

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: April 25, 2024

Members via Zoom: Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau), Casey Kniffin (Florida Wildlife Federation), Scott Brown (Friends of the Everglades), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida).

Members in person: Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Jim Moir-Merritt Matheson (Indian Riverkeeper), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assn.), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Allie Hartman (Friends of the Everglades), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Kelli Dore (River Kidz), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Joe Gilio (LORI), Valentina Miele (FOS), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove), Walter Deemer (League of Women's Voters of MC).

Non-members via Zoom: Drew Martin (Florida Sierra), Paul Linton (Palm Beach County), R.M. Harris, Ross Dietrich (Rep. Brian Mast), Doug Ashley, Jacob Zehnder, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Mike Conner, Derk Cox, Deanna Thurlow, Heather Schott (Rep. Toby Overdorf).

Non-members in person: Kathy LaMartina (SFWMD), Sarah Heard-Amy Eason-Elizabeth Kelly-Sarah Philion (Martin County), Campbell Rich (City of Stuart), Bruce Osborn, Barbara Osborn, Jane Dall, William Witkop, Caleta Scott (One Lagoon), Glenn Kellis, George Jones (ORCA), Renee Lessard Moreshead, Anne Cox, Matthew Neubacher, Chris Savits, Thomas Witkop, Liam Murdoch, Paula McLease-Joe Bonasia (Florida Right to Clean Water).

Charles Grande called the meeting to order at 11:0 am. There were 94 attendees in person, 15 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

Opening Comments: Charles Grande welcomed everyone and announced that the lake level has dropped close to 2 feet. He welcomed Sarah Heard, Martin County Commissioner, and then introduced Joe Bonasia, the featured speaker.

Presentation: "Florida Needs the Right to Clean and Healthy Waters"

Joe Bonasia, SWFL Regional Director of Florida Rights of Nature Network, gave a presentation on the Florida Right to Clean Water campaign advocating for an amendment to the state Constitution guaranteeing Floridians the right to clean and healthy waters.

More information on the campaign and petition can be found at floridarighttocleanwater.org.

A Q&A session followed the presentation.

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

Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: Amy Eason, Environmental Resource Engineer for Martin County, stated the county continues to monitor the river and Lake O updates. She mentioned the EPA grant for the county to develop a more robust monitoring plan.

City of Stuart/LOSOM: No updates given.

SFWMD: Kathy LaMartina, SWFMD Project Manager, announced that the SFWMD May monthly meeting will be in Martin County at the Chastain Center on May 9th. She also stated that the SFWMD has upgraded their reference system (NAVD88) to measure water levels, and briefly described what this means.

USACE: No representatives present to give an update.

Lake O Update: No update given.

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State and Federal Legislation: Gil Smart stated that Governor DeSantis announced this week his commitment to approving \$1.5 billion to support Everglades restoration and water quality improvements. Gil also announced that VoteWater, Friends of the Everglades, and Florida Oceanographic Society are among a group of 27 organizations that signed a veto request for 2 water quality studies that they feel are unnecessary and a waste of taxpayer money.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Kelli Dore mentioned that the River Kidz have been extremely busy this spring with numerous events, including WaterFest, the VoteWater and FOS town halls, and the Environmental Studies Center Spring Celebration. The Toxic Trail Run will be this summer.

Speakers Bureau: Todd Weissing stated the Speakers Bureau had recently presented at the Fort Pierce Yacht Club and also Hidden Harbour Estates. Speakers can be requested at riverscoalition.org.

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow was unable to display his website with visuals due to the laptop/battery problems connecting to the A/V system. He reminded everyone of the address of his website for updates, photos, and live flow maps. eyeonlakeo.com

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir discussed the busy spring for the Indian Riverkeeper. The lagoon is improving, with more seagrass and manatees, although the water clarity is not good. He reminded everyone to be mindful of the manatees when boating.

Water Quality Update: Valentina Miele, Advocacy Coordinator for the Florida Oceanographic Society, gave a water quality update in Mark Perry's absence. Due to A/V problems, her slides were not seen in their entirety, but they are available on at riverscoalition.org.

Member and Public Comments:

Mark Perry thanked everyone for attending and recognized Congressman Brian Mast, County Commissioner Sarah Heard, SFWMD representative Cheryl Mead, and City of Stuart Mayor Becky Bruner, Vice-Mayor Campbell Rich, and Commissioner Chris Collins.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:35 p.m.