

Rivers Coalition

Meeting Minutes: October 22, 2026

Members via Zoom: Ed Killer (Florida Sportsman), Kelli Doré (River Kidz), Bob Mathias (FOS), Greg Braun (Guardians of Martin County), Hannah Angelo-Walker (Captains for Clean Water), Tiare Fridrich (Save the Manatees Club), Dana Espinosa-Steffani Farquharson (Friends of the Everglades), Tiffany Kincaid (Keep Martin Beautiful)).

Members in person: Mark Perry-Valentina Miele (Florida Oceanographic Society), Charles Grande (Pres. Council of H.I.), Gil Smart (VoteWater), Todd Thurlow (North River Shores Property Assn), Casey Darling Kniffin (River Kidz), Melissa Burke (Indian Riverkeeper), Eve Samples (Friends of the Everglades), Cindy Christopher (Hell Gate Sea Dragons), Phyllis Klarmann (Audubon Florida), Diane Goldberg (St. Lucie Audubon Society), Trae Jennings-Dave Alexander (Ballantrae Anglers Club), Erin Kellis (MC Chapter Native Plant Society), Glen Kellis, Walter Deemer (League of Women Voters of MC).

Non-members via Zoom: Todd Kimberlain-E. Pigman (SFWMD), Grewes, McKee Gray, Baker, Jennifer Smith, Terrie Bates, Rosbet, Victoria Carpenter, Allen B., Tom MacVicar, William Baker, Pat LaBalbo, Robert Mahoney, Lisa Interlandi (Everglades Law Center).

Non-members in person: Barbara Osborn, Miki Blumenthal, Merritt Matheson, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Kathy Petteruti, Jason Ludwig-Jeff Prater-Col. Brandon Bowman (USACE), Julian DiGialleonardo, Mike Knepper, Sarah Heard-Mark Aveni-Christopher Collins-Michael Yustin (Martin County), Ruth Holmes-Misti Guertin (City of Stuart), Ike Crumpler, Douglas Ashley, Mitchell Latzman, James Martin, Elsa Shortridge, Nick Muzia, Carl Stewart, Linda Gideonse, Blake Faulkner, Greg Gardner.

Mark Perry called the meeting to order at 11:01 a.m. There were 43 attendees in person, 24 attendees on ZOOM call.

Minutes taken by Miki Blumenthal, Administrative Assistant.

Business Matters: Mark Perry welcomed attendees and recognized October as a month to celebrate oysters. He described the importance of oyster reefs to water filtration and habitat in the St. Lucie Estuary. He also introduced Phyllis Klarmann, who spent ten years with SFWMD and is taking Paul Gray's former position with Audubon. Mark acknowledged Paul Gray's dedication.

Presentation: Amendment 3: Super El Niño: A Perfect Storm for Our Waterways?

Todd Kimberlain, SFWMD lead meteorologist, described the developing Super El Niño and its potential effects on the coming dry season. He said the most likely rainfall scenario is comparable to the 1997–98 and 2015–16 events, while emphasizing the range of possible outcomes. Discussion focused on monitoring conditions closely and planning for potential impacts on Lake Okeechobee and the estuary. (Due to technical difficulties, the Super El Niño presentation was postponed until after the City of Stuart and Martin County updates.)

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

Government & Agency Reports:

City of Stuart: Ruth Holmes introduced SALT—Sustainable Acquisition of Lands for Tomorrow. A seven-member committee will evaluate and rank properties for the City Commission's consideration. She said the city estimates \$15 million - \$20 million could be available over the remaining life of the sales-tax program and invited applications from people with environmental or real estate backgrounds.

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Martin County: Michael Yustin, Martin County Project Manager, reported sightings of the invasive seagrass *Halophila stipulacea* in the Indian River Lagoon and near Sailfish Point. The county is preparing a contract to map its extent. He asked that sightings be reported to FWC or the county and cautioned against attempting removal or applying herbicide.

SFWMD: Main presentation.

USACE: Col. Brandon Bowman reported that Lake Okeechobee was about 12.5 feet and said no lake recovery operations are planned this dry season. He updated the group on S-80, the EAA and C-44 reservoirs, and the after-action report, which has no confirmed release date. He said he will be replaced in July 2027 and shared that Maj. Bell's assignment has been extended.

State and Federal Legislation: Gil Smart discussed proposed permitting reform and potential effects on wetlands 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 the Glover family for fifteen years of involvement and announced River Kidz participation in the upcoming Indian River Lagoon Science Festival in Fort Pierce.

Speakers Bureau: Ed Killer reported an upcoming December meeting with the Rio Civic Club and outreach to Piper's Landing and Nettles Island.

Riverkeeper Update: Jim Moir was not present to give a report.

Water Quality Report: Greg Braun announced that the Guardians of Martin County had contracted Julian DiGialleonardo to examine water-quality conditions in the winding South Fork of the St. Lucie River. The work will draw on existing monitoring data and stakeholder input; findings were anticipated in 60–90 days. Mark Perry also discussed the South Fork's importance as a smalltooth sawfish habitat and encouraged members to oppose proposed shrimp-trawling access affecting Oculina Reef.

Seagrass and Lake Okeechobee Update: Todd Thurlow showed rainfall, lake-level and discharge charts, including comparisons with previous El Niño dry seasons. See his website, eyeonlakeo.com, for detailed charts and maps.

Member Comments and Announcements:

Members were encouraged to submit comments opposing Oculina Reef amendments 11 and 12 by **November 17** and on the EAA Reservoir initial fill plan by **November 2**.

Diane Goldberg urged members to ask SFWMD and DEP to consider septic-system locations alongside flood-zone maps in resilience planning.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:54 p.m.