IRL COUNCIL
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Minutes from the meeting of

May 10, 2024

9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Sebastian City Hall; Council Chambers, 1225 Main Street, Sebastian, FL 32958

Attendance: Joseph Earman, Rob Feltner, Aaron Watkins, Stacy Hetherington, Doug Bournique, Libby Pigman, Jeff Brower, Chris Dzadovsky

Guests: Lauren Hall, Melissa Meisenburg, Eric Charest, Kathy LaMartina, Melanie Parker, Captain Blair Wiggens, Ruth Holmes, Becky Allenbach

1. **Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance** (Jeff Brower, Chair)

   Mr. Jeff Brower called the meeting to order at 9:36 a.m. and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. **Introductions**

   Mr. Jeff Brower welcomed Becky Allenbach, EPA, in attendance and recognized Jennifer DiMaio, EPA, watching the live-streaming meeting. Board members and staff introduced themselves.

3. **Agenda Revisions** (Jeff Brower, Chair)

   THERE WERE NO AGENDA REVISIONS. A MOTION WAS MADE BY JOSEPH EARMAN TO ACCEPT THE AGENDA. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY STACY HEATHERINGTON. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. **Resolutions, Recognition, Letters and Awards** (Jeff Brower, Chair)

   None

5. **Public Comment**

   Captain Blair Wiggins of the Indian River Lagoon Clam Restoration Project provided an update on the project, stating that forty million clams have been released as part of the program thus far. Using a drone has allowed for a larger number of clams to be released at once, which helps to combat predation and increase the survival rate of juvenile clams. As a result, clam beds have been established, water samples in the area are cleaner, and clam larvae have been observed. Data indicate that they are effectively absorbing nutrients from the environment, providing improved benefits to water quality.

6. Water Quality Reports

a. Northern and Central Lagoon (Lauren Hall, SJRWMD)

Ms. Hall reported that six continuous monitoring sondes at a 1.5-meter depth collect water data every hour. The water depth for the current reporting period is typical. Salinity has slightly increased, and the Eau Gallie sonde shows a dip, which is attributed to rainfall in the area. The water temperature has risen seasonally, but the dissolved oxygen level remains normal. Chlorophyll-a levels are below 15 RFU, and turbidity spikes are due to wind events. Fluorescent Dissolved Organic Matter (FDOM) changes occurred at the Eau Gallie and Vero freshwater inputs due to rainfall. Water clarity data shows that Secchi depths have improved in the Banana River and the central lagoon over the three months. Seagrass comparison from 2021 to 2023 indicates an increase of hectares in Mosquito Lagoon, Northern IRL, Banana River, and Central IRL, with a decrease in Southcentral and Southern IRL. Ms. Hall has noted that *Halophila* grasses are present but small and do not appear well on aerial surveillance, so the extent of seagrasses may be greater than reported. Rainfall has decreased since the December and January reporting period.

Doug Bournique encouraged Board members to contact the Governor's office to request his signing into law the $400 million budget line item for the purchase of the Grove Land properties in Indian River County for use as a regional water management project between SJRWMD, SFWMD and other interested parties. Jeff Brower, chair, asked Mr. Bournique to make a motion for staff to create a letter from the Council and send it to the governor to support this budget line item. Dr. De Freese addressed the Board, reminding them that Resolution 2023-06, which supported large regional water management projects of this type, was sent to the governor's office in August 2023 and again in April 2024. Dr. De Freese stated that as a Board, the IRL Council does not take positions on individual project permits or funding appropriations. He noted that should the Board choose to act now, it would set a precedent and potentially impact the IRL Council and IRLNEP operations moving forward.
During Board member comments, Aaron Watkins stated that the item was not on the agenda for consideration. He recommended that the item be deferred to the August Board meeting to allow the Board to see more details before acting on Mr. Bournique's motion, expressing concern about circumventing the role of the IRL Council and its operating processes. Libby Pigman indicated support for Aaron Watkins' concerns. Doug Bournique reminded the Board about the short timeline for the Governor to make his budget decisions. Dr. De Freese intervened in the discussion and suggested resending Resolution 2023-06 with a letter recognizing the importance of large, dispersed water management projects that are protective of water quality in the Everglades, Indian River Lagoon and the St. John's River.

DOUG BOURNIQUE MADE A MOTION TO HAVE STAFF CREATE A LETTER ON BEHALF OF THE IRL COUNCIL WITH A GENERAL FOCUS ON THE BENEFITS OF LARGE, REGIONAL WATER MANAGEMENT PROJECTS TO BE SENT TO THE GOVERNOR ALONG WITH RESOLUTION 2023-06. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY JOSEPH EARMAN. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

b. Southern Lagoon (Dr. Melanie Parker, SFWMD)

Dr. Parker reported the data presented is through April 28th, and weekly averages cover April 22 through April 28th. Lake Okeechobee releases started on February 17, 2024. Releases were pulsed with an average of 1800 cfs over a 14-day period. The release schedule included multiple days of zero CFS releases, allowing the estuary to recover briefly. Releases ended on March 31, 2024. The salinity for the most recent 7-day period fell into the optimal range for oysters at the HR1 and US1 bridge. The A1A bridge was in the upper stressful range for oysters. Salinities fell

into the lower stressful range several times during the Lake Okeechobee releases but recovered quickly once the releases stopped. Water temperatures were low during the Lake O releases, which was less stressful for oysters. Juvenile oyster (spat) recruitment rates have been at or near zero since November 2023, as oysters do not typically spawn until March. Spawning and larval settlement began in late March/early April at a rate similar to the previous year. It was noted that the settlement rate may be reduced due to the lower salinities occurring in March and April.

7. IRLNEP Management Conference Committee Reports

a. Management Board Report (Beth Powell, Indian River County)

Ms. Heather Stapleton reported on behalf of Beth Powell. There were twenty-nine members and six guests in attendance. The meeting started at 10:15 a.m. Ms. Powell expressed gratitude to the Board and Chairs for their support and acknowledged the progress being made. The Finance Sub-committee report was accepted, and the Management Board heard presentations on Water Quality. Kara Radabaugh from the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute presented on the *Monitoring Improved Hydrology, Water Quality, and Mangrove Recovery in the Jensen Beach Impoundment* project, which sparked a productive discussion. All New Business items were recommended for approval by the Board of Directors. The Management Board concurred with the CAC recommendation to add four additional projects to the Small Grant rankings, as these projects scored above the 70% threshold for funding. This would result in a budget increase of $14,412. The members of the Citizens' Advisory Committee were thanked for their work in reviewing and scoring the submitted proposals. The meeting concluded at 12:00 p.m.

b. STEM Advisory Committee (Dr. Chuck Jacoby, Florida Flood Hub)

Dr. Jacoby reported that the committee heard the *Monitoring Improved Hydrology, Water Quality, and Mangrove Recovery in the Jensen Beach Impoundment* presentation. Old Business included the Science 2030 document approval, and under New Business, the Small Grant ranking was recommended for approval. The STEM committee agreed with the CAC recommendation to increase the budget to fund all eligible Small Grant projects. The 2025 EPA BIL work plan was accepted.

c. Citizens' Advisory Committee (Tess Sailor-Tynes, Marine Discovery Center)

Ms. Sailor-Tynes reported that the CAC members met to review the ranked proposals, discussed adding four proposals meeting the scoring threshold, and recommended increasing funding by $14,412 to cover the cost. All New Business items were accepted and moved forward to the Board. The committee discussed creating metrics to account for public commentary on perspectives on projects to increase communication between communities and the work being done.

8. Consent Agenda

a. Approval of IRL Council Meeting Minutes from February 9, 2024
b. Board of Directors Appointments to IRLNEP Management Conference:

<u>New Appointments</u>

- Melissa Meisenburg, Sr. Lagoon Environmental Specialist, Indian River County, to Management Board
- Melisa Diolosa, Strategic Basin Planner, SJRWMD, to Management Board, replacing Gretchen Kelly

- Elizabeth Kelly, Environmental Programs Coordinator, Martin County, changed from Management Board to STEM Advisory Committee
- Amy Eason, Environmental Resource Engineer, Martin County, to Management Board

Requested Action: Motion to approve Consent Agenda.

MOTION WAS MADE BY JOSEPH EARMAN TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY STACY HEATHERINGTON. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

9. Old Business

None

10. New Business

a. Passage of CS/CS/SB 224 (Glen Torcivia, Esq.)

Exemption for volunteer advisory committee members to participate in meetings using communications media technology.

Ruth Holms, Esq, on behalf of Glen Torcivia, explained the contents of the legislative bill allowing for advisory committees to meet using communications media technology.

Requested Action: Information only. No action is required.

b. Fiscal Year 2025 Final Budget (Daniel Kolodny)

Mr. Kolodny outlined the changes from the tentative budget to the final budget. Changes included expanding the strategic program based on the decisions made at the February meeting by approving additional projects in the RFPs.

Requested Action: Review and adopt the Final Budget for FY 2025 by Resolution 2024-03, pursuant to Florida Statutes.

MOTION WAS MADE BY DOUG BOURNIQUE TO REVIEW AND ADOPT THE FINAL BUDGET FOR FY 2025 BY RESOLUTION 2024-03, PURSUANT TO FLORIDA STATUTES. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY STACY HEATHERINGTON. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

c. Small Grant (Daniel Kolodny)

Mr. Kolodny announced that the Citizens Advisory Committee reviewed, scored, and ranked twenty-four proposals. Seven of the proposals were ranked within the funding allocation. An additional four projects ranked above the funding threshold of 70% but fell outside the budget allocation. The CAC, Management Board, and STEM committees recommend funding the four additional projects. Discussion focused on where the additional funds would come from and concerns with possible funding availability in the future.

Requested Action: Motion to accept IRLNEP Management Conference recommendations, approve the final ranked list of proposals, and fund the top proposals contingent and consistent with available funds and budgetary authority. Authorize staff to negotiate and enter into contract agreements with those applicants.

MOTION WAS MADE BY CHRIS DZADOVSKY TO ACCEPT THE IRLNEP MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS, APPROVE THE FINAL RANKED LIST OF PROPOSALS, ADD ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO COMPLETELY FUND THE FIRST THROUGH ELEVENTH RANKED PROPOSALS CONTINGENT AND CONSISTENT WITH AVAILABLE FUNDS AND BUDGETARY AUTHORITY; AND AUTHORIZE STAFF TO NEGOTIATE AND ENTER INTO CONTRACTS WITH

THOSE APPLICANTS. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY LIBBY PIGMAN. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

d. Fiscal Year 2025 EPA BIL Workplan (Daniel Kolodny)

Mr. Kolodny explained that the EPA is reviewing the 2024 EPA BIL Workplan. A concern was noted in the contractual portions of the procurement guidelines for a for-profit company. In order to maintain compliance, the 2025 EPA BIL Workplan submitted in the Board of Directors packet has been edited.

Requested Action: Motion to authorize staff to develop and submit the FY 2025 EPA BIL Workplan and authorize staff to submit the plan to EPA.

MOTION WAS MADE BY CHRIS DZADOVSKY TO AUTHORIZE STAFF TO DEVELOP AND SUBMIT THE FY 2025 EPA BIL WORKPLAN AND AUTHORIZE STAFF TO SUBMIT THE PLAN TO EPA. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY AARON WATKINS. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

e. Science 2030 (Dr. Chuck Jacoby)

Dr. Jacoby explained that the Science 2030 document will be a living document with two parts: the first part targets scientific investigations to support the IRL protection plan, and the second part is a compendium of scientific questions raised by the STEM committee. The goal is to document the issues raised by the scientists.

Requested Action: Motion to accept the IRLNEP Management Conference recommendation to accept the Science 2030 document.

MOTION WAS MADE BY STACY HEATHERINGTON TO ACCEPT THE IRLNEP MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION TO ACCEPT THE SCIENCE 2030 DOCUMENT. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY JOSEPH EARMAN. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

11. IRLNEP Staff Reports:

a. Community Engagement Update (Kathy Hill)

Ms. Kathy Hill reported that the social media metrics for this quarter show a distinction between organic interactions and those generated by ads. The ads focused on the IRL license plate and were created by IDEAS. It was observed that the ads performed better on Facebook than on Instagram. Facebook continues to experience more interactions and has an older demographic than Instagram. The interactions of the Community Engagement Coordinators in various activities increased this quarter compared to the previous one. Ms. Hill and Ms. KJ Ayers-Guerra represented the IRLNEP at the EPA Annual Meetings in Washington, D.C.

b. Information Technology and Delivery Update (KJ Ayres-Guerra)

Ms. KJ Ayers-Guerra reported on her participation in the ESRI Southeast User Conference and the presentation of the IRL Council Master Project Map 1.0. Feedback was obtained, which will be instrumental in improving the project. Interviews for the IRL Fishing Tales Project are ongoing, and suggestions for future interviews were requested, indicating the project's active engagement with the community. Boater's Guide is being developed as an app and a paper version.

c. IRL Project Update (Daniel Kolodny)

Mr. Daniel Kolodny announced that 41 CCMP projects/activities are in progress. Four projects were completed in the second quarter, and a brief overview was given: *Indian River Drive and Dixon Blvd.*, the City of Cocoa, *Tucker Cove Seagrass Restoration,* Sea and Shoreline, *Using Genetic*

Tools to Boost Seagrass Restoration Success in the IRL, Mote Marine Lab and *One Health Fish Monitoring -PFAS,* ORCA. Mr. Kolodny recently attended the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council meeting and presented on the IRL and the issues affecting its habitat health.

d. Executive Director Report (Duane De Freese)

Dr. Duane De Freese thanked Florida state Senators Wright and Mayfield, Representative Altman and their staff for assisting in the passage of CS/CS/SB 224. The IRLNEP staff will arrange the communications media technology needed for public meetings. He also thanked the governor for a year of historic funding. Eighty-eight bipartisan members of the U. S. House of Representatives have signed a letter of support sent to the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior. The Senate letter is still in circulation. Dr. De Freese commended the volunteer workforce throughout the lagoon, working on restoration projects; the economic value is immense. Moving forward, we are looking to update the CCMP, and work continues on the One Lagoon Habitat Restoration Plan. The Brevard Zoo and the Florida Institute of Technology entered an agreement titled CARE, Consortia of Aquarium Research and Education. Space Florida has released a report on the future of Port Canaveral and expanding the wharf to support the expansion of the Kennedy Space Center. The FDEP funding portal is open for the 2025 cycle.

12. IRL Council Member Reports

Rob Feltner, Brevard County, shared the Natural Resources Director's status update report. The county commission approved the 2024 SORIL project plan update. Ongoing projects included leaky lateral repairs, detected code enforcement cases, private sewer leaks repaired, quick connect to existing sewer, south-central C septic to sewer, Micco sewer line extension is 96% completed, preparing for lift station start up, septic upgrades continue. Completed projects included Sand Point Park baffle box installation, vegetation harvesting of aquatic weeds contract, derelict vessels removed, Titusville causeway multi traffic restoration and living shoreline resiliency bid and awarded, clams seeded into aquaculture lease areas, seagrass and oyster resilience project bid and awarded to plant 1.5 acres of seagrass, monitoring by University of Central Florida at Rainwater Oyster bar, and Castaway Cove oyster bar proved successful. The 2024 federal appropriation awards for septic upgrades, muck removal, and quick connect were procured.

Doug Bournique, SJRWMD, announced his attendance at the South Florida Water Management District's recent Board of Governors meeting and reception at the Florida Oceanographic Society. He noted that the FOS exhibit is phenomenal.

Stacey Heatherington, Martin County, thanked Mr. Bournique for the plug for FOS. Ms. Heatherington also thanked the IRLNEP staff for educating newcomers to the Florida community and noted the importance of advocating for the lagoon and waterways. Septic-to-sewer projects continue, and finding ways to help homeowners fund connections is ongoing. She noted the difficulty in finding competitive contractors to do the work. A referendum item for the November ballot has been approved: a half-cent sales tax to acquire land for conservation easement.

Joe Earman, Indian River County, announced that work on vessel anchor regulations for acceptable locations and septic to sewer work continues in the county. The next sewer project will be at Hobart Landing. Additional staff has been added to the Natural Resource department. The Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel is reviewing nominated lands. Melisa Meisenburg, Senior Lagoon Environmental Specialist, reported working with Dr. Austin Fox of FIT on a muck study to include legacy loads and the locations of muck deposits. This effort will guide

restoration efforts for the lagoon. Four derelict vessels have been removed, and FWC has released nine vessels. Eric Charest, Interim Natural Resources Director, reported the kickoff meeting with stormwater management and a consultant to address stormwater treatment and flooding concerns.

Aaron Watkins, FDEP, recognized the historic investment by the legislature and governors' offices to protect the environment. Mr. Watkins noted the busy legislative session and commended the work of the FDEP leaders and staff. One of the highlights was the passing of House Bill 1557 and Senate Bill 1386. The FDEP Funding Opportunities portal is open.

Libby Pigman, SFWMD, announced a Governing Board meeting in Martin County yesterday. The location of meetings has rotated to allow for community participation, enabling board members to interact with stakeholders in various communities. Martin County was recognized for the excellent work completed. A site visit has been completed at the C44 STA; the recreational portion will soon be open. Ms. Pigman congratulated Kathy LaMartina for coordinating events. On May 21st at 5:00 pm, the district will host a community meeting on the IRL Lagoon south projects in Fort Pierce and on May 22nd at 1:00 p.m. at Stuart City Hall. These meetings will be poster events and open house style with question-and-answer opportunities and no set agenda. In April, the district held an Open House to present the South Florida environmental report; highlights are available.

Chris Dzadovsky, St. Lucie, thanked Kathy LaMartina and SFWMD for the Governing Board meeting in Martin County. He was unable to attend due to conflicts with county commitments. Mr. Dzadovsky acknowledged Martin County's efforts in preservation and land conservation. St. Lucie County is actively working to maintain its tree canopy, and any new developments must include preservation and conservation elements in their plans. Mr. Dzadovsky expressed a desire for St. Lucie County to acquire lands for preservation and conservation purposes, particularly old groves that are desirable for development. Considering the environmental impacts of development is essential. Mr. Dzadovsky thanked the many volunteers and presenters at the Oxbow Eco-Center and Preserve's Earth Day Event. FPUA is moving the wastewater plant off of South Beach; the progress is reported on Water Wednesdays on Facebook. The Board of County Commissioners approved the municipal services boundary unit for the north beach area, septic to sewer project and thanked FDEP, EPA and the IRL Council for funding. Also noted, counties should work together on anchor regulations for consistency. Kathy Hill was thanked for participating in May's Inside St. Lucie show.

Jeff Brower, Volusia County, reported that development is a significant concern for all counties, and constituents request a halt. The role of elected officials is to guide development in a way that minimizes negative environmental impacts. Volusia Forever is raising funds to buy land for conservation and preservation. Agricultural landowners have shown interest, and the county has purchased development rights, allowing landowners to keep and maintain their agricultural land. Progress is being made in removing derelict vessels, and drones are being used to disperse clams. The Biorock project demonstrates the growth of oysters and clams with algae present. Seagrass is not growing in the project area. Approval has been given for a nutrient-removing baffle box. Mr. Brower invited CEC Jessy Wayles to come to extreme northern Volusia County and emphasized the importance of educating the public. Projects to convert septic systems to sewers are currently underway. The living docks program is successfully attracting oysters. The IRLNEP staff was thanked for their ongoing efforts and work.

13. **IRL Council – Next Meeting Announcement** (Jeff Brower, Chair)

    The IRL Management Board meeting will be held on Friday, August 23, 2024, from 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at Sebastian City Hall, Council Chamber, 1225 Main Street, Sebastian, FL

14. **Adjourn**

    The meeting was adjourned at 12:18 p.m.

NOTE: If a person decides to appeal any decision made by the Board with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing, he or she will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose, he or she may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. Section 286.0105, Florida Statutes (2014).

Pursuant to the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act, any person requiring special accommodations to participate in this workshop/meeting is asked to advise the agency at least 48 hours before the workshop/meeting by contacting Erin Bergman at (314) 347-5854. If you are hearing or speech impaired, please contact the agency using the Florida Relay Service at 1(800) 955-8771 (TDD) or 1(800) 955-8770 (Voice). For more information, you may contact Erin Bergman, IRL Council, 1235 Main St, Sebastian, FL 32958, (314)347-5854, or by email at bergman@irlcouncil.org