

# Rivers Coalition

## Meeting Minutes: October 26, 2023

---

**Members via Zoom:** Tiare Fridrich (Save the Manatee Club), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida), Kevin Hinkle (St. Lucie Audubon).

**Members in person:** Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Jim Moir-Merritt Matheson (Indian Riverkeeper), Blair Wickstrom (Florida Sportsman), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Rich Hall (River Warriors), Joe Gilio (LORI), Casey Kniffin (FOS), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Walter Deemer (League of Women's Voters of MC), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove).

**Non-members via Zoom:** Matt Taylor, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Stephen Chalmers, R.M. Harris, Deanna Thurlow, Tim Gysan (SFWMD), Bill Baker, Terri Bates, Susan Innis.

**Non-members in person:** Maj. Cory Bell-Kim Vitek-Jeff Prater-Jaz Levago(USACE), John Mitnik-Drew Bartlett-Cheryl Meads-Kathy LaMartina-Lawrence Glenn (SFWMD), Ben Hogarth-Becky Bruner-Chris Collins (City of Stuart), Tiare Fridrich (Save the Manatee Club), John Maehl-Elizabeth Kelly-Michael Uston-Scott Tedford-Amy Eason-Sarah Pillion (Martin County), H.M. Ridgely, David Carlson, Jim Karas, Blake Faulkner, Boo Lowery, Mike Knepper, Greg Gardner, Samantha Rosenberg (Rep. Overdorf).

Charles Grande called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 44 attendees in person, 18 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

**Opening Comments:** Charles Grande welcomed everyone and recognized Becky Bruner (Mayor), Cheryl Meads (SFWMD), and Major Cory Bell (USACE).

Both Charles Grande and Merritt Matheson made opening comments, applauding the USACE and SFWMD working together to hold off on Lake O discharges to the east. Dry season is approaching, and with it the opportunity to get the lake levels lower. Both asked Drew Bartlett to focus on what the plan is and how we can move lake water south.

### **Presentation: "Moving Lake Water South"**

Drew Bartlett, along with Lawrence Glenn (Director of Water Resources Division of SFWMD), and John Mitnik, (Assistant Executive Director of the SFWMD), engaged in a lengthy and informative presentation regarding moving lake water south, explaining the conditions and operations of the Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) and Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs).

Q&A session during and after 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)**

# Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: October 26, 2023

---

## Government & Agency Reports:

**USACE:** Major Cory Bell introduced himself as the new USACE Deputy Commander, South Florida Jacksonville District. He gave a brief biography and then gave an update on Lake Okeechobee, as well as the C44 canal conditions and seepage.

**Martin County:** John Maehl expressed frustration at the LOSOM implementation delays, praising, however, the USACE and SFWMD for using strategies in the proposed LOSOM schedule to handle discharges during the wet season. He then gave a county update, mentioning internal restructuring going on and introducing several team members.

**City of Stuart/LOSOM:** Ben Hogarth discussed two major priorities that the City Commission recently decided upon. He discussed in detail a DEP ruling related to the Clean Waterways Act which dictates what developers need to do for approvals, and he talked about the Savings Clause and the City of Stuart participating in an amicus brief.

**SFWMD:** See above presentation.

**Lake O Update:** Paul Gray stated the current lake level is deeper than we want, and the outer edges are taking a beating. He did see lots of periphyton on a recent trip to the lake.

**State and Federal Legislation:** Gil Smart recently went to Tallahassee. He feels we will see another "Session of Sprawl" and advised us to be on the lookout for more pro-developer bills, as well as the possibility of BMPs (Best Management Practices) being revised to allow more fertilizer.

## Coalition Reports:

**Seagrass Update:** Todd Thurlow briefly shared his website and gave a grass flat update. He discussed the importance of water quality over quantity and the need to get phosphorus levels down.

Casey Kniffin of the Florida Oceanographic Society emphasized the need for protection for wetlands and the importance of local control rather than state control of regulations to protect them.

**River Kidz:** Casey Kniffin announced the River Kidz would be participating in "Community Conversation" hosted by the Florida Oceanographic Society on November 7th at 5:30 pm. All ages are invited to the event, which will encourage conversations, stories, and perspectives to be shared by those who love our water and coastal environment.

**Speakers Bureau:** N/A. Todd Weissing not present.

**Riverkeeper Update:** Jim Moir discussed the need for stormwater bill support, and he mentioned the Low Impact Development Conference last week was excellent.

## Public Comments:

Diane Goldberg put out a call for volunteers to get petitions signed at the Port St. Lucie Fall Fun Fest happening October 27-29.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:53 pm.