

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: July 23, 2026

Members via Zoom: Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Rip Fisher (Sailfish Point Yacht Club), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Jim Moir (Indian Riverkeeper), Lisa Interlandi (Everglades Law Center), Paul Gray (Audubon Florida), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus), Dana Espinosa (Friends of the Everglades).

Members in person: Mark Perry-Valentina Miele (Florida Oceanographic Society), Eve Samples-Mitchell Latzman-Peter Upton-Steffani Farquharson (Friends of the Everglades), Gil Smart-Jason Bultman (VoteWater), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Merritt Matheson (IRK), Ed Killer (Florida Sportsman), Casey Darling Kniffin (River Kidz), Glen Kellis-Erin Kellis (MC Chapter of the Native Plant Society), Joe Gilio (LORI), Hannah Angelo-Walker (Captains for Clean Water), Allen Herskowitz (Sailfish Point HOA), Susan Hemmes (Guardians of Martin County), Paul Laura (HIPI), Richard Hall (River Warriors), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon Society), Lyn Aal-Magee (Audubon of Martin County), Gloria Gronowicz-Walter Deemer (League of Women Voters of MC), Cindy Christopher-Bob Rolfort (Hell Gate Sea Dragons), Tiffany Kincaid-Amanda Barry (Keep Martin Beautiful),

Non-members via Zoom: Kevin H., P.L., E. Pigman (SFWMD), Pat LaBalbo, iPhone Jim, Maj. Cory Bell (USACE), Terrie Bates, Sarah Paulick, Baker, Sydney Walsh, Tom MacVicar, Robert Mahoney.

Non-members in person: Miki Blumenthal, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Jeff Prater (USACE), Sherry McCorkle (SFWMD), Amy Eason (Martin County), Ruth Holmes-Eula Clarke-Laura Giobbi (City of Stuart), Tim O'Hara (TCPalm), Will Gideonse, Linda Gideonse, Frederick Ernst, Jordan Sejour-Grace Bauer (Congressman Brian Mast), Barbara Osborn, John Dial, Chris Collins, Ike Crumpler, Blake Faulkner, Nick Gulotta, Sharon Seagren, Laurie MacDougall, Deanna Thurlow, Will Laughlin.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:00 am. There were 52 attendees in person, 19 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant.

Business Matters:

Member roll call was taken. Mark Perry welcomed new member Hell Gate Sea Dragons (and its representatives Cindy Christopher and Mark Wolfort), a local dragon boat club that trains on the St. Lucie, Loxahatchee, and Indian River and incorporates conservation and cleanup into its activities.

Presentation: The Summer of Slime: 10 Years Later - The Data Behind the Discharges

Todd Thurlow, local attorney and Rivers Coalition Board Member, gave a presentation comparing 2016 discharge conditions with current 2026 conditions. He reviewed the history of the 2016 algae event, the public pressure that helped change agency responses, and the work still needed to move more water south and protect the estuary.

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

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Government & Agency Reports:

City of Stuart: Ruth Holmes spoke about the importance of water storage and the need to retain water rather than dispose of it. She also stated that the city is continuing discussions on muck removal and will sign onto a letter urging EPA review of Florida's refusal to adopt cyanotoxin water quality standards.

Martin County: Amy Eason reported that Martin County passed its FY2027 budget at a flat mill rate so far, with additional public hearings to come in September. She also noted a July 26 proclamation for the International Day for the Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystems and shared updates on two land purchases through the Martin County Forever sales tax program.

SFWMD: Sherry McCorkle announced the next district meeting on August 13 and highlighted a recent restoration partnership event in Miami.

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 (via Zoom) and Jeff Prater reported that Lake Okeechobee remains low, the C44 facility is collecting local basin runoff, and no algae is being discharged east. They also shared updates on the C23/24 stormwater treatment areas, the North Reservoir pump station, and C44 seepage management.

State and Federal Legislation: Gil Smart stated the proposed property tax amendment could significantly affect environmental and local government funding. He also reported that WRDA 2026 is moving through Congress, with efforts to require an after-action report on recovery operations and clarify the purpose of the EAA reservoir in federal law.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Casey Kniffin shared that River Kidz are participating in summer activities and announced a student documentary screening, *Sea Change: The Future of Our Ocean*, on July 30 at the Elliott Museum. She also encouraged involvement in the upcoming International Coastal Cleanup in September.

Speakers Bureau: Ed Killer emphasized the importance of youth advocacy and said Rivers Coalition remains available to speak with local groups about water issues.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir said seagrass is looking good locally, though nutrient pollution, algae, heat stress, and low oxygen remain concerns in parts of the lagoon. He also mentioned the upcoming Right Whale documentary film screening on August 29 at the Marriott Hutchinson Island hosted by [Florida Oceanographic Society](#) | [The Right Whale: Tales of Resilience & Hope](#).

Water Quality Report: Mark Perry said water quality is currently looking good due to low rainfall and the absence of lake discharges, though local algae and Lyngbya remain concerns. He also noted signs of seagrass recovery on the flats.

Seagrass Update: Todd Thurlow referenced recent monitoring and recovery trends linked to reduced discharges and current dry conditions. See his website, eyeonlakeo.com, for detailed charts and maps.

Member Comments and Announcements:

Keep Martin Beautiful's Tiffany Kincaid and Amanda Barry announced the International Coastal Cleanup on September 19.

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Mark Perry noted there will be no Rivers Coalition public meeting in August. The next meeting will be September 24, during National Estuaries Week.

Joe Gilio mentioned the risk of blue-green algae as nutrient ratios in Lake Okeechobee continue to change.

Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch thanked Martin County and the City of Stuart for their “Speak up for the St. Lucie” program.

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