

# Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: July 25, 2024

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**Members via Zoom:** Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau), James Packer (Royal Harbor HOA), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Tiare Fridrich (Save the Manatee Club), Caitlin Newcamp-Paul Gray (Audubon Florida).

**Members in person:** Mark Perry (Florida Oceanographic Society), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Carol Waxler (Friends of the Everglades), Valentina Miele (FOS), Jason Bultman (VoteWater), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Joe Gilio (LORI), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove), Paul Laura (Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), Annie Potts (Treasure Coast Rowing Club), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club).

**Non-members via Zoom:** Pat LaBalbo, Terri Bates, Heather Schott (Rep. Toby Overdorf), Douglas Ashley, Lawrence Glenn (SFWMD), Caleta Scott (One Lagoon), Derek Cox.

**Non-members in person:** Barbara Osborn, Bruce Osborn, Maj.Cory Bell-Jeff Prater (USACE), Sherry McCorkle (SFWMD), Sarah Heard-Elizabeth Kelly-Sarah Phillion-Amy Eason (Martin County), Becky Bruner-Chris Collins, Ben Hogarth (City of Stuart), Kara Muzia, Nicholas Muzia, John Paterson-Paula McCleave (Right to Clean Water), Liam Murdoch, Greg Gardner, Will Gideonse, Linda Gideonse, Thomas Witkop, Mike Berger, Anne Cox, John McMurry, Will Witkop, Carrie Witkop, Bob Matheson, Dianne Hughes.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 44 attendees in person, 19 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

**Opening Comments:** Mark Perry welcomed everyone and thanked the City of Stuart for letting us use their facility. He reminded attendees to check in with the sign-in sheet and also recognized Becky Bruner, Ben Hogarth, Sarah Heard, and Chris Collins from the City of Stuart. He asked any candidates running for office to stand up, and recognized Becky Bruner running as an incumbent for City Commissioner and also Thomas Witkop running for US House of Representatives.

## **Presentation: "Sharks in the IRL: Are They in Trouble?"**

Dr. Grant Gilmore, senior scientist at Estuarine, Coastal, and Ocean Science, Inc., in Vero Beach, talked about bull sharks and their relationship to the health of the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon.

A Q&A session followed the presentation.

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

## **Government & Agency Reports:**

**Martin County:** Dr. Elizabeth Kelly, Martin County Environmental Programs Coordinator, gave an updated water quality report.

**City of Stuart/LOSOM:** Ben Hogarth, City of Stuart Community Affairs Liaison, discussed the approved oyster garden project consisting of 300+ oyster gardens to be put along the Stuart boardwalk. The first stage of the project will be assembly on Tuesday, August 6th after 5 p.m. at River Palm Cottages. Volunteers are needed and the project is open to all participants.

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**SFWMD:** Sherry McCorkle, SFWMD Senior External Affairs Specialist, attended in Kathy LaMartina's place. She introduced herself but did not have updates. Mark Perry mentioned that at the most recent SFWMD meeting, they discussed the Lower East Coast water supply plan.

**USACE:** Major Cory Bell, USACE Deputy District Commander for South Florida, gave an update on the lake level (13.65'), C44 canal, and flow to STAs. LOSOM has been submitted to USACE headquarters and the decision is still expected on August 12th. He mentioned that the USACE has resumed dredging in the St. Lucie Canal. Mark Perry reminded the attendees that a change in command at USACE takes place tomorrow. Col. Bowman will take Col. Booth's place as District Commander and will be invited to attend the Rivers Coalition September meeting.

**Lake O Update:** Paul Gray, via Zoom, stated that the lake is still in the 13-½-foot range. No other updates.

**State and Federal Legislation:** In Gil Smart's absence, Mark Perry announced that, on the federal level, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2024 has passed in the House of Representatives but still has to go through the Senate. Florida's legislature is not currently in session.

## Coalition Reports:

**River Kidz:** No update given.

**Speakers Bureau:** No report given. Speakers can be requested at [riverscoalition.org](http://riverscoalition.org).

**Seagrass Update:** Todd Thurlow, via Zoom, mentioned he has updated images, including new satellite imagery to his website, and has added the DEP's daily microcystin data to the site at [eyeonlakeo.com](http://eyeonlakeo.com).

**Water Quality Report:** Mark Perry stated there are no discharges from the lake, only from local basins. Water quality is currently at a "C" or satisfactory rating.

**Riverkeeper Update:** In Jim Moir's absence, Mark Perry reminded the attendees that the Treasure Coast Water Cleanup will be on Saturday, July 27th. The IRK will be at Jensen Beach Causeway all day. Additionally, the Florida Oceanographic Society will be at Stuart Causeway from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Volunteers are needed.

## Member Comments and Announcements:

Valentina Miele from the Florida Oceanographic Society announced they will host a virtual town hall on August 20th on blue-green algae. The Rivers Coalition will post the information as it becomes available.

Mark Perry reminded the group that there will not be a Rivers Coalition meeting in August. The next public meeting will be on Thursday, September 26th.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.