

# Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: January 23, 2025

---

**Members via Zoom:** Bob Mathias (FOS), Caitlin Newcamp (Audubon), Casey Kniffin (Florida Wildlife Federation), Kelli Doré (River Kidz), Brian McGann (The Estuary), Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau), Rip Fisher (Sailfish Point Yacht Club), Hilarie Davis (US Sailing Center), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus).

**Members in person:** Merritt Matheson-Jim Moir (IRK), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Harvey Nation (Rio Civic Center), Nathaniel Winn-Valentina Miele (FOS), Ed Killer (Florida Sportsman), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Eve Samples-Mitchell Latzman (Friends of the Everglades), Nic Mader (Dolphin Ecology Project), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Walter Deemer-Lyn Aal-Magee (League of Women's Voters of MC), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove).

**Non-members via Zoom:** Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Heather Schott (Rep. Toby Overdorf), Jesse Friedman (WPTV), John Amerling, Forest Blanton, Rosbet, Ernie Barnett, Paul Julian (Everglades Foundation), Tom MacVicar, Lisa Interlandi (Everglades Law Center), Pat LaBalbo, Terri Bates.

**Non-members in person:** Maj. Cory Bell-Jason Engle (USACE), John Maehl-Sarah Phillion-Elizabeth Kelly-Sarah Powers (Martin County), Christopher Collins-Laura Giobbi-Mike Mortell-Eula Clarke-Ben Hogarth-Jim Chruski-Campbell Rich-Sean Reed-Lee Baggett (City of Stuart), Beth Jurgaitis, Chris and Deb Grazel (Admiralty Yacht Club), Newton Cook, George and Paula McLease, Dave Preston, Christiane Ashb, H.M. Ridgely, Reneé Lessard-Moreshead, Barbara Osborn, Patrick Malone, Will Gideonse, Linda Gideonse, Anne Cox, Bradley Watson (Everglades Foundation), Tom Bausch, Frederick Ernst.

Eve Samples called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 54 attendees in person, 25 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant

## **Business Matters:**

Eve Samples asked Rivers Coalition members to stand and introduce themselves. She then introduced the Rivers Coalition Board of Directors and mentioned that she is now the Vice President of the board. Ed Killer of Florida Sportsman was welcomed as a new member of the Board of Directors and gave a brief self-introduction.

## **Presentation: Update on Lake Okeechobee Discharges**

Maj. Cory Bell, USACE District Commander for South Florida, and Jason Engle, USACE Chief of Water Resources Engineering Branch, gave an update on the Lake Okeechobee Recovery Operations.

*An extended Q&A session followed their presentation. The above presentations in its entirety can be seen at [www.riverscoalition.org](http://www.riverscoalition.org).*

## **Government & Agency Reports:**

**Martin County:** John Maehl gave an update on how the recently passed land acquisition sales tax is being used.

**City of Stuart:** Ben Hogarth discussed the city's view of the recovery operations.

**SFWMD:** No one was present from SFWMD. Eve Samples remarked that the SFWMD makes recommendations and did recommend the lake recovery operation. She stated that the proposed rock mine letter of endorsement from SFWMD occurred during the holidays. Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, via Zoom, asked if there was an update on the Interconnect canal, but no one was available to answer.

# Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: January 23, 2025

---

**USACE:** See main presentation by Maj. Cory Bell. Additionally, Maj. Bell reminded everyone of the EVCO (Everglades Coalition) conference next week.

**Lake O Update:** Paul Gray, via Zoom, remarked on the difference between a stage envelope and recovery mode for the lake.

**State and Federal Legislation:** Gil Smart talked about 2 issues: a Special Session called by Gov. DeSantis to toughen rules to get an amendment on the ballot, and a bill regarding the State Parks development issue.

## **Coalition Reports:**

**River Kidz:** Casey Kniffin, via Zoom, stated that the River Kidz and Sabrina Glover recently had a booth at the Mutt March, a well-attended event. The Environmental Studies Center will celebrate Grandparents Day on February 8th.

**Speakers Bureau:** Todd Weissing was not present, but Eve Samples reminded everyone that the Rivers Coalition is available to speak to organizations of all types. Speakers can be requested at [riverscoalition.org](http://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](http://eyeonlakeo.com).

**Riverkeeper Update:** Jim Moir remarked on the terrible turbidity of the St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon, stating that they also deserve recovery.

## **Member Comments and Announcements:**

Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County) gave an update on the Loxalucie Project.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:26 p.m.