

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: June 25, 2026

Members via Zoom: Rip Fisher (Sailfish Point Yacht Club), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Valentina Mield (Florida Oceanographic Society), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida), Annie Potts (Treasure Coast Rowing Club), Jim Wharton (Harbour Ridge Yacht Club), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Paul Laura (HIPI), Dana Espinosa (Friends of the Everglades), Tiffany Kincaid (Keep Martin Beautiful).

Members in person: Mark Perry (Florida Oceanographic Society), Mitchell Latzman-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-Merritt Matheson (IRK), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Glen Kellis-Erin Kellis (MC Chapter of the Native Plant Society), Allen Herskowitz (Sailfish Point HOA), Paul Uttormark (Sandhill Cove), Walter Deemer (LWV of Martin County), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon Society), Trae Jennings (Ballantrae Anglers Club).

Non-members via Zoom: Charles Murphy, Brynne Talas-Jennifer Thera (FDACS), Sarah Philion (Martin County), Eula Clarke (City of Stuart), Derek Cox (SFWMD), Rosbet, Philip S., Tom ?, Baker, Rip Fisher (Sailfish Point Yacht Club), Everglades Law Center, Stephen Mahoney, Susan Innis, Patrick Connally.

Non-members in person: Miki Blumenthal, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Dr. Robert Hess (USCG Auxiliary), Maj. Cory Bell-Jeff Prater (USACE), Sherry McCorkle (SFWMD), John Maehl-Sarah Heard-Mark Aveni-Jim Gorton (Martin County), Michael Giardino-Milton (City of Stuart), Will Gideonse, Linda Gideonse, Anne Cox, James Martin, Paul Millar, Carl Stewart, Nat Osborn, Barbara Osborn, Michael Kennedy (FIND), Sunny Walker, John Dial, Chris Collins, Ike Crumpler, Blake Faulkner, Nick Gulotta.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:03 am. There were 44 attendees in person, 25 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant.

Business Matters:

Member roll call was taken. Mark Perry recognized local officials present. He noted continued concern for river conditions and recent observations related to algae and muck in the estuary and also thanked Harbour Ridge Yacht Club for their recent generous donation.

Presentation: The Muck Stops Here: Dredging, Disposal, and Restoration in the St. Lucie Watershed

Major Cory Bell, USACE District Commander for South Florida, Michael Kennedy, Martin County Representative on FIND, and John Maehl, Martin County Environmental Resource Administrator, gave a presentation focused on efforts to clean up muck in the St. Lucie River and protect local waterways. They reviewed recent dredging concerns, discussed lessons learned, and shared updates on longer-term plans to improve river health.

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

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Government & Agency Reports:

City of Stuart: No update given.

Martin County: John Maehl reported that Martin County is working to secure a site for the future muck removal project, which would allow planning and design to move forward. He said the project is a key part of long-term estuary restoration and will be discussed further at the County Commission July meeting.

SFWMD: Sherry McCorkle, SFWMD Senior External Affairs Specialist, gave a brief update on recent South Florida Water Management District meetings and invited people to follow the district's work online. She also said district staff are available to speak to community groups.

Lake O Update: Paul Gray stated Lake Okeechobee is very low, but the rainy season should help conditions improve. He also noted that algae is present on the lake, though it is not being discharged east.

USACE: Maj. Cory Bell said Lake Okeechobee remains low, C-44 is also low, and work on the C-23/24 STA is nearly complete, with a milestone event expected soon. He added that no major issues were reported on current Corps projects.

State and Federal Legislation: Gil Smart reported that the federal WRDA (Water Resources Development Act) bill is stalled in Congress. He also said the new state budget includes Everglades restoration funding, but no new Florida Forever land-buying money, with more funding directed instead toward easements and rural lands protection.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: No update given.

Speakers Bureau: No update given.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir shared concerns about algae and nutrient problems in the lagoon, stressed the importance of continued restoration work, and said he hopes July will be declared Mangrove Month.

Water Quality Report: Mark Perry said recent water quality conditions have generally looked good, but noted new concerns about algae and Lyngbya near seagrass beds in the outer estuary. He said samples are being collected and the situation is being monitored.

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow reviewed updated water quality data, including phosphorus and nitrogen levels, and connected those conditions to concerns about seagrass and algae in the estuary. See his website, eyeonlakeo.com, for detailed charts and maps.

Member Comments and Announcements:

A student presentation on plastics at the Elliott Museum was announced for July 30. Members also discussed hopes for local recognition of July as Mangrove Month and raised concerns about the possible impacts of a proposed property tax amendment on environmental funding and local government services.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:49 p.m.