

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: September 24, 2026

Members via Zoom: Eve Samples-Dana Espinosa-Steffani Farquharson (Friends of the Everglades), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Hilarie Davis (US Sailing Center), Carol Ann Leonard (Martin County Democratic Environmental Caucus).

Members in person: Mark Perry (Florida Oceanographic Society), Jim Moir (Indian Riverkeeper), Gil Smart-Jason Bultman (VoteWater), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Darrell Brand (Palm Cove Yacht Club), Ed Killer (Florida Sportsman), Casey Darling Kniffin (River Kidz), Mitchell Latzman (Friends of the Everglades), Hannah Angelo-Walker (Captains for Clean Water), David Alexander (Ballantrae Anglers Club), Lynda Capobianco-Diane Wolfort-Robert Wolfort-Cindy Christopher (Hell Gate Sea Dragons), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon Society), Renee Lessard-Moreshead (Surfrider), Lyn Aal-Magee (Audubon of Martin County), Gloria Gronowicz-Walter Deemer (League of Women Voters of MC), Susan Hemmes (Guardians of Martin County), Bianca Bernhard (MORI), Paul Laura (HIPI), Susan Milette (St Lucie County Conservation Alliance), Harvey Nation (Rio Civic Club).

Non-members via Zoom: Eric Draper, Carrie, Ernie Barnett, Grace, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Jennifer Thera (FDACS), Maj. Cory Bell (USACE), Scott Samples, Tom Hurley-E. Pigman (SFWMD), Vera, Eula Clarke (City of Stuart), Pat LaBalbo, D. Zugelter, Tom MacVicar, Robert Mahoney, Lisa Interlandi (Everglades Law Center).

Non-members in person: Miki Blumenthal, Jeff Prater (USACE), James Martin, Sherry McCorkle (SFWMD), John Maehl-Sarah Heard-Stephanie Merle-Blake Capps-Sarah Phillion-Mark Aveni-Christopher Collins-Michael Yustin (Martin County), Ruth Holmes (City of Stuart), Tim O'Hara (TCPalm), Clay Scherer, Juliann Hickey, Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers of Florida), Anne Cox, Will Gideonse, Linda Gideonse, Jeremy Neff, Thomas Lanahan (TCRPC), Victoria Carpenter, Tom Moyher, Mike Knepper, Gary Roderick, Barbara Osborn, Blake Faulkner.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m. There were 52 attendees in person, 23 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant.

Business Matters: Mark Perry recognized September as Estuaries Month and noted that National Estuaries Day is September 27. He emphasized the ecological importance of the St. Lucie River Estuary and Indian River Lagoon.

Merritt Matheson, having become an elected official, stepped down from the Rivers Coalition Board in accordance with the bylaws. He was appointed as the Rivers Coalition representative to the Environmental Lands Acquisition Oversight Committee (ELOC).

Presentation: Amendment 3: Potential Impacts on Indian River Lagoon Recovery:

Eric Draper, Environmental Policy Advisor, and Martin County representatives Stephanie Merle and Sarah Heard gave an overview of how Amendment 3 could affect local services, water projects, and environmental funding. They discussed possible impacts to stormwater, water quality, public safety, parks, libraries, and grant funding.

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:

Martin County: John Maehl announced construction has begun on a stormwater treatment project near Port Salerno to reduce nutrient pollution entering the Manatee Pocket.

City of Stuart: Ruth Holmes reported that the City applied for DEP grant funding for targeted muck removal and nanobubble restoration work in local creeks. The City Commission will consider establishing an ELOC committee to review potential uses of the 0.5-cent sales-tax referendum funds.

SFWMD: Tom Hurley reported that the C-23 Estuary Discharge Diversion Canal is now operational. He also noted preparations for the anticipated Super El Niño rainfall and reported that the EAA Reservoir seepage-management pump station is progressing.

USACE: Maj. Cory Bell reported on Lake Okeechobee conditions, C-44 capacity planning, and progress on the C-23/24 stormwater treatment area. The Lake Okeechobee After Action Report is expected by December 31. Maj. Bell also announced that his term has been extended through summer 2028.

State and Federal Legislation: Gil Smart reported on H.R. 9017 and its potential effects on wetlands permitting and endangered-species protections.

Lake O Update: Discussion focused on forecasts for a potentially significant Super El Niño event. Speakers noted historical comparisons to 1998 and concerns about increased rainfall, lake levels, possible discharges, algae blooms, and impacts to the estuary.

Coalition Reports:

River Kidz: Casey Kniffin thanked participants in the International Coastal Cleanup and announced an Environmental Studies Center open house on October 10, from 10 a.m.–1 p.m. River Kidz volunteers of all ages are welcome.

Speakers Bureau: Ed Killer encouraged organizations to contact Rivers Coalition for speakers on local water issues. There are a few upcoming speaking engagements on the schedule.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir discussed an executive order exempting commercial space infrastructure from NEPA review, along with potential environmental impacts of port expansion and rocket-reentry operations near Fort Pierce and Cape Canaveral. He also raised concern about proposed shrimp trawling access near Oculina Bank.

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 provided an update using charts and images from his website, covering basin runoff, lake levels, salinity, and C-44 flows. He noted signs of seagrass recovery and concerns about nutrient pollution and potential Super El Niño-related discharges. See his website, eyeonlakeo.com, for detailed charts and maps.

Member Comments and Announcements:

Newton Cook raised concerns about closed-door FWC discussions regarding Lake Okeechobee aquatic plant management and requested public access and transparency.

Members were encouraged to submit comments opposing the proposed shrimp-trawling access near Oculina Bank before the November 1 deadline.

The League of Women Voters will host an Amendment 3 symposium on October 7, from 6–8 p.m., at Unity Church.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:42 p.m.