

# Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: April 27, 2023

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**Members via Zoom:** Gayle Ryan (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Joan Bausch (MC Native Plant Society), Tiare Fridrich (Save the Manatee Club), Paul Gray (Audubon), Hilarie Davis (US Sailing Center), Kelli Dore (FOS), Tiffany Kincaid (Keep Martin Beautiful).

**Members in person:** Mark Perry (FOS), Nic Mader (Dolphin Ecology Project), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assn.), Jim Moir (Indian Riverkeeper), Eve Samples (Friends of the Everglades), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Rich Hall (River Warriors), Jim Skeoch (Venture Three), Bobbie and Walter Deemer (League of Women's Voters of MC), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Blair Wickstrom (Florida Sportsman), Casey Kniffin (FOS), Merritt Matheson (Indian Riverkeeper), Paul Laura (Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative).

**Non-members via Zoom:** Congressman Brian Mast, Libby Tidwell (Congressman Brian Mast's office), Meghan McRoberts, Kelsey Konopka, Mitchell Roffer, Jessica Levy, Tim Gysan (USACE), Lisa Interlandi, Michele Arquette, Bradley Watson, Deb Drum (PB County), Paul Linton, Robert Mathias, Erica Welch, Terri Bates.

**Non-members in person:** LTC Todd Polk-Gretchen Ehlinger (USACE), David Weston, Joe Gilio, Brian McGann, Doug Ashley, Jolynn Jensen, Bob Gibbons, Patrick Foley, Dick and Sharon Raab, Mike Knepper, Chris and Deb Grazel, Barbara Osborn, Anne Cox, Ben Hogarth-Chris Collins-Eula Clarke-Campbell Rich-Becky Bruner (City of Stuart), John Maehl-Elizabeth Kelly-Sarah Heard (Martin County), Newton Cook, Jim and Beth Jurgaitis, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch (SFWMD).

Mark called the meeting to order at 11:03 am. There were attendees in person, 26 attendees on ZOOM call. Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

**Opening Comments:** Mark Perry welcomed everyone and announced the meeting would focus on the LOSOM delay and the fact that it will be delayed until at least December. He then read the statement from NOAA Fisheries explaining why they were not at the meeting.

Mark welcomed County Commissioner Sarah Heard, and City Commissioners Eula Clarke, Chris Collins, Campbell Rich, and Becky Bruner.

Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch announced the presence of Dr. Gretchen Ehlinger, Senior Biologist and Environmental Branch Chief of USACE in Jacksonville.

**Presentation: "The Losom Delay—What is Behind It?"**

Tim Gysan, Senior Project Manager for the USACE Jacksonville District, joined via Zoom and gave a slide show presentation on the LOSOM regulation schedule and delays.

Congressman Brian Mast joined via Zoom and expressed his unhappiness with NOAA Fisheries and the LOSOM delay, explaining how he had expressed his displeasure and what he had tried to do. He mentioned he had not been able to get a reasonable explanation and that he is highly skeptical of what is taking place.

A Q&A session followed the presentation. Lt. Col. Polk and Gretchen Ehlinger from the USACE answered questions, along with Congressman Brian Mast and Tim Gysan.

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Mark Perry announced that the Rivers Coalition is attempting to re-engage members and asked for those present to reach out to absent members and help get them to attend and engage in the meetings.

Congressman Brian Mast added remarks with regard to the closing of the railroad bridge for at least 21 days in May.

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

#### **Government & Agency Reports:**

**Martin County:** John Maehl said the county had also engaged in discussion about the LOSOM delay and had gotten a similar response. He discussed the progress of the water quality treatment facility east of U.S. 1 and that the county had received every grant request they had asked for from the DEP.

**City of Stuart/LOSOM-** Ben Hogarth discussed the city's engagement with regard to the LOSOM delay and mentioned the City Commission approved extended help and assistance with septic-to-sewer conversion.

**SFWMD:** Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch showed photos from her blog that her husband had taken since the discharges stopped on April 15th. She emphasized the USACE works closely with the SFWMD in taking photos and reporting daily. She shared the email address to sign up for algae updates from the DEP. The 2023 South Florida Environmental report is now available.

**USACE:** LTC Todd Polk participated in the main discussion above. Mark Perry expressed gratitude for the USACE Brigadier General Hibner, as well as Lt. Col. Polk, attending the Rivers Coalition March meeting at the locks.

**Lake O Update:** Dr. Paul Gray said the lake level is currently at around 14 feet. Rain has helped the burn ban but not the lake levels. We want to get the lake lower before rainy season.

**State and Federal Legislation:** Gil Smart discussed the Florida Legislature's "Session of Sprawl" and gave an update on good and bad bills of this current session. Mark Perry mentioned that Florida Oceanographic Society is also tracking legislation and working with other agencies to track them. The current legislative session ends May 5th.

#### **Coalition Reports:**

**River Kidz:** Nic Mader emphasized the importance of talking about the issues everywhere and that she discussed issued while paddleboarding with a gentleman who attended our meeting today. She discussed the large amount of boat traffic even on weekdays and the importance of making the boaters aware of the marine life. Casey Kniffin, River Mom, talked about the River Kidz being present at the upcoming Environmental Science Center event on May 6th and the hope to get River Kidz involved this summer.

**Speakers Bureau:** Todd Weissing has been busy speaking at four meeting this year so far and bringing in new people to the Rivers Coalition meetings. The Speakers Bureau is available upon request.

**Water Quality:** Mark Perry updated us on the most recent water quality report of 4/19/2023 since the recent storms. He announced that the FDEP will be giving a 5-year BMAP update on May 5th.

**Seagrass Update:** Todd Thurlow showed images from his site and gave a seagrass update. He also has links to the SFWMD report and posters on his website [eyeonlakeo.com](http://eyeonlakeo.com).

**Riverkeeper Update:** Jim Moir discussed the turbidity problem in the Indian River Lagoon and emphasized the importance of working to get National Park status for the Lagoon.

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## **Public and Closing Comments:**

Darrell Brand announced that ORCA is looking for volunteers to help with buffer zone planting on May 6th.

Mark Perry said the next meeting of the SFWMD is May 11th.

Diane Goldberg spoke and emphasized the importance of the “Right to Clean Water” petition and how to access it and send it in.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:53pm.