

Biscayne Bay Commission Minutes
February 12, 2026, at 10 a.m. EST
Cutler Bay Town Hall and GoToWebinar

General subject matter overview: The Biscayne Bay Commission meets to discuss matters pertaining to the protection of the vital natural resources within Biscayne Bay.

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Noah Valenstein	Chair	Present
Adam Blalock	Vice Chair	Present
Micky Steinberg	Commission Member	Present
Tim Meerbott	Commission Member	Present
Scott Wagner	Commission Member	Not Present
Dr. Thomas Reinert	Commission Member	Present
Spencer Crowley III	Commission Member	Present

Welcome and Introduction

Mollie Cordo from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection welcomes attendees online and informs the audience that the meeting is being recorded. She adds that a copy of the agenda is in the handouts section of GoToWebinar and that public comments are due by February 19, 2026. Public comments may be emailed to: BBCommission@FloridaDEP.gov.

Commission Procedural Items

Chair Valenstein takes roll call and requests a motion to approve minutes from both the July 23 and November 12, 2025, meetings. The motion is made, seconded and passed with all in favor.

Miami Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management

John Ricisak, manager of Miami-Dade County’s Derelict Vessel Removal and Disposal Program, provides a presentation on statistics from the vessel removal program from 2025 and the success of the program with agency partners working in Miami-Dade County waters. John also discusses the current challenges and potential solutions to illegal mooring in areas of Biscayne Bay.

Commissioner Blalock asks about protections for seagrass bottom habitat and the difference of at-risk and derelict, as well as any actions that can be taken by code enforcers currently. Commissioner Reinert mentions Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s vessel turn-in program is designed to prevent at-risk vessels from becoming derelict. Commissioner Steinberg thanks the collection of partners working together on these challenges and is willing to extend support for legislative solutions.

Commissioner Crowley offers the perspective of the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND) on the challenges of derelict vessels and highlights the economic value of offering long-term anchoring locations. The commissioner indicates that identifying those differences between long-term anchoring and long-term storage is an important distinction to make when considering these challenges.

Additionally, the commissioner encourages local governments to develop additional managed mooring fields to prevent scouring of the bay bottom and offer economic benefits to local governments. Lastly, Commissioner Crowley calls for applications for two derelict vessel removal grants through FIND.

Chair Valenstein proposes a possible letter of support for agencies on the commission to support legislative solutions.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Law Enforcement Updates

Captain Rafael Almagro with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) presents updates from 2025 within the agency and the region, including the addition of 10 new officers and four additional officers in training, as well as updates on their derelict vessel removal program. Captain Almagro addresses the challenges they face with vessel titles, tracking owners and misdemeanor warrants. Almagro also addresses working with state and local agencies to tackle violations of livery permits in the Miami River and their work to cite large vessels whose wake causes damage to seawalls.

Finally, Captain Almagro details important new legislation like Lucy's Law, which increases penalties for violations related to boating accidents; the Vessel Accountability Act, which changes the definition of a livery; and the implementation of the Boater Freedom Act this year.

The commission acknowledges the number of violations on the map provided and the large number of violations on land as well as on the water.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Grant Funding Updates

Mollie Cordo of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection provides an update on the funding within the Florida's Coral Reef Restoration and Recovery Initiative (FCR3), Resilient Florida and the Biscayne Bay Water Quality Improvement Grants. For FCR3 this year, \$9.5 million has been awarded to 11 different entities for projects focused on infrastructure expansion, training and facility operations. Within Miami-Dade County, since its creation, Resilient Florida has awarded about \$482 million for a total of 132 projects. Lastly, for Fiscal Year 2025-26, a total of \$20 million was awarded to eight different projects under the Biscayne Bay Water Quality Improvement Grant.

Commissioner Blalock encourages applicants with nutrient reduction projects to apply for Biscayne Bay Water Quality Improvement grants and other projects to apply under Resilient Florida. Additionally, Commissioner Blalock expresses a desire to hear from awardees on what has been accomplished with these awards. Commissioner Crowley echoes Commissioner Blalock, requesting a comprehensive update from Miami-Dade County regarding state-funded projects to enable the commission to articulate and defend the success of these initiatives. Chair Valenstein proposes a celebratory focus for an upcoming commission meeting that highlights the projects receiving funding and their progress.

Public Comments

Public comments are opened. Each commenter is limited to three minutes.

- In-person commenter: Jed Redwine

- Comments on high nitrogen levels in canals close to Cutler Bay and the potential for an upscale solution. Additional comments given on rapidly developing technology and its uses for water quality solutions.
- In-person commenter: Adriana Gonzalez Fernandez
 - Comments on the Biscayne Bay Water Quality Improvement Grant and urges the commission to continue advocating for funding for septic-to-sewer conversion projects and habitat restoration.
- In-person commenter: Laura Reynolds
 - Comments on autonomous survey vessels and advocates for their funding and monitoring projects, as well as the use of projecting systems to aid forecasting environmental indicators like algal blooms and for regular updates for the commission from Florida International University on their monitoring insight. Reynolds emphasizes the need for real-time information within monitoring that can be achieved with dedicated funding.
- In-person commenter: Rachel Silverstein
 - Requests for strong Biscayne Bay funding to continue work on key projects and highlights the importance of the need to support FCR3. Additional comments include the recent water shortage announcement, urging for attention on protecting water resources.
- Virtual commenter: Jessica Gannon
 - Comments on the support needed for FCR3 within the Governor's budget for Fiscal Year 2027-28 and highlights the economic and ecological value of Florida's Coral Reef.
- Virtual commenter: Rachel Streitfeld
 - Comments on the derelict vessel program and the state legislation approved last year that assisted local governments in removing squatters. Additionally support for the Monroe County pump out program is identified as something to bring to Miami-Dade County.
- Virtual commenter: Sandy Moise
 - Comments on the agencies, nonprofits and organizations working on improving Biscayne Bay, especially individuals like Captain Almagro and Colonel Maza. Moise highlights the FWC, Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves, and Urban Paradise Guild mangrove restoration project and flourishing bird population on Mangrove Island. Moise also stresses the need to slow down boats in this area.
- Virtual commenter: Mariana Aziz
 - Supports House Bill 1319 and Senate Bill 1492, designating coral reefs as critical natural infrastructure and identifies that protecting them is in the public interest. Aziz highlights how these bills could unlock funding from other agencies for coral restoration.

Commission Discussion

Chair Valenstein opens discussion to hear thoughts and ideas from commissioners about today's meeting.

Commissioner Meerbott extends thanks to the Florida Communities Trust for awarding funding for the town of Cutler Bay to buy green spaces. Commissioner Blalock appreciates hearing the insightful presentations during this meeting and acknowledges the next meeting will be focused on water quality restoration. The commission discusses the idea of hosting a celebration for the next in-person meeting to bring together those entities funding and carrying out research and restoration projects in Biscayne Bay.

Commissioner Reinert highlights FWC's initiative to remove invasive green iguanas during the cold weather, removing around 5,200 individuals from Palm Beach and Broward counties.

Commissioner Meerbott asks for clarification on the money allocated to Biscayne Bay and Indian River Lagoon. Chair Valenstein responds that the Florida Legislature has not yet announced their budgets that will include clarification on what will be allocated to Biscayne Bay.

Online, Commissioner Crowley encourages visitors to take the water taxi in downtown Miami to the newly renovated Maurice Gibb Park on South Beach to help foster appreciation and engagement with Biscayne Bay. He reminds the audience that FIND's grant cycle is open this year for projects that help improve public access to the bay.

Lastly, Chair Valenstein encourages all commissioners to complete and update the project tracker with ongoing or new projects.

Closing Remarks and Adjournment

Chair Valenstein makes closing remarks. Mollie Cordo announces the completed December 2025 Semi Annual Report is available online at the commission website, ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov/BiscayneBayCommission. The meeting is adjourned.