IRL COUNCIL
MANAGEMENT BOARD

Minutes from the meeting of

November 4, 2025

10:15 AM - 1:00 PM

Historic Sebastian Elementary School, 1235 Main Street, Sebastian, FL 32958

Remote Access: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89060418395

Member In-person Attendance: Terri Breeden, Tony Catanese, Melisa Diolosa, Adam Dyer, Amy Eason, Stu Glass, Carter Henne, Chuck Jacoby, Mike Johannsen, Melissa Meisenburg, Josh Mills, Robert Musser, Judy Orcutt, Brion Pauley, Beth Powell, Kevin Shropshire, James Sullivan, Laurilee Thompson, Laura Wilson

Member Online Attendance: Jeffrey Collins, Jennifer DiMaio, Jake Fojtik, Dave Fuss, James Gray, Chandler Keenan, Dale Ketchum, Kelli McGee, Jennifer Spain, Jennifer Thera, Janet Zimmerman, Marina Owens

Guest In-person Attendance: Matt Stevens, Lauren Hall, Pete Eggert, Cortney Cortez, Valerie Seidel, Alexandra Brisson

Guest Online Attendance: Melanie Parker, Thomas Heller, Alexander Ren, Mike McMunigal, Abigail Gering

1. **Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance** (Beth Powell, Chair)

   Ms. Powell called the meeting to order at 10:21 a.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. **Introductions** (Beth Powell, Chair)

   Ms. Powell led the committee in introductions.

3. **Agenda Revisions** (Beth Powell, Chair)

   No agenda revisions were made.

4. **Minutes Approval** (Beth Powell, Chair)

   Requested Action: Approval of Minutes from Management Board meeting on August 19, 2025.

   MOTION WAS MADE BY TONY CATANESE TO APPROVE THE MEETING MINUTES FROM AUGUST 19, 2025. WITH A CORRECTION. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY STU GLASS. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

5. **Finance Sub-Committee Report** (Stu Glass, Chair, Finance Sub-Committee)

   Mr. Stu Glass gave an overview of the committee's actions. He requested volunteers to join the committee.

   Requested Action: Motion to accept the Committee Report.

MOTION WAS MADE BY TONY CATANESE TO ACCEPT THE FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY KEVIN SHROPSHIRE. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

6. **Public Comment**

No public comment was made.

7. **Water Quality Reports**

a. Northern IRL (Lauren Hall, SJRWMD)

Ms. Lauren Hall, SJRWMD, presented the rainfall data from August through October. In October, the average rainfall for the watershed was over eleven inches. This was similar to 2024. Localized areas in Titusville received an extreme amount of rain; some areas recorded over 20 inches in October. The locations of the continuous monitoring sondes were identified, and collected data was made available on the St. Johns River Water Management District website. Water depth remained high from August through October. Salinity had declined throughout the lagoon due to rainfall. The Vero area had greater fluctuations due to its proximity to tributaries and the sonde's location in the water column; freshwater tends to stay closer to the surface. The other sites had experienced decline, especially in the Banana River Lagoon and the Titusville area, where levels had dipped below 20 PSU. The other sites remain above 20 PSU. The seasonal decline in temperatures allows colder water to hold dissolved oxygen (DO) better than warmer water, reducing hypoxic conditions. DO dipped briefly in August and September. Rain and wind events caused variability in turbidity throughout the lagoon. Fluorescent Dissolved Organic Matter (FDOM) exhibited greater fluctuations in areas with freshwater inputs. Chlorophyll *a,* a measure of phytoplankton in the water, indicated bloom activity over the three months. With cooler temperatures, the bloom activity is expected to decline. The blooms represent mixed species. The Northern Indian River Lagoon and Mosquito Lagoon had experienced challenges with water clarity.
The 2025 seagrass data indicated that the mean transect length and mean cover had increased, but not consistently across the lagoon. The Central Indian River Lagoon showed no improvement.

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

Dr. Melanie Parker, SFWMD, reported that the data covered was through October 26, 2025, and the weekly averages cover October 20-26. Freshwater inflow data showed no releases from Lake Okeechobee since March 29. Over the most recent 7-day period, total inflow into the St. Lucie Estuary (SLE) averaged 657 cfs, with much of the flow originating from the Tidal Basin.

Salinity monitoring at HR1, US1 Bridge, and A1A Bridge recently revealed increased salinity levels at all locations. The HR1 recorded surface salinity at 5 and bottom salinity at 9. The US1 Bridge had a surface salinity of 9 and a bottom salinity of 12. The A1A Bridge displayed the highest readings, with surface salinity at 19 and bottom salinity at 25. Salinities decreased steadily at all sites beginning in late August, but in recent weeks, salinities have increased due to drier conditions. Salinities briefly fell into the stressful and damaging ranges for oysters in early October but have increased in recent weeks and returned to optimal range.

Oyster recruitment data at the Rio station indicates that the 2025 spawning season started later than in previous years, with the first spat detected in May. By June, the spawning season

was in full progress, with an average recruitment rate of 17.7 spat per shell, the highest rate recorded in the SLE over the past two years. Oyster density, which is measured quarterly rather than monthly, ranged from about 300 to 500 oysters per square meter. The recent September survey shows the average density nearly doubled to 965 oysters per square meter. This reflects the high spat recruitment rate observed in June.

8. Presentations

a. *NOAA Habitat Restoration Project Year 1 Update*
(Kevin Walker, IRLNEP)

Kevin Walker from IRLNEP reviewed the progress after the first year of the NOAA Transformational Habitat Restoration grant. The project's aim is to accelerate habitat recovery in the lagoon and foster a collaborative restoration culture. Two partners have finished their deliverables and are now in the monitoring phase, while others are securing permits or actively engaged in restoration efforts.

b. *2025 Indian River Lagoon Economic Valuation*
(Valerie Seidel and Cortney Cortez, The Balmoral Group)

Valerie Sidel from the Balmoral Group discussed the results of the economic valuation study of the lagoon. The study encompassed the valuation of ecosystem services associated with restoration projects financed by the NOAA Transformational Habitat Restoration grant. Also included are assessments of property value impacts, benefit-cost analyses, regional economic effects, and tax revenue. A dashboard link to county-by-county socioeconomic metrics was provided. The goal of the study was to assign monetary value to the benefits people in the region gain from a healthy habitat that provides ecosystem services.

c. *An Introduction to the Florida Office of Ocean Economy at FAU*
(Dr. James Sullivan, Executive Director, FAU HBOI)

Dr. James Sullivan of FAU HBOI announced the creation of the Florida Office of Ocean Economy, established by the Florida Legislature in 2024. Its purpose is to connect the state's ocean and coastal resources with strategies that promote, improve, or maintain the ocean economy.

d. *Looking Back 10 Years*

(Dr. Duane De Freese, Executive Director, IRLNEP)

Dr. Duane De Freese, Executive Director of the IRLNEP, provided an overview of the IRLNEP's accomplishments in reorganizing over the past 10 years. Topics discussed included the creation of the Management Conference, funding, economic impact, and the development of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). Completed projects by county were also included.

9. Old Business

None

10. New Business

a. 2026 IRL Council Meeting Calendar (Kathy Hill)

Ms. Hill presented the calendar and requested to report any conflicts on the dates.

Requested Action: Motion to recommend that the IRL Council Board of Directors accept the IRLNEP Management Conference recommendation to adopt the proposed 2026 IRL Council Board of Directors and Management Conference meeting calendar.

MOTION WAS MADE BY STU GLASS TO RECOMMEND THAT THE IRL COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS ACCEPT THE IRLNEP MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION TO ADOPT THE PROPOSED 2026 IRL COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE MEETING CALENDAR. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY KEVIN SHROPSHIRE. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

b. Fiscal Year 2025 Final Budget Amendment (Daniel Kolodny)

Mr. Kolodny reviewed the changes attributed to benefits with the FRS System.

Requested Action: Motion to recommend that the IRL Council Board of Directors accept the IRLNEP Management Conference recommendation to approve the Fiscal Year 2025 Final Budget Amendment by Resolution 2025-05, pursuant to Florida Statutes.

MOTION WAS MADE BY STU GLASS TO RECOMMEND THAT THE IRL COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS ACCEPT THE IRLNEP MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION TO APPROVE THE FISCAL YEAR 2025 FINAL BUDGET AMENDMENT BY RESOLUTION 2025-05, PURSUANT TO FLORIDA STATUTES. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY TONY CATANESE. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

11. **IRLNEP Staff Reports**

a. Community Engagement Update (Kathy Hill)

Ms. Hill highlighted the top social media posts and their reach. The achievements of the three Community Engagement Coordinators were reviewed, and the first-quarter engagement statistics were shared: 648 total engagements in FY 2025. The winner and runners-up of the 2026 Annual IRL Calendar were announced. Highlights from the 2025 Annual Report were also presented.

b. Information Technology and Data Science Update (K.J. Ayres-Guerra)

Ms. Ayres-Guerra announced the highlight of the quarter: the birth of her son. A review of upcoming projects was conducted, and Ms. Ayres-Guerra expressed her gratitude to the staff for their support during her leave.

c. IRL Project Update (Dan Kolodny)

Mr. Kolodny reported that 25 CCMP projects and activities are currently underway. Twenty-one new CCMP projects are set to start. Eighteen projects were completed in the first quarter. Mr. Kolodny requested reviewers for the pending RFPs.

d. Executive Director Report (Duane De Freese)

Dr. De Freese provided a brief legislative update and shared statistics on research topics published in Frontiers in Marine Science. He announced upcoming participation in the Florida Ocean Alliance and the ANEP Fall Tech Transfer Meeting. The deadlines for the Call for Abstracts for the 2026 IRL Symposium were reviewed.

12. **Final Comments** (Management Board, Staff, Public)

Tony Catanese announced that Dr. Duane De Freese received the Dr. Jerome P. Keuper Distinguished Alumni Award from the Florida Institute of Technology.

Beth Powell mentioned the Florida Association of Environmental Professionals' annual conference at Hutchinson Island from April 29th to May 1st, and encouraged participation; they do excellent work.

13. Next Meeting

Management Board meeting: February 10, 2026, at 10:15 a.m.
Historic Sebastian Elementary School, 1235 Main Street, Sebastian, FL 32958

14. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:37 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.