

# Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: April 24, 2025

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**Members via Zoom:** Nic Mader (Dolphin Ecology Project), Brian McGann (The Estuary), Bob Mathias (FOS), Kevin Hinkle (St. Lucie Audubon), Brittany Bearden (Martin County Farm Bureau).

**Members in person:** Mark Perry-Valentina Miele (FOS), Eve Samples-Mitchell Latzman (Friends of the Everglades), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assn.), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Jim Moir (IRK), Rip Fisher (Sailfish Point Yacht Club), Bradley Watson (Everglades Foundation), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Richard Hall (River Warriors), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club).

**Non-members via Zoom:** Jill Vickers, Pat LaBalbo, Rosbet, Joan Bausch, Libby Pigman, Phil Sliger, John Amerling, Deb Drum (Palm Beach County), Ernie Barnett.

**Non-members in person:** Maj. Cory Bell-Jaz Levano (USACE), Sherry McCorkle (SFWMD), John Maehl-Sarah Pillion (Martin County), Christopher Collins-Ben Hogarth-Sean Reed-Laura Giobbi (City of Stuart), Nicholas Linehan (St. Lucie County), Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Barbara Osborn, Nick Gulotta (We Care Martin), Erin Kellis, John Yukus, Kara Muzia, Lee Baggett, Will Gideonse, Linda Gideonse, J. Thomason, M. Gregory, Thomas Bowler, Angela Rantinella.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 39 attendees in person, 16 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant.

## **Business Matters:**

Member roll call was taken. Mark Perry welcomed new Rivers Coalition member Everglades Foundation and their representative, Bradley Watson.

Bradley gave a brief introduction and mentioned that the Everglades Foundation is hosting America's Everglades Summit in June in Washington, DC.

Mark thanked the Kahlert Foundation for their recent large donation. He also briefly mentioned recent changes to the SFWMD board and staff.

## **Presentation: Florida Legislative Update**

Gil Smart, Executive Director of VoteWater, and Eve Samples, Executive Director of Friends of the Everglades, gave an update on Florida legislation that could affect our estuaries and environment.

*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 discussed recent increase in filamentous algae in our estuaries and its effect.

**City of Stuart:** Ben Hogarth talked about the outlook of the water quality since the Lake O discharges stopped. He also discussed growth-management and land-development bills and their effect on local government, as well as challenges local governments now face getting funding.

City Commissioner Chris Collins gave an update on the hiring of an environmental attorney. Vote will be on May 12th. He also stated the City Commission wrote a letter in support of Maj. Bell's request for an extension of his position with the USACE.

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**SFWMD:** In the absence of a SFWMD representative, Mark Perry discussed the recent changes and additions to the SFWMD Board of Directors. He also talked about the Southland rock mine project, stating Palm Beach County will address it at their meeting on May 22nd.

**USACE:** Maj. Bell gave updates on the Indian River Lagoon South project, the EAA Reservoir projects, and the lake levels. The USACE's assessment of the lake recovery operations will most likely be in the fall.

**Lake O Update:** In Paul Gray's absence, Mark Perry gave an update on the lake level and discharges. Level is currently 11.62 feet. No discharges to the east and minimal discharges to the west.

**State and Federal Legislation:** Eve Samples discussed the upcoming Farm Bill and urged the members to contact their representatives to ensure the sugar industry does not get protection from the Farm Bill.

## **Coalition Reports:**

**River Kidz:** Not present.

**Speakers Bureau:** Todd Weissing reminded the members that speakers can be requested at [riverscoalition.org](http://riverscoalition.org).

**Water Quality Report:** Mark Perry discussed the filamentous algae. He mentioned that the University of Florida IFAS Extension is encouraging the general public to observe and submit photos of algae during the month of May. Rivers Coalition will post the QR code on their website.

**Seagrass Update:** Todd Thurlow also talked about the algae. Discussion ensued about how to clean up the filamentous algae. The best way is to reduce the influx of nutrients.

**Riverkeeper Update:** Jim Moir stated that seagrass in the lagoon continues to steadily recover. Although looking better, there is still sediment that is stirred up by boating activity. He also gave an update on manatees, green sea turtles, and right whales.

## **Member Comments and Announcements:**

Nick Linehan, Stormwater Program Coordinator for St. Lucie County, introduced himself and is looking forward to giving updates at future Rivers Coalition meetings.

A member announced that there will be a recognition program for those involved in getting Martin County Forever off the ground. It will be from 10-2 at Jonathan Dickinson State Park.

On a related note, Mark Perry stated that Merritt Matheson, board member of Martin County Forever, will keep us updated on the progress of the land acquisition.

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