

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: February 27, 2025

Members via Zoom: Caitlin Newcamp (Audubon), Kelli Doré (River Kidz), Tiare Fridrich (Save the Manatee Club), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Allie Hartmann (Friends of the Everglades), Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau), Bradley Watson (Everglades Foundation).

Members in person: Mark Perry-Valentina Miele), (FOS), Eve Samples-Mitchell Latzman-Peter Upton (Friends of the Everglades), (Pres. Council of H.I.), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assn.), Gil Smart-Jason Bultman (VoteWater), Merritt Matheson-Jim, Moir (IRK), Harvey Nation (Rio Civic Center), Casey Kniffin (Florida Wildlife Federation), Ed Killer-Blair Wickstrom (Florida Sportsman), Richard Hall (River Warriors), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Joe Gilio (LORI), Nic Mader (Dolphin Ecology Project), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida), Walter Deemer-Lyn Aal-Magee (League of Women's Voters of MC), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove).

Non-members via Zoom: Paul Linton-Deb Drum (Palm Beach County), Tim Gysan (USACE), Luis Alejandro, Rosbet, Bill Baker, Lisa Interlandi (Everglades Law Center), Terri Bates.

Non-members in person: Maj. Cory Bell-Jason Engle (USACE), Lawrence Glenn (SFWMD), John Maehl-Sarah Philion-Elizabeth Kelly (Martin County), Christopher Collins-Laura Giobbi-Ben Hogarth-Campbell Rich (City of Stuart), Laurie MacDougall, Glenn Kellis, Mike Knepper, Barbara Osborn, Frederick Ernst, Deana Peterson, Caleta Scott (One Lagoon), Peter Koch, Blake Faulkner, Paula McLease, Will Gideonse, Linda Gideonse, Anne Cox, Tom Bausch, Kara Muzia, Angela Rantinella.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:06 am. There were 51 attendees in person, 17 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant.

Business Matters:

Mark Perry announced that Col. Bowman (USACE) will be the speaker at the March public meeting. Mark Perry and Jim Moir spoke a few words in remembrance of Kenny Hinkle, Jr., and a slide show and moment of silence were observed in his memory.

Mark welcomed new Rives Coalition member organizations, Admiralty Yacht Club and Farm Vets. Jim Harter spoke on behalf of the Admiralty Yacht Club.

Presentation: How to Rescue the River of Grass and End Lake Okeechobee Discharges

Eve Samples, Executive Director of Friends of the Everglades, gave a presentation on a bold new movement to restore the Everglades and save the northern estuaries. Blair Wickstrom followed her presentation with a rallying call to action.

Jim Moir motioned for the Rivers Coalition to sign the River of Grass petition. Charles Grande seconded the motion. It was unanimously voted in favor. Motion was carried.

An extended Q&A session followed their presentation. The above presentations in its entirety can be seen at www.riverscoalition.org.

Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: John Maehl announced the good news that recent seagrass surveys were better than anticipated, showing a 75% presence, foreshadowing a good recovery this summer.

City of Stuart: Ben Hogarth had no updates at this time.

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SFWMD: Lawrence Glenn briefly discussed the Lake O recovery operations as an introduction to Maj. Bell (USACE). He answered a few questions regarding the maximum practical concept.

USACE: Maj. Cory Bell gave a presentation on the status of the Lake Okeechobee operations.

A Q&A session followed his presentation. The above presentations in its entirety can be seen at www.riverscoalition.org.

Lake O Update: Paul Gray stated that for the first time in a few years the lake has started to dry out on the shoreline, and wading birds are present.

State and Federal Legislation: Gil Smart stated that the Florida legislative session begins on March 4th and looks like it will be another “session of sprawl.” He mentioned 2 upcoming bills to keep an eye on—a state park bill sponsored by Representatives Gayle Harrell and John Snyder, and SB7002, which seems targeted at SFWMD.

Eve Samples mentioned that Friends of the Everglades has sent out a targeted action regarding keeping our parks fully funded. Learn more here: <https://www.everglades.org/standwithnationalparks/>.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Casey Kniffin showed a recent River Kidz presentation. The link to the presentation will be included in the next newsletter. She mentioned that there are many upcoming events and they are always in need of volunteers.

Speakers Bureau: Todd Weissing has a speaking engagement tonight. He reminded the members that speakers can be requested at riverscoalition.org.

Water Quality Report: Mark Perry gave a brief presentation on the current water quality.

Seagrass Update: Mark Perry mentioned that there is small seagrass growth along the flats.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir stated that the turbidity is a serious issue for seagrass, caused by both discharges and dredging. He reminded us to be mindful of the manatees.

Member Comments and Announcements:

Merritt Matheson brought up LOSOM and whether or not it guaranteed 5 years of no lake recovery operations unless the lake is above 16 feet. Jason Engle (USACE) responded.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:32 p.m.