean Water petition.

Presentation: 2022 RIVERS COALITION REVIEW AND LOOKING AHEAD TO 2023

Gil Smart and Eve Samples reviewed the accomplishments of the Rivers Coalition in 2022 and also things that could have gone better, touching on the seagrass mitigation bill, LOSOM, and Hurricane Ian. Charles Grande and Todd Weissing informed us about the strategic planning session that the Rivers Coalition board participated in, highlighting the major points. The board members listed and discussed priorities for 2023, including the critical need to increase capacity of the EAA reservoir. The 2023 Florida legislative session begins in March, and both St. Lucie and Martin County have already held delegation meetings.

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

Discussion: (summary of discussion-not verbatim)

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Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: Not present.

City of Stuart/LOSOM- Ben Hogarth gave an update on the city's 2023 priorities, including septic-to-sewer conversions, LOSOM, and water basin projects.

SFWMD: Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch discussed the recent Executive Order by Governor DeSantis and that the Indian River Lagoon is earmarked for \$100 million/year. She gave updates on the interconnect canal, EAA reservoir, and STAs.

USACE: LTC Todd Polk emphasized that public engagement and transparency are goals of the USACE. HHD ribbon-cutting is next week (3 years early). No major announcements on Lake Okeechobee yet, though the level is 16.1'.

Lake O Update: Dr. Paul Gray praised the USACE and SFWMD for working together. He discussed the concern about current high lake levels.

State and Federal Legislation: Discussed during the main presentation.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Nic Mader introduced Casey Kniffin and Kelli Dore as new head River Momz. She will remain the chair of the River Kidz committee and serve as liaison between River Kidz and the Rivers Coalition.

River Kidz will have a presence at the upcoming Waterfest on 3/25/23.

Speakers Bureau: Todd Weissing has an upcoming presentation at the Humanists of the Treasure Coast.

Water Quality Report: Mark Perry gave the latest water quality report which is level A-B. He is hoping for a successful oyster spawning in the spring. Click here for the latest report from 1/11/2023: [Water Quality Report 1/11/2023](#).

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow gave an update on Lake Okeechobee and showed recent photos from his site www.eyeonlakeo.com. He mentioned that the seagrass recovery from August and September is now gone and may not ever recover.

Indian Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir discussed recent sightings of the right whale and her calf. The Indian Riverkeeper organization is hard at work getting set up. They are trying to get the Indian River Lagoon established as national park status. He mentioned that the Sand Spike Shootout is March 18-19. The Seagrass Assembly will be next week at the same time as EVCO.

Public and Closing Comments:

Mark Perry reminded everyone that people should remain at least 500 feet away from the whales and to report any whale sightings to the FWC and MRC.

Mac Stuckey mentioned the Right to Clean Water petition and reiterated the need for signatures.

Joe Gilio talked about the Lake Okeechobee Restoration Initiative and the need for all of us to work together.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 pm.