

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: November 21, 2024

Members via Zoom: Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Hilarie Davis (US Sailing Center), Kelly Cox (Audubon Florida), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida).

Members in person: Merritt Matheson (IRK), Casey Kniffin (Florida Wildlife Federation), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Dick Tuschiek (Seagate Harbor HOA), Kelli Doré (River Kidz), Joe Gilio (LORI), Ed Killer (FloValentina Miele (Florida Oceanographic Society)), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Eve Samples-Leah Voss-Allie Hartmann-Mitchell Latzman-Peter Upton (Friends of the Everglades), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assoc.), Gil Smart-Jason Bultman (VoteWater), Jim Moir-rida Sportsman), Walter Deemer (League of Women's Voters of MC), Paul Laura (Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove).

Non-members via Zoom: Tim Gysan-Jason Engle-Lan Do (USACE), Amaris Mokhortov, Delores Johnson, John Campbell, Luis Alejandro, Doug Ashley, Forest Blanton, Matt DePaolis-Allie Pecenka (SCCF), Pat LaBalbo, Paul Linton (Palm Beach County), Terri Bates, Robert Mahoney.

Non-members in person: Maj. Cory Bell-Jeff Prater (USACE), Lawrence Glenn (SFWMD), John Maehl-Sarah Philion-Sarah Heard-Elizabeth Kelly-Amy Eason-Eileen Vargas, (Martin County), Christopher Collins-Laura Giobbi-Sean Reed-Lee Baggett (City of Stuart), Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Becky Bruner, Tad Bowler, Lisa Interlandi (Everglades Law Center), Barbara Osborn, Patrick Malone, Tim O'Hara (TCPalm), Carol Ann Leonard, Nick Goletta, Greg Gardner, Angela Antinella, Mary Laura, Becky Harris, Paula McCleave, Tom Bausch, Joan Bausch.

Charles Grande called the meeting to order at 11:03 am. There were 50 attendees in person, 24 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

Presentation: Should the City of Stuart Hire an Environmental Attorney?

Christopher Collins, Stuart City Commissioner, spoke about the City of Stuart's intention to hire an environmental attorney, whose sole purpose will be to advocate for water quality in the St. Lucie River. The Commission will finalize the job description and other details of the position at their December meeting.

Following Chris's presentation, 3 locally elected officials introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their position on clean-water issues:

1. Eileen Vargas replaced Doug Smith as County Commissioner for District 1.
2. Sean Reed is newly elected City Commissioner, Group IV.
3. Laura Giobbi is newly elected City Commissioner, Group II.

The above presentations in their entirety can be seen at www.riverscoalition.org.

Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: John Maehl discussed the status of the Okeelanta vs. USACE court case. He mentioned that the Office of Everglades Restoration will host the South Florida Restoration Task Force in Washington, DC in December. John also announced that voters approved the land use referendum and that the county is working on getting things in place.

Lisa Interlandi of the Everglades Law Center further explained details of the Okeelanta vs. USACE case.

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City of Stuart: No announcements.

SFWMD: Lawrence Glenn of SFWMD brought up the recent decision by USACE to put the lake recovery operations plan in place in December. He stated that the SFWMD supports this plan and gave reasons why.

USACE: Maj. Cory Bell gave a slide presentation and details of the lake recovery operations plan. Discharges would begin on December 7th.

An extended Q&A session followed Maj. Bell's presentation, which can be seen at www.riverscoalition.org.

Lake O Update: Paul Gray, via Zoom, stated that he appreciates the USACE's efforts to balance lake recovery and estuary health, reminding the attendees that the USACE can stop the operation if it is not working.

State and Federal Legislation: Gil Smart said the Florida legislative session will begin in March 2025. He suggested that, based on election results, we may be entering a period of deregulation.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Casey Kniffin announced that the River Kidz recently endorsed a bill by Congressman Frost to establish the Youth Climate Leadership Act.

Speakers Bureau: Todd Weissing stated the Rivers Coalition is available to speak to organizations of all types, not just member organizations, and would be happy to discuss the Rivers Coalition's position on the lake recovery operations. Speakers can be requested at riverscoalition.org.

Water Quality Report: Valentina Miele of the Florida Oceanographic Society gave a brief presentation on current water quality.

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow briefly went over the information that is available on his site, eyeonlakeo.com.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir stated that seagrass recovery is not good, confirmed by the recent Marine Resources Council report on the Indian River Lagoon. He emphasized that this is the worst time to begin discharges—this is not recovery, it is exacerbation of harm.

Member Comments and Announcements:

An attendee brought up the efforts of the FDEP to amend a conservation easement on the border of St. Lucie and Martin County at the Riverwatch Community, where they are trying to dredge. Paul Laura stated he would like the Rivers Coalition to be more active in trying to prevent this from happening.

Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch reminded everyone that it has been 2 years since she was discharged from the SFWMD board and that it is vital that our area be represented on the SFWMD. She urged everyone to appeal to the governor to appoint someone from this area to the board.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.