

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: September 28, 2023

Members via Zoom: Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau), Kevin Hinkle (St. Lucie Audubon), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club).

Members in person: Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Nic Mader (Dolphin Ecology Project), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assn.), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Jim Moir-Merritt Matheson (Indian Riverkeeper), Paul Laura (Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), Allie Hartmann (Friends of the Everglades), Joe Gilio (LORI), Paul Gray (Audubon), 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: Gary Franklin, Cheryl and Gerry Kilpatrick, Judy Orcutt, Tom MacVicar, Forest Blanton, Jean Catchpole, Anna Wachnika, Bill Baker, Terri Bates, Susan Innis, Rebecca Elliott, Pat LaBalbo.

Non-members in person: Kim Vitek (USACE), Drew Bartlett-Cheryl Meads-Sean Cooley-Lawrence Glenn-Kathy LaMartina (SFWMD), Kelli Dore, Bob Voisinet, Jason Bultman, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Janet Jorden, Keith Richardson, Len Lindahl, Dr. D.E. Noble, John Maehl-Sarah Pillion (Martin County), Carol Waxler, Alaura MacPherson, Kiki Sottak, Angela Biggs, Ed Killer-Katie Delk (TCPalm), Blake Faulkner, Mike Knepper, Samantha Rosenberg (Rep. Overdorf).

Charles Grande called the meeting to order at 11:04 am. There were 47 attendees in person, 16 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

Opening Comments: Charles Grande welcomed everyone and introduced Drew Bartlett, Executive Director of the SFWMD.

Drew gave an overview of what is currently going on with Lake Okeechobee and STAs. He discussed water conservation areas and the building of a new STA dedicated to lakewater (A2). Accompanying Drew was Lawrence Glenn, Director of the Water Resources Division of SFWMD, a scientist. Lawrence talked in more depth about the health of the STAs with regard to vegetation.

Drew also gave updates on the C44 canal and interconnect, mentioning the USACE's Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS).

Cheryl Meads, a governing board member of the SFWMD and current Martin County resident, introduced herself and talked about what she was doing to enable her to be a better governing board member.

Q&A session followed.

Presentation: "Get the Muck Out of Here"

Merritt Matheson, Rivers Coalition board member, gave a brief explanation of the muck problem and introduced Joe Gilio, the founder and President of the Lake Okeechobee Restoration Initiative (LORI). Joe gave a presentation on Lake Okeechobee's increasing nutrient pollutant problem, emphasizing that we need to remove the high concentration of phosphorus from the muds in the lake to control harmful algal blooms.

Len Lindahl, a professional engineer with MacVicar Consulting, Inc., gave a presentation on the Diatom Lagoon Project. This project focuses on the capture of the fluid mud and pumping it into the center of a man-made "lagoon" in the lake, which would then be filtered.

Q&A session followed.

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

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Discussion: (summary of discussion-not verbatim)

Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: John Maehl mentioned that the next meeting of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force will be on November 15th.

City of Stuart/LOSOM: N/A

SFWMD: See above presentation.

USACE: (*after the River Kidz report*): Kim Vitek, Program Manager with USACE, announced that the Indian River Lagoon muck removal project is underway, and that the Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) is to be executed sometime in 2024.

Lake O Update: Paul Gray mentioned the current lake level at 15'16" and the effects of El Nino.

State and Federal Legislation: N/A.

Public Comments (out of order):

Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch thanked the SFWMD for attending and speaking at the meeting. She mentioned she will be speaking at the Conservation Alliance of St. Lucie County's next meeting on Tuesday, October 10th at the Morningside Library. The topic will be "Keeping Government Accountable and the Price of Speaking Up."

Diane Goldberg discussed a planned fuel depot in St. Lucie County and the possible consequences.

She reminded us of the legislative delegation meetings in St. Lucie County and Martin County next week, and of the St. Lucie Audubon Society meeting on Oct. 5.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Nic Mader reminded us that the River Kidz held a "Get the Muck Out" event almost 10 years ago. She announced the presence of four 4th-generation dolphin calves in the Indian River Lagoon.

Kelli Dore and Casey Kniffin, River Momz, gave an update on the recent Coastal Cleanup and mentioned upcoming events: Estuaries Day on 9/30/23 at the Florida Oceanographic Center and an open house on 10/21/23 also at the Florida Oceanographic Center.

Speakers Bureau: Todd Weissing emphasized that the speaker's bureau is available upon request.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir discussed the presence of several recent fish kills in the Indian River Lagoon.

He also mentioned that the Marine Resources Council will be holding their 3rd Low Impact Development (LID) conference in Rockledge, FL on October 21 and 22.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:46 pm.