

# Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: January 18, 2024

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**Members via Zoom:** Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida), Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Hilarie Davis (US Sailing Center), Laura Vennard (League of Women Voters of St. Lucie County), Kevin Hinkle (St. Lucie Audubon), Beth Brady (Save the Manatee Club), Paul Laura (Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative).

**Members in person:** Mark Perry (Florida Oceanographic Society), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Jim Moir-Merritt Matheson (Indian Riverkeeper), Eve Samples-Allie Hartmann-Amanda Purnell (Friends of the Everglades), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Casey Kniffin (River Kidz), Walter Deemer (League of Women's Voters of MC), Rip Fisher (Sailfish Point Yacht Club), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County).

**Non-members via Zoom:** Anne Cox, Robert Mathias, John Amerling, Cathy R.

**Non-members in person:** Renee Lessard-Moreshead, Major Cory Bell (USACE), Elizabeth Kelly-Sarah Philion-Scott Olsen (Martin County), Jason Bultman, Chris and Deb Grael, Newton Cook, Chris Collins-Ben Hogarth (City of Stuart), Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Blake Faulkner.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 40 attendees in person, 14 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

**Opening Comments:** Mark Perry welcomed everyone and announced that the Florida Legislature is currently in session and we are currently tracking bills. Gil Smart will be giving a presentation at today's meeting.

**Membership Roll Call:** The microphone was passed around the room and everyone present introduced themselves and what member organization they represent. Those present on Zoom did the same.

**Introduction of 2024 Rivers Coalition Board:** Mark Perry announced the 2024 Rivers Coalition board members and officers and introduced those present at the meeting.

**Presentation:** "Tallahassee: A Look at the Bad (and Good) Bills to be Considered During the 2024 Legislative Session"

Gil Smart, Executive Director of VoteWater and board member of Rivers Coalition, gave an informative presentation summarizing the bills currently being introduced at this year's Florida legislative session. This year's session appears to be an even worse version of last year's "session of sprawl." Gil did mention a couple of good bills also coming up.

Mark Perry thanked Gil, VoteWater, and Friends of the Everglades for their diligent work on tracking the legislation. For more information, go to [votewater.org](http://votewater.org) and [everglades.org](http://everglades.org). He mentioned that the governor's proposed budget is done and has to go to the Senate and House.

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

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

### Government & Agency Reports:

**Martin County:** John Maehl agreed that this Florida legislative session has a massive bill dump. He introduced a new member of his team, Amy Eason, Environmental Resource Engineer.

**City of Stuart/LOSOM:** Ben Hogarth mentioned that he is also responsible for doing legislative analysis for the city, and he addressed the fertilizer ordinance. He talked about concerns about high lake levels, the amicus brief recently filed by the City of Stuart, and an update on the septic-to-sewer conversions.

**SFWMD:** Kathy LaMartina, Project Manager at SFWMD, gave a “big picture” overview of current projects the SFWMD is working on. She mentioned that they will be hosting a reception at EVCO next week.

**USACE:** Major Cory Bell, Deputy District Commander for South Florida USACE, gave an update on USACE projects and lake discharges (currently none going east and 2000 CFS going west). Agencies met in mid-November and expect to put the new LOSOM regulations into effect sometime this year.

**Lake O Update:** Paul Gray said the lake level has been at 16 feet for months. Heavy rains have caused excess nutrients in the lake, causing depletion of fisheries and loss of the lake as a winter habitat for migrating birds.

**State and Federal Legislation:** See presentation.

### Coalition Reports:

**River Kidz:** Casey Kniffin announced that the River Kidz are partnering with the Environmental Studies Center on a shoreline planting project on February 17th.

**Speakers Bureau:** In Todd Weissing’s absence, Mark Perry announced that the Speaker’s Bureau is scheduled to speak at the Jensen Beach Club in February and at the Fort Pierce Yacht Club in early March.

**Seagrass Update:** Todd Thurlow showed his new website section that is now live. It gives a visual representation of phosphorus levels, with detailed maps.

Extensive discussion ensued about the C44 reservoir and STAs (Stormwater Treatment Areas).

**Riverkeeper Update:** Jim Moir mentioned there is seagrass recovery in Mosquito Lagoon, but not much in this area since July. Lots of dredging projects are currently ongoing. He reminded us of the importance of keeping boats in the channels, as he has seen injured manatees and sea turtles.

### Member and Public Comments:

Mark Perry announced that the Dolphin Ecology’s Project 40th Anniversary Celebration is March 15th. See the sign and postcards in the back of the room.

Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch handed out brochures about the 100th Anniversary of the St. Lucie Canal.

Greg Braun announced that the Guardians of Martin County’s Loxalucie project received an endorsement from the Stuart Garden Club.

Merritt Matheson gave an update on the “Martin County Forever” initiative. Their goal is to have the proposal written and ready by February 20th.

Amanda Purnell (Friends of the Everglades) announced that applications are now being accepted for this year’s Karen Mashburn Environmental Scholars Program scholarship and internship. Details are available at [everglades.org](http://everglades.org).

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Diane Goldberg mentioned that she is available for lectures on native plants. She is giving a free lecture at the IRSC Pruitt Campus on February 13th on "Native Edibles and Historical Medicinal Plants."

Mark Perry announced that the Florida Oceanographic's Coastal Lecture Series has begun and will be held at the Blake Library on Tuesday nights from January 9th through March 12th at 6:30 p.m.

Renee Lessard-Moreshead reminded everyone of the Martin County Commission meeting tonight at the Blake Library at 6:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:25 p.m.