IRL COUNCIL
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Minutes from the meeting of

November 7, 2025

9:30 AM

Sebastian City Hall Complex, 1225 Main Street, Sebastian, FL 32958

Members: Jeff Brower, Kim Adkinson, Joseph Earman, James Clasby, Stacey Hetherington, Aaron Watkins, Doug Bournique, Thomas Hurley

Absent: None

Guests: Melissa Meisenburg, Chuck Jacoby, Melanie Parker, Caitlin Butler, Cortney Cortez, Madison Drewry, Lauren Hall, Jenna Kent, Beth Powell, Sherry McCorkel

1. **Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance** (Joe Earman, Chair)

   Mr. Earman called the meeting to order at 9:34 a.m.

2. **Introduction of IRL Council Board of Directors and Special Guests** (Joe Earman, Chair)

   Mr. Earman invited the Board members to introduce themselves. Mr. Earman expressed gratitude to the EPA staff for monitoring the meeting remotely and hopes they will return to work soon.

3. **Agenda Revisions** (Joe Earman, Chair)

   No agenda revisions were made.

4. **Resolutions, Recognition, Letters and Awards** (Joe Earman, Chair)

   None

5. **Public Comment**

   No public comment was made.

6. **Water Quality Reports**

   a. Northern and Central Lagoon (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 Lagoon (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.

7. Presentations

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

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*
(Cortney Cortez, The Balmoral Group)

Cortney Cortez 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. *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.

8. IRLNEP Management Conference Committee Reports

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

Ms. Beth Powell, Chair of the Management Board, reported that the meeting started a little late due to some technical difficulties, but we began around 10:30 AM. There were no agenda revisions, and the minutes of the August 19th board meeting were unanimously approved with a single minor correction that noted that seagrass seeds were present in the north and central regions of the IRL.

Stu Glass submitted, and the board approved the Finance Committee report, emphasizing the importance of recruiting and motivating members to attend and engage.

Lauren Hall and Dr. Parker provided our water quality reports. We heard presentations from Kevin Walker and Valerie Seidel. Dr. James Sullivan introduced the Florida Office of the Ocean Economy at FAU and requested that we invite him to speak about those efforts. Dr. De Freese also reported on "Looking Back 10 years." There was no old business. The new business items were unanimously approved, with a recommendation for the Board of Directors to accept each. The 2026 Indian River Lagoon Council calendar was

approved unchanged. The fiscal year 2025 budget amendment, increasing the budget by $3,477 from reserves, was also approved. Staff Reports were presented. Closing remarks mentioned the Florida Association of Environmental Professionals' annual conference at Hutchinson Island from April 29th to May 1st. We encourage participation; they do excellent work. Our meeting concluded with an announcement of the next meeting date, February 10th, and we finished around 12:30.

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

Dr. Chuck Jacoby, Chair of the STEM Committee, reported that the Consent Agenda included approval of the revised minutes from August, incorporating the correction that *Ruppia maritime* seeds were discovered in the northern central region of the IRL and the approval of the FY25 budget amendment. Discussions encompassed water quality, including presentations on the NOAA grant, the economic evaluation, and the ten-year retrospective review. Additionally, we examined the evaluation of herbivore-exclusion devices for seagrass planting aimed at safeguarding juvenile plants from herbivory. The primary emphasis was that ongoing seagrass transplantation requires further research regarding the effective utilization of these devices. There was no old business. The New Business included the recommendation for the approval of the 2026 meeting calendar. Staff reports were presented, and the meeting concluded around 3:30.

c. Citizens' Advisory Committee (Captain Frank Catino)

Ms. Kathy Hill presented the CAC report on behalf of Captain Frank Catino. The Citizens Advisory Committee convened on Thursday, November 6, at 1:00 p.m. They received a presentation from students at Saint Edward's School regarding a small grant they obtained, explaining their project, its implementation, and their efforts to expand its community impact. Some students educated their lawn care providers, while others displayed posters in neighborhoods advocating for reduced fertilizer use and environmentally friendly lawn practices. The presentation featured three student speakers and was met with high regard. Overall, it was a valuable and constructive experience. Business matters included the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting, as well as the recommendation for approval of the upcoming year's budget amendment and meeting calendar.

9. Consent Agenda (Joe Earman, Chair)

Approval of August 22, 2025, Board of Directors meeting minutes.

Requested Action: Approve Consent Agenda.

MOTION WAS MADE BY STACEY HETHERINGTON TO APPROVE THE AUGUST 22, 2025, BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY KIM ADKINSON. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

10. Old Business

None

11. New Business

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

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

Requested Action: Motion to approve the Fiscal Year 2025 Final Budget Amendment by Resolution 2025-05, pursuant to Florida Statutes.

MOTION WAS MADE BY JAMES CLASBY TO APPROVE THE FISCAL YEAR 2025 FINAL BUDGET AMENDMENT BY RESOLUTION 2025-05, PURSUANT TO FLORIDA STATUTES. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY AARON WATKINS. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

b. 2026 IRL Council Meeting Calendar (Kathy Hill)

Ms. Hill presented the calendar and shared that the Management Conference did not report any conflicts on the dates.

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

MOTION WAS MADE BY STACEY HETHERINGTON TO ADOPT THE PROPOSED 2026 IRL COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE MEETING CALENDAR. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY JAMES CLASBY. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

c. Contract Amendment IRL2024-10, Coastal Connections, Inc. (Daniel Kolodny)

Mr. Kolodny reviewed the differences in cost share match and volunteer participation.

Requested Action: Board review and discussion of final project financial submission and determination of action regarding potential modification of cost share match proportions.

MOTION WAS MADE BY THOMAS HURLEY TO ACCEPT THE MODIFICATION OF COST SHARE MATCH PROPORTIONS. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY STACEY HETHERINGTON. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

d. IRL Council Executive Director Annual Evaluation (Glen Torcivia, ESQ.)

Mr. Torcivia shared the performance review results.

Requested Action: Motion to review and accept the Executive Director's Annual Performance Review.

MOTION WAS MADE BY DOUG BOURNIQUE TO REVIEW AND ACCEPT THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY KIM ATKINSON. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

12. 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 (Daniel 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.

13. IRL Council Member Reports

Kim Adkinson of Brevard County reported on various projects and activities, including those completed or ongoing for the county: quick connects of homes to existing sewers, upgrades of septic tanks to advanced nitrogen-reducing septic systems, stormwater treatment projects, muck removal, reef arches installed at the west end of the Titusville Causeway, distribution of clams, and the removal of derelict vessels.

Stacey Hetherington from Martin County stated that shoreline restoration at Indian Riverside Park is in progress. The septic-to-sewer project is advancing and using funding resources for residents. Protecting natural lands remains a priority, and efforts are ongoing to secure funding and identify parcels for purchase.

Doug Bounique from SJRWMD stated his desire to ban specific sunscreens and chemicals used in the lagoon because of their documented harmful effects on coral reef ecosystems. He also highlighted the importance of raising awareness about microplastics and their impact on humans and aquaculture.

Jeff Brower of Volusia County announced that the FDEP has granted a permit for Stetson University to test RioVation's septic tank technology. This has been a

lengthy process. Mr. Brower congratulated the Marine Resource Council on its recent low-impact development conference. Volusia County also presented the county's low-impact development manual, which developers have requested.

James Clasby of St. Lucie County reported that a boat ramp at Taylor Creek was approved, with permit processes for the roadway underway. The Anchor Limitation ordinance was approved and is awaiting US Coast Guard signage approval. The Fort Pierce and St. Lucie County Sheriff's Departments have entered into an agreement to enforce the ordinance.

Aaron Watkins, FDEP, announced that the regulatory district boundaries have been updated, and Indian River County has been moved from the Southeast District to the Central District. Mr. Watkins thanked Dr. De Freese for the conversation with the FDEP staff members participating in the Indian River Lagoon Days festival; the staff appreciated the opportunity to meet Duane.

Thomas Hurley from SFWMD announced that the Governor signed the agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers for several large projects for Lake Okeechobee. The C23 and C24 reservoirs and storm treatment areas are under construction, with a completion date late in 2026. The large projects will be beneficial for water quality improvements to the St. Lucie Estuary and IRL.

Joe Earman of Indian River County announced that the County also has an Anchor Limitation ordinance. The City of Sebastian and the County have established a CRA to support septic removal from homes and businesses near the lagoon. Many other septic-to-sewer projects have been completed or are in progress. The process of identifying and purchasing conservation land is moving forward.

14. IRL Council – Next Meeting Announcement (Joe Earman, Chair)

February 13, 2026, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Sebastian City Hall, Council Chambers, 1225 Main Street, Sebastian, FL 32958

15. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 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, 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 .