

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: February 26, 2026

Members via Zoom: Bob Mathias (FOS), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Ed Killer (Florida Sportsman), Kelli Doré-Casey Kniffin (River Kidz), Paul Laura (HIPI), Dana Espinosa (Friends of the Everglades), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida).

Members in person: Mark Perry (Florida Oceanographic Society), Eve Samples-Mitchell Latzmann-Peter Upton (Friends of the Everglades), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Jim Moir (IRK), Richard Hall (River Warriors), Trae Jennings-Dave Alexander (Ballantrae Anglers Club), John Paterson (Estuary at North River Shores), Allen Herskowitz (Sailfish Point POA), Regina Wood (TCUUC), Jim Harter (Stuart Rod & Reel Club), Dave Derrenbacker (Realtor Assoc. of MC), Walter Deemer (League of Women Voters of MC), Greg Braun-Emilie Pryor (Guardians of Martin County), Harvey Nation.

Non-members via Zoom: Pat LaBalbo, K. Hinkle, E. Pigman-Jennifer Reynolds (SFWMD), Rosbet, Jennifer Smith, Terrie, DLD, Anne Cox, Jennifer Thera.

Non-members in person: Miki Blumenthal, Maj. Cory Bell (USACE), Dr. Cassondra Armstrong-Sherry McCorkle (SFWMD), John Maehl-Amy Eason-Sarah Pillion (Martin County), Bob Daniel-Kaija Mayfield (Town of Sewall's Point), Campbell Rich-Christopher Collins (City of Stuart), Hannah Angelo-Walker (Captains for Clean Water), Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Nick Muzia, Karen Muzia, Linda Gideonse, Will Gideonse, Tim O'Hara (TCPalm), Pia Dandya, Stephen Callahan, René Lessard Moreshead, Blake Faulkner, Ingrid Venezia, William Venezia, Carl Stewart, Nic Gillata, Kaija Mayfield, Susan Hemmes (Jupiter Island Garden Club), Barbara Osborn, Laura Macpherson, Kim Streiber.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. There were 50 attendees in person, 20 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant.

Business Matters:

Member roll call was taken. Mark Perry welcomed everyone and announced that he has been reaching out to Port St. Lucie and other local agencies to invite them to attend Rivers Coalition meetings.

Presentation: How What's Happening in Tallahassee Impacts Our Rivers

Eve Samples, Executive Director of Friends of the Everglades, and Gil Smart, Executive Director of VoteWater, gave an update on the current legislative session in Tallahassee and how proposed bills may affect 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: John Maehl thanked Sen. Harrell for her work on adding an amendment to the Agriculture Enclaves Bill. He shared the good news that the Martin County Forever team had closed the deal on acquiring the Bar-B Ranch and is making good progress on other parcels. He also gave an update on other county projects.

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City of Stuart: Campbell Rich, City Commissioner, updated the Rivers Coalition on various projects that the City of Stuart is working on with Ruth Holmes, the city's environmental attorney, including an EPA water grant application and biosolid legislation.

Town of Sewall's Point: Bob Daniels, Sewall's Point Town Manager, introduced himself and discussed a resiliency project that Sewall's Point is working on.

SFWMD: Dr. Cassondra Armstrong, SFWMD's Bureau Chief of Applied Sciences, introduced herself and stated she oversees all SFWMD restoration activities. She mentioned that the SFWMD will hold an Open House at their Palm Beach offices on Wednesday and Thursday, March 3 and 4, from 1-3 pm.

Dr. Armstrong proceeded to give a slide presentation on St. Lucie River conditions. *The presentations in its entirety can be seen at www.riverscoalition.org.*

USACE: Maj. Cory Bell discussed a new initiative recently launched by the USACE called "Build Infrastructure, Not Paperwork."

Lake O Update: Paul Gray (via Zoom) gave an update on Lake Okeechobee levels and recent fire on the west side of the lake. Right now the level is good for aquatic vegetation recovery.

State and Federal Legislation: See main presentation.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Casey Kniffin (via Zoom) mentioned the recent Waterways Day activity that the River Kidz participated in. Upcoming events include the Indian Riverkeeper's Sand Spike Shootout on March 7 and also Grandparents/VIP Day at the Environmental Studies Center on March 28. She gave a shoutout to former River Kidz who attended Everglades Action Day in Tallahassee.

Speakers Bureau: Ed Killer not present.

Water Quality Report: Mark Perry presented the latest weekly and year-to-date water quality reports.

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow discussed chart updates on his website eyeonlakeo. Seagrass is holding steady; it is not growing season.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir updated the status of the Indian River Lagoon and stressed to the Rivers Coalition the importance of local government NOT losing control of their waterways.

Member Comments and Announcements:

Mark Perry mentioned the draft schedule for C23-C24 projects.

Mitchell Latzman of Friends of the Everglades reminded the group of the public comment period for the C44 project.

Greg Braun of Guardians of Martin County thanked the Martin County Commission for allowing public comments on the slaughterhouse projects.

Nick Muzio, Principal Engineer for Sea and Shoreline, announced that they will host a public meeting in collaboration with the DEP on March 2 at 5 pm at IRSC.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:46 p.m.