

# Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: May 25, 2023

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**Members via Zoom:** Gayle Ryan (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Regina Wood (Treasure Coast Unitarian Universalist Church), Allen Herskowitz (Sailfish Point POA).

**Members in person:** Eve Samples-Allie Hartmann (Friends of the Everglades), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Nic Mader (Dolphin Ecology Project), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assn.), Jim Moir (Indian Riverkeeper), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Annie Potts (Treasure Coast Rowing Club), Dr. Paul Gray (Audubon Florida), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Rich Hall (River Warriors), Jim Skeoch (Venture Three), Walter Deemer (League of Women's Voters of MC), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Blair Wickstrom (Florida Sportsman), Casey Kniffin (FOS), Merritt Matheson (Indian Riverkeeper), Angela Rantinella for Paul Laura (Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative).

**Non-members via Zoom:** John Amerling, Charles Murphy, Cheryl Bryson, Harvey Alligood.

**Non-members in person:** LTC Todd Polk-Gretchen Ehlinger (USACE), Rep. Toby Overdorf, Gary Roderick, Kiele Mader, Dana Kimberly, Joe Gilio, Anne Cox, Kim Streiber, Blake Faulkner, Becky Harris, Ben Hogarth-Chris Collins-Becky Bruner (City of Stuart), Katie Delk (TCPalm), Joe Katz-Samantha Rosenberg (Rep. Overdorf), John Maehl-Elizabeth Kelly-Sarah Heard (Martin County), Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch (SFWMD).

Charles Grande called the meeting to order at 11:04 am. There were 46 attendees in person, 11 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

**Opening Comments:** Charles Grande welcomed everyone and recognized Representative Toby Overdorf and City Commissioners Chris Collins and Becky Bruner.

**Presentation: Did the Florida Legislature "Fix" our Toxic Algae Problem?"**

Representative Toby Overdorf began the presentation by discussing highlights of environmental legislation that he introduced and/or passed. He also explained the process of getting a bill through the Florida House of Representatives.

Eve Samples, Executive Director of Friends of the Everglades, and Gil Smart, Executive Director of VoteWater, discussed good bills that had not passed and bad bills that had passed during the most recent legislative session.

A lengthy and informative Q&A session followed the presentation.

*The above presentation in its entirety can be seen at [www.riverscoalition.org](http://www.riverscoalition.org).*

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

**Government & Agency Reports:**

**Martin County:** John Maehl mentioned that on June 6th a panel would speak to Martin County about golf course best management practices. Martin County has a new ecotourism program. Details can be found at [discovermartin.com/ecotourism](http://discovermartin.com/ecotourism). The next county coalition meeting will be in Okeechobee on June 6th. At the second board meeting in June the county will acquire 119 acres of land from Audubon.

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**City of Stuart/LOSOM:** Ben Hogarth brought up the fact that the City of Stuart is involved in a class-action suit on PFAS contamination that has been in our ground supply of water. He warned that there would be publicity about it, but that the City cannot comment anything more at this time. He did emphasize that the city drinking water is safe! Ben also added that he is concerned about the upcoming forecast with regard to El Nino and lake levels.

**SFWMD:** Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch talked about current algal blooms in Lake Okeechobee. She has not been confirmed yet by the Governor to the SFWMD board. She encouraged others to apply in the event she is not reconfirmed.

**USACE:** LTC Todd Polk said the lake level is currently at 13.8'. There will be a media call on June 9th and an upcoming CERP meeting in Naples.

**Lake O Update:** Dr. Paul Gray made brief comments that the lake is deep, it is wet season, and "we are holding our breath."

**State and Federal Legislation:** Gil Smart and Eve Samples gave updates in the main presentation above.

### Coalition Reports:

**River Kidz:** Nic Mader announced the 8th Annual Toxic Trail Run will be Saturday, June 7th to benefit the River Kidz. Will Glover is the organizer of the 37-mile run from Port Mayaca to Stuart Beach. The Facebook event page is [here](#). Registration information is [here](#). Casey Kniffin, River Mom, gave an update on River Kidz planned summer activities.

**Speakers Bureau:** Todd Weissing recently spoke at the Circle Bay Yacht and Sailing Club and will be speaking next month at the Conservation Alliance of St. Lucie County. The Speakers Bureau is available upon request.

**Riverkeeper Update:** Jim Moir talked about the seagrass recovery being impeded in the Indian River Lagoon, but he is regularly seeing sea turtles and manatees. He mentioned it is graduation season and praised the fact that so many of our young people are inspired and involved in environmental advocacy.

**Water Quality:** Casey Kniffin gave an update on the most recent water quality report of [5/17/2023](#). She mentioned that the 2023 five-year review of the St. Lucie River Estuary and BMAP is [online](#).

**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](#).

### **Public and Closing Comments:**

Charles Grande announced that the Rivers Coalition had written a letter to Governor DeSantis asking him to reconfirm Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch to the SFWMD board. Copies of the letter are available.

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.