

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: September 25, 2025

Members via Zoom: Erin Kellis (MCFNPS), Chris Grazel (Admiralty Yacht Club), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Jeanette Hartzell (Humanists of the Treasure Coast), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida), Kelli Doré (River Kidz), Amanda Purnell-Dana Espinosa (Friends of the Everglades), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club).

Members in person: Mark Perry-Valentina Miele (Florida Oceanographic Society), Eve Samples-Miki Blumenthal-Peter Upton (Friends of the Everglades), Gil Smart-Jason Bultman (VoteWater), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Merritt Matheson (IRK), Todd Weissing (Lighthouse Point Assn.), Ed Killer (Florida Sportsman), Gloria Gronowicz-Walter Deemer (League of Women Voters of MC), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Richard Hall (River Warriors), Jeffrey Bishop-Bob McAnnally (Yacht Club of Stuart Yacht & Country Club), Brian McGann (The Estuary), Regina Wood (TC Unitarian Universalist Church), Trae Jennings-David Alexander (Ballantrae Angler's Club), Dave Derrenbacker (Realtor Assoc. of MC), Paul Laura (HIPI), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon), Lyn Aal-Magee (Audubon of MC), Laura Vennard (League of Women Voters of SLC), Shari Anker (Conservation Alliance of SLC), Bradley Watson (Everglades Foundation), Carol Ann Leonard (MC Democratic Environmental Caucus), Harvey Nation (Rio Civic Club), Joe Gilio (LORI).

Non-members via Zoom: Eula Clarke, Robert Mahoney, Tom MacVicar, Terrie Bates, Lisa Interlandi (Everglades Law Center), Ernie Barnett, Jennifer Smith, Lauren Smith, Rosbet, Tim Gysan (USACE), Elizabeth Pigman (SFWMD), Susie Innis, Renée Lessard-Moreshead, Angela, Charles Murphy.

Non-members in person: Maj. Cory Bell-Jeff Prater (USACE), Sherry McCorkle (SFWMD), Tim O'Hara (TCPalm), Amy Eason (Martin County), Christopher Collins-Ruth Holmes-Laura Giobbi-Lee Baggett-Campbell Rich (City of Stuart), Mac Stuckey, Susan Hemmis, Carl Stewart, Becky Bruner, Chris Savits, Nick Gulotta, Blake Faulkner, Barbara Osborn, Bruce Osborn, Shane Arnold, Cathy Rethmeier, Tom Rinert (FWC), Paul McLease, Amaris Mokhorton (MCNPS), Anne Cox, Linda Gideonse.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 59 attendees in person, 28 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant.

Business Matters:

Member roll call was taken. Mark Perry welcomed everyone, recognized government officials present, and reminded members to sign in. He explained the resolution voting process taking place during today's meeting. The resolution to "Stop Harmful Development in the Greater Everglades Ecosystem" is available for review. Members are to cast their ballots by the end of the meeting. Zoom attendees can cast their votes in the chat. ***Resolution ballots were counted at the end of the meeting, and results were recorded at the end of these minutes.***

Presentation: From City Hall to the Everglades: Key Updates You Need to Know

Ruth Holmes, the City of Stuart's new Environmental Attorney, introduced herself, stating her position with the city is unique in the state of Florida. She gave an overview of her job and areas of key focus.

Eve Samples, Executive Director of Friends of the Everglades, gave an update on the lawsuit filed against the detention center (Alligator Alcatraz) in the Everglades.

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

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Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: Amy Eason, Martin County's Environmental Resource Engineer, gave updates on the land acquisition sales tax. At their next meeting on October 21st, the county is recommending 16 properties to be acquired.

City of Stuart: See main presentation by Ruth Holmes, Environmental Attorney.

SFWMD: No updates.

USACE: Maj. Bell gave updates on the C23/24, and various other projects, including HAB testing and the projected timeline for the new LOSOM meetings to begin in late 2026. Lake Okeechobee is still in the recovery envelope. He announced that he was granted a 1-year extension as the Deputy District Commander for South Florida.

Lake O Update: Paul Gray stated the lake level is at 13.38 feet and is rising slowly and steadily, with no planned releases this year. It is looking good for plant recovery.

State and Federal Legislation: Gil Smart stated that the Florida legislative committees will begin meeting in 2 weeks. He discussed SB180 and also reminded us that Friends of the Everglades will continue their legislative accountability tracking. Gil stated that the county legislative meetings are scheduled for October 21st for Martin County and October 29th for St. Lucie County.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Kelli Doré mentioned that the River Kidz had recently participated in the International Coastal Cleanup the past weekend. Future projects include Estuaries Day at the Florida Oceanographic Coastal Center on October 4th and a speaking engagement at the Native Plant Society on November 15th. The River Kidz organization is working on activities to keep the older River Kidz members engaged.

Speakers Bureau: Todd Weissing reminded the group that speakers can be requested at riverscoalition.org.

Water Quality Report: Mark Perry stated that the Florida Oceanographic Society provides weekly water quality updates which can be seen here: [Water Quality Reports](#).

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow stated that Lake Okeechobee levels had met goals of the USACE lake recovery operations. The seagrass looks the best it has in a while. He reminded everyone of the address of his website for updates, photos, and live flow maps: eyeonlakeo.com.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir stated that though the seagrass as a whole looks good, other areas are doing just okay. He reminded us that we need to continue to focus on issues including land management and stormwater management.

Mark Perry stated he would keep the Rivers Coalition updated on challenges to the BMAP process.

Member Comments and Announcements:

Merritt Matheson mentioned that the second meeting of the land oversight committee was held at the beginning of September and gave more details on the 16 properties to be recommended to the county for acquisition.

Diane Goldberg stated she is giving away 3 native trees and reminded the group that she also gives lectures.

Mark Perry discussed the recent success of the Florida Oceanographic Society's "Sip 'n Science" at Frazier Creek Brewery and Distillery and reminded the group of the upcoming Estuaries Day event at FOCC on October 4th. He stated that FOS is working with the city and county to put up smalltooth sawfish recognition signs.

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Mark introduced the newest member organization of the Rivers Coalition, the Yacht Club of the Stuart Yacht & Country Club. Bob McAnnally spoke about the organization and presented a check to the Rivers Coalition.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:40 p.m.

Resolution ballots were counted directly after the meeting by Darrell Brand and Miki Blumenthal.

Member organizations present (Zoom and in person): 32

Yay votes: 28

Nay votes: 2

Abstain: 2

The resolution to “Stop Harmful Development in the Greater Everglades Ecosystem” passed.