

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: May 23, 2024

Members via Zoom: Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau), Kelly Cox (Audubon Florida), Paul Laura (Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), Tiare Fridrich (Save the Manatee Club), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida).

Members in person: Mark Perry-Valentina Miele (FOS), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Merritt Matheson (Indian Riverkeeper), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Gil Smart-Jason Bultman (VoteWater), Eve Samples-Allie Hartman-Leah Voss-Amanda Purnell-Scott Brown (Friends of the Everglades), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Rich Hall (River Warriors), Casey Kniffin (Florida Wildlife Federation), Kelli Doré (River Kidz), Richard Tuschick (Seagate Harbor HOA), Brian McGann (The Estuary), Annie Potts (Treasure Coast Rowing Club), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove).

Non-members via Zoom: Anne Cox, Ernie Barnett, Richard Sanchez, Tom MacVicar, Terri Bates, Paul Linton (Palm Beach County), Derek Cox, Heather Schott (Rep. Toby Overdorf).

Non-members in person: Jason Totoiu (Center for Biological Diversity), Maj. Cory Bell-Jeff Prater (USACE), Lawrence Glenn-Taniel Koushajian-Kathy LaMartina (SFWMD), John Maehl-Amy Eason-Elizabeth Kelly-Sarah Phillion (Martin County), Becky Bruner-Miike Mortell-Campbell Rich-Ben Hogarth (City of Stuart), Bruce Osborn, Barbara Osborn, Laurie MacDougall, Deb McKone, Cathy Rethmeier, Eileen Vargas (MCC candidate), Laura Giobbi, Nicholas Muzia, Michael Syrkus, Ed Killer (TCPalm), Charley Bartholomay, Cat Villano, Blake Faulkner, Greg Gardner, Dana Kimberly, Sean Reed, Becky Harris.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:03 am. There were 54 attendees in person, 19 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

Opening Comments: Mark Perry welcomed everyone, encouraging the members to actively participate in meetings and to let Miki know if they need name tags.

Acknowledgment of Retiring Board Members and New Board Member: Mark announced that both Blair Wickstrom and Nic Mader had retired from the Rivers Coalition Board of Directors, thanked them for their service, and wished them well. He welcomed new board member Casey Kniffin of Florida Wildlife Federation.

Announcement of New Rivers Coalition Member: Mark announced that the Florida Wildlife Federation is the newest Rivers Coalition member. Casey Kniffin introduced herself and gave a brief bio, thanking Blair and Nic for their service to the Rivers Coalition.

Presentation: “Protecting Floridians from Toxic Algae: Why the EPA and the State of Florida Need to Step Up”

Eve Samples, Executive Director of Friends of the Everglades and Rivers Coalition board member, introduced the topic and the featured speaker, Jason Totoiu, Senior Attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. Jason discussed the petition that the Center for Biological Diversity, along with many other allies, is filing next week. It is a formal request to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that seeks new standards for cyanotoxins under the Clean Water Act. Jason also requested letters of support from Rivers Coalition members and the public. Once the petition has been filed, he will provide more information on where to send the letters. Mark Perry announced that the Rivers Coalition will also post information on our website at that time.

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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 estuaries. Total nitrogen levels are being met, but they are still working on phosphorus levels. She mentioned that BMAP milestones had been extended, and that the county is meeting with someone regarding new structures for reefs.

City of Stuart/LOSOM: Ben Hogarth thanked the USACE for the new LOSOM process and also thanked everyone in the room for their support. He discussed a potential oyster garden project, which would include up to 300 of them installed near the city docks.

USACE: Maj. Corry Bell, Deputy District Commander for South Florida USACE, gave an update on the LOSOM process. The public announcement will occur on Friday, May 24th, with a public discussion continuing until June 24th. He expects the USACE to sign off on it by mid-August. Maj. Bell reminded the room of the approaching hurricane season and is optimistic about current lake levels.

SFWMD: Lawrence Glenn, Director of the Water Resources Division of the SFWMD, gave a short presentation on "Ecological Monitoring in the Estuaries." He also welcomed new SFWMD Director of Communications, Taniel Koushakjian (T.K), and thanked Mark Perry for hosting a reception last week for the SFWMD.

Lake O Update: Paul Gray, via Zoom, stated that the lake is dropping fast which gives hope for the rainy season, although too fast for nesting birds.

State and Federal Legislation: No update as the legislature is not currently in session.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Casey Kniffin announced that the Toxic Trail Run is coming up on Saturday, June 29th. It is a 37-mile run/walk/bike from Port Mayaca to Stuart Beach. The River Kidz will be stationed in Stuart to cheer on the runners. Registration for the Toxic Trail Run is available online: [Toxic Trail Run Registration](#).

Casey is encouraging River Kidz to also write letters of support for the petition to the EPA.

Speakers Bureau: Speakers can be requested at riverscoalition.org.

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow mentioned that the water is looking much better since the discharges stopped. He has updated information on his website at eyeonlakeo.com

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir not present.

Member Comments and Announcements:

Mark Perry thanked the USACE and the SFWMD for the recent local Indian River Lagoon South meetings. He announced that June is Oceans month. Florida Oceanographic Society will host the 2024 International Oceans Film Festival on June 13th at the Lyric Theatre. More information is available here: [International Film Fest](#). Mark reminded the audience that June 8th is World Ocean Day, and to "wear blue and tell two."

Diane Goldberg reminded the group about the Right to Clean Water petition. Carol Ann Leonard is assisting Diane Goldberg with collecting petitions. More information is available here: [Florida Right to Clean Water](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 12:18 p.m.