

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: November 20, 2025

Members via Zoom: Isabella Gukeisen (Everglades Foundation), Jim Moir (Indian Riverkeeper), Carol Ann Leonard (MC Democratic Environmental Caucus), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida), Dana Espinosa (Friends of the Everglades), Laura Vennard (League of Women Voters of SLC).

Members in person: Mark Perry-Valentina Miele (Florida Oceanographic Society), Eve Samples-Miki Blumenthal-Mitchell Latzmann (Friends of the Everglades), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Merritt Matheson (IRK), Ed Killer (Florida Sportsman), Casey Darling Kniffin (Florida Wildlife Federation), Walter Deemer-Gloria Gronowicz (League of Women Voters of MC), Trae Jennings-David Alexander (Ballantrae Angler's Club), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Erin Kellis (MC Native Plant Society), John Paterson (Estuary at North River Shores), Paul Laura (HIPI), Joe Gilio (LORI), Lyn Aal-Magee (Audubon of MC), Tom Bausch-Tom Tomlinson (MC Conservation Alliance), Harvey Nation (Rio Civic Club), George Jones (ORCA), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove).

Non-members via Zoom: Rosbet, Paul Linton-Deb Drum (Palm Beach County), Jennifer Smith.

Non-members in person: Drew Bartlett-Thomas Hurley-Sherry McCorkle (SFWMD), Amy Eason-Sarah Philion-Sarah Heard (Martin County), Becky Bruner-Christopher Collins-Ruth Holmes-Laura Giobbi (City of Stuart), Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Diane Kimes, Caleta Scott, James Martin, Blake Faulkner, Barbara Osborn, Renée Lessard-Moreshead, Pia Dandiya, Stephen Callahan, Kara Muzia.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 48 attendees in person, 11 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant.

Business Matters:

Member roll call was taken. Mark Perry welcomed everyone and recognized Rivers Coalition board members and general members present. He also recognized government officials present, including Sarah Heard from Martin County and also City of Stuart representatives. Mark talked about the Rivers Coalition mission of "Stop the Discharges" and mentioned the 2028 BMAP deadline.

Presentation: Making Waves in Tallahassee - How Citizens Can Push for Better Water Policy

Eve Samples and Gil Smart, Friends of the Everglades Executive Director and Policy Director respectively, and Casey Darling Kniffin of River Kidz, discussed how citizens can advocate for our waterways.

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

Government & Agency Reports:

Martin County: Amy Eason, Martin County's Environmental Resource Engineer, gave a Martin County update, including an artificial reef project and approval of a stream restoration project budget.

City of Stuart: Ruth Holmes, City of Stuart Environmental Attorney, updated the group on various city projects, including meetings with locally elected officials, local government land acquisition programs, and a look at proposed Florida bills.

SFWMD: Drew Bartlett, SFWMD Executive Director, introduced Tom Hurley, SFWMD Governing Board Member. Tom gave a brief autobiography and his contact information.

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USACE: Maj. Cory Bell gave updates on various USACE projects and discussed 2 upcoming public meetings.

Lake O Update: Paul Gray (via Zoom) gave an update on Lake Okeechobee levels.

State and Federal Legislation: Gil Smart talked about the EPA rescinding protections for many wetlands across the U.S.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Casey Kniffin discussed the River Kidz's recent talk at the Martin County Native Plant Society and plans to do some outside exploring in December.

Speakers Bureau: Todd Weissing was not present but is speaking to the Rio Civic Club on December 3rd. Requests for a speaker can be made online at the Rivers Coalition website.

Water Quality Report: Mark Perry updated the group on water quality, seagrass research, and the upcoming Marine Mammal Fest.

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow gave seagrass updates and showed new graphs available on his website: eyeonlakeo.com.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir discussed bottom trawling and effects on coral reefs. He also talked about the Marine Mammal Exhibit at FOS and the sighting of 2 right whales locally.

Member Comments and Announcements:

Greg Braun with Guardians of Martin County stated that they have almost met the \$3 million target for land acquisition.

Mark Perry reminded the group that the 2026 EVCO conference will be January 28-30 in Naples.

Laura Giobbi, speaking as a private citizen and not as a City Commissioner, thanked everyone for reaching out to Tallahassee and stressed the importance of staying involved.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:36 p.m.