

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: July 27, 2023

Members via Zoom: Merritt Matheson (Indian Riverkeeper), Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau), Kevin Hinkle (St. Lucie Audubon), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus).

Members in person: Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Eve Samples (Friends of the Everglades), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Nic Mader (Dolphin Ecology Project), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assn.), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Blair Wickstrom (Florida Sportsman), Paul Laura (Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), Regina Wood (Unitarian Universalist Church), Annie Potts (Treasure Coast Rowing Club), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Jim Skeoch (Venture Three), Rich Hall (River Warriors), Walter Deemer (League of Women's Voters of MC), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.).

Non-members via Zoom: Dan Egan, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Douglas Ashley, Pat LaBalbo, Tiare Fridrich (Save the Manatee Club), Deb Drum (PB County), Deanna Thurlow, Robert Mathias, Ernie Barnett, John Amerling, R.M. Harris, Tim Gysan (USACE), J.B. Rebello, Paul Gray (Audubon Florida), Elizabeth Ross.

Non-members in person: LTC Todd Polk-Kim Vitek (USACE), Ben Hogarth-Becky Bruner-Campbell Rich-Chris Collins (City of Stuart), Alaura MacPherson, Kiki Sottak, Kelli Dore, Dana Kimberly, Alicia Butler, Renee Lessard-Moreshead, David Rivers, Kiele Mader, Katie Delk (TCPalm), Blake Faulkner, Sarah Heard-Elizabeth Kelly (Martin County), Anne Cox, Mike Knepper, Angela Ratinella, Sam Hay, Cheryl Kilpatrick, Carol Waxler, Samantha Rosenberg-Blake Cross-Joe Katz (Rep. Overdorf), Emily Derrenbacker, Dave Derrenbacker.

Charles Grande called the meeting to order at 11:04 am. There were 50 attendees in person, 19 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

Opening Comments: Charles Grande welcomed everyone and introduced Eve Samples, mentioning that Dan Egan would be joining via Zoom after Eve's talk.

Presentation: National Spotlight on Lake O

Eve Samples, Executive Director of Friends of the Everglades, discussed her recent visit to Washington, DC to meet with elected officials about the upcoming farm bill. She talked about the recent national spotlight on the toxic algae levels in Lake Okeechobee, both in the New York Times and Time magazine. Eve then introduced Dan Egan, author of the New York Times article and author of the book, *The Devil's Element: Phosphorus and a World Out of Balance*. Dan attended via Zoom and answered questions from the audience, including what led him to write the book and article. A lengthy Q&A session ensued.

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

Comments:

Charles Grande belatedly recognized City Commissioners Becky Bruner, Campbell Rich, and Chris Collins, as well as County Commissioner Sarah Heard and LTC Polk.

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Discussion: (summary of discussion-not verbatim)

Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: Dr. Elizabeth Kelley, Environmental Programs Coordinator for Martin County, gave an update on recent meetings the county has had with regard to workshops and LOSOM. She talked in length about 2 upcoming programs: (1) a long-term water-quality monitoring program, and (2) a seagrass project. A Q&A session took place with regard to the above and STAs.

City of Stuart/LOSOM: Ben Hogarth stated the city's main project is managing stormwater runoff and talked about how the city is following the BMAP guidelines. He also discussed LOSOM and the importance of the USACE's flexibility in recovery operations.

Dr. Paul Gray elaborated on the fact that 2 of the 3 triggers for recovery operation are in place; the 3rd being the lake level. Currently the lake is stressed due to the deep water.

SFWMD: N/A

USACE: Lt. Col. Polk thanked the City of Stuart for its letter of support with regard to LOSOM. He is retiring in August of this year.

Lake O Update: See Dr. Paul Gray's comments under "City of Stuart" above.

State and Federal Legislation: See Eve's comments in the opening presentation.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Nic Mader thanked all current and former River Kidz members and introduced Kelli Dore, one of the River Momz. Kelli Dore gave an update on River Kidz activities, including upcoming Back-to-School cleanup and collaborating with the Young Friends of the Everglades' school programs.

Speakers Bureau: Todd Weissing mentioned how busy the speakers bureau has been this year and emphasized that he is available upon request.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir was not present.

Water Quality: See below.

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow stated the current lake level is 14.98. The seagrass levels are significantly higher than in January of last year. He showed updated images from his website eyeonlakeo.com and also talked about the phosphorus data mentioned by Dan Egan. He discussed the increased number of water quality stations.

Public and Closing Comments:

Diane Goldberg mentioned she also is available for lectures on the Clean Water Initiative and also on what we can do in our gardens with regard to not using pesticides and fertilizers. She discussed the topic of farms getting their own restoration areas and why it has not been at the forefront. Diane reminded us of the Right to Clean Water petitions.

Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch commented (via Zoom) that we should be restoring the land around Lake Okeechobee to what it once was.

Charles Grande announced that there would not be a public Rivers Coalition meeting in August.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:35 pm.