

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: March 27, 2025

Members via Zoom: Rip Fisher (Sailfish Point Yacht Club), Bob Mathias (FOS), Kelly Cox (Audubon Florida), Caitlin Newcamp (Audubon), Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau).

Members in person: Mark Perry-Valentina Miele-Nate Winn), (FOS), Eve Samples-Allie Hartmann-Leah Voss-Mitchell Latzman (Friends of the Everglades), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assn.), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Merritt Matheson-Jim Moir (IRK), Harvey Nation (Rio Civic Center), Casey Kniffin (Florida Wildlife Federation), Ed Killer (Florida Sportsman), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Richard Hall (River Warriors), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Nic Mader (Dolphin Ecology Project), Kelli Doré (River Kidz), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), 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: Pat LaBalbo, Phil Sliger,, Sarah Phillion (Martin County), Tom MacVicar, Richard Sanchez, Forest Blanton, Erica Welch, Mandy Michaelsen,Ernie Barnett, WPEC, Ken Bradshaw-Jason Engle (USACE), Terri Bates.

Non-members in person: Col. Brandon Bowman-Maj. Cory Bell-Jaz Levano-Julie Treichel-Jeff Prater (USACE), Lawrence Glenn-Sherry McCorkle (SFWMD), John Maehl-Amy Eason-Michael Yustin-Elizabeth Kelly (Martin County), Christopher Collins-Ben Hogarth (City of Stuart), Laurie MacDougall, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Clay Scherer, Barbara Osborn, Peter Koch, Blake Faulkner, Tim ? (TCPalm), Erin Kellis, Rob Moir, David Alexander, Janet Jorden, John Yukus, Pamela Young, Douglas Ashley, Pamela Dugan, Stephen Mahoney, Anne Cox, Joan Bausch, Kara Muzia, Hugh Jennings III, Jack Jennings, Jr., Rusty Hooks, Nick Muzin, Beth Jurgaitis, Jim Jurgaitis, Newton Cook, Jeff Wood, Caleta Scott (One Lagoon), Chris Savits, Susan Babek, Tyler Hatfield (WPTV), Nick ?, Angela Rantinella, Marcella Jones.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 72 attendees in person, 25 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant.

Business Matters:

Mark Perry welcomed Rivers Coalition members and guests and introduced Col. Bowman.

Presentation: Col. Bowman Updates on Lake Okeechobee Discharges and Water Quality Efforts

Col. Bowman discussed the Lake Recovery Operations procedures and process of review when discharges are done. He announced that the discharges will end on Saturday, 3/29/25.

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

Government & Agency Reports:

City of Stuart: Ben Hogarth stated the City of Stuart is in the process of hiring an environmental attorney. He discussed the City's reaction to the failure of the Sugar Industry's lawsuit with regard to the savings clause and reaffirmed the City's position.

Mark Perry informed the group that the Everglades Law Center had been working on this case since 2021, mentioning that the Sugar Industry is not harmed in any way by the Everglades Restoration project.

Martin County: John Maehl plugged 3 upcoming ecotourism projects and also announced that there will be a meeting on April 16th of the Environmental Lands Oversight Committee, which oversees funds created by the

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recently added surtax. He discussed the time factor in salinity returning to appropriate levels after discharges stop, and thanked Lawrence Glenn of SFWMD for his partnership.

SFWMD: Lawrence Glenn discussed the science of lake recovery operations and SFWMD's work with the USACE in determining a stop date for discharges based on reproductive season in the estuaries. Lawrence announced he was leaving the SFWMD and would take on the role in Tallahassee of running the BMAP program.

USACE: See main presentation by Col. Bowman.

Lake O Update: In Paul Gray's absence, Mark Perry stated the lake level is coming down quickly.

State and Federal Legislation: Eve Samples discussed the proposed "State Parks" bills being introduced by Senator Gayle Harrell and Representative John Snyder (SB80 and HB209). She announced that there will be a state parks "Love Fest" on Saturday, 4/5/25 at Jonathan Dickinson State park at 10:00 a.m. Other state parks are also having their own events that same day. For updates on the current legislative session, go to <https://www.everglades.org/legislative-accountability/>.

Mark Perry added that numerous organizations would be going to Tallahassee April 7-8 to participate in Everglades Action Day.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Kelli Doré announced that the River Kidz would be participating in both the Dirty River Jam and the Indian Riverkeeper's Sand Spike Shootout on Saturday, 3/29/25. They will also participate on Earth Day in Hobe Sound and will be speaking at the Sewall's Point Commission. She reiterated that volunteers are needed for the various River Kidz events.

Casey Kniffin brought up a proposed bill in the Florida legislature relating to single-use plastics, and the River Kidz commitment to keeping plastics out of our waterways.

Speakers Bureau: Todd Weissing spoke a few weeks ago to the St. Lucie Power Squadron. 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: Todd Thurlow mentioned that seagrass, although thin and sparse, is visible.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir stated that the current high turbidity is just as important an issue as the lack of salinity in the lagoon. Seagrass is looking much better in the northern lagoon. He discussed recent sightings of sperm and right whales. Jim announced that the Indian Riverkeeper's Sand Spike Shootout will be this coming weekend, March 29-30. He reminded the group to be wary of hidden agendas in proposed bills, such as the "boater freedom" bill.

Member Comments and Announcements:

Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch thanked Col. Bowman for his presentation and willingness to be present. She introduced a long-time friend who hopes to become involved with the Rivers Coalition.

Merritt Matheson mentioned the April 16th meeting with regard to the Martin County Forever surtax. It will be from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. at the Martin County Commission chambers. He would like the county to bond future revenue from this project.

Greg Braun of Guardians of Martin County stated that the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Project needs donations.

Diane Goldsteine reminded the group to sign the Right to Clean Water petition. She will also be giving a lecture on April 26th at 2:00 p.m. at the Kilmer Library in Fort Pierce about alternatives to fertilizer.

Darrell Brand congratulated Jacqui Thurlow-Lippiach on her recent year-long journey of the Great Circle Loop, completing 6000 nautical miles in her boat with her husband, Ed.

Casey Kniffin discussed the need for the Florida legislature to fund the Florida Forever project.

Todd Thurlow reminded the group of the importance of fixing the BMAPs.

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The meeting was adjourned at 12:28 p.m.