



MIAMI  
WATERKEEPER®

# STANDING UP FOR SOUTH FLORIDA'S WATERS



2017  
ANNUAL  
REPORT



Executive Director &  
Waterkeeper

Rachel Silverstein, Ph.D.

## THANK YOU FOR BEING A CHAMPION OF SOUTH FLORIDA'S WATERS!

### A Message from Your Waterkeeper

With a watershed as large as South Florida's, complex challenges are inevitable. Fighting to protect our resources can seem daunting, but because you stood with Miami Waterkeeper, we had a year of clean water victories!

Together, we succeeded in uncovering and stopping a long-neglected sewage leak from the Virginia Key Treatment Plant. This reignited our efforts to hold Miami-Dade County accountable for upgrading our aging water treatment infrastructure and raised public awareness about the importance of keeping Biscayne Bay clean.

We also made tremendous progress in further protecting our coral reefs from dredging damage. We continue to see successes in our ongoing lawsuit over the destruction caused by dredging in PortMiami, and our advocacy and community outreach efforts are paving the way for us to preempt similar damage to our corals around Port Everglades.

As we tackle these and other pressing challenges that threaten clean water and healthy marine ecosystems, we are also focused on the long-term, working toward a resilient South Florida in the face of sea level rise and hurricanes. We pride ourselves on empowering the next generation to become clean water advocates, and our Junior Ambassador program continues to grow.

Thank you for joining us in taking a stand to protect South Florida's waters. And thank you for sharing our vision for a vibrant South Florida.

Sincerely,

A blue ink handwritten signature of Rachel Silverstein.

Rachel Silverstein, Ph.D.

Executive Director & Waterkeeper

Miami Waterkeeper



**A YEAR OF CLEAN WATER VICTORIES**

## 1 DREDGING DELAYED

After legal pushback from Miami Waterkeeper and co-plaintiffs backed by over 10,000 public comments asking for stronger coral reef protections, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must now conduct new environmental studies and delay dredging to expand Port Everglades until at least 2019.

## 2 SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

In collaboration with University of Miami scientists, our Waterkeeper published a first-authored peer-reviewed research article in the *Journal of Experimental Biology*, examining coral bleaching and possible coral responses to climate change.

## 3 A DAY ON THE BAY

As a part of NOAA's Habitat Focus Area Grant, and in collaboration with Florida Sea Grant and community partners, we led numerous educational boat tours for elected officials and community leaders focused on threats to Biscayne Bay, including algae blooms, degraded water quality, and sea level rise.

## 4 SEWAGE LEAK PLUGGED

After uncovering a sewage leak from a Miami-Dade County outfall pipe that had been ignored for a year, we filed a notice of intent to sue the County for Clean Water Act violations. Within days, the County plugged the leak, which had already spewed more than 10 million gallons of partially treated sewage into the ocean and Biscayne Bay.

## 5 ARMY CORPS ALTERNATIVE FACTS

Our continued monitoring of the reef tract damaged by the PortMiami dredging exposed false information in a Corps' court filing this year – claiming that the corals impacted by dredging sediment had seemingly recovered. Our efforts forced the Corps to correct the record, and we continue to hold them accountable for damage to our coral reefs from this project.

## 6 HURRICANE HELPERS

Miami Waterkeeper was one of the first organizations on the ground after Hurricane Irma, reporting pollution and water hazards, and mobilizing volunteer efforts for debris clean up. We partnered with the City of Miami Parks and Recreation Department to clean up Kennedy Park in Coconut Grove, collecting over 1,400 pounds of trash and debris washed ashore from storm surge.

## 7 STOPPING STYROFOAM

Our 2016 advocacy efforts yielded results in 2017 when Miami-Dade County officially implemented a Polystyrene ban in County parks, marinas, and beaches.

## 8 WORLD WATER DAY

We teamed up with Philippe Cousteau, Jr. and EarthEcho International at Biscayne Nature Center for a hands-on day of action to monitor the health of our waters and to address ongoing water quality issues. Hundreds of students from Miami-Dade County Public Schools collected water samples to help evaluate water quality in Miami.

## 9 BAG BAN

Coral Gables became the first city in the State of Florida to ban plastic bags through municipal ordinance. We lobbied and rallied community support for this important effort.

## 10 NO NEW NUCLEAR

Miami Waterkeeper continues to advocate against new nuclear power reactors at FPL's Turkey Point, which now will not be built. We are still fighting for FPL to clean up pollution in our site that is impacting Biscayne Bay, Biscayne National Park, and the Biscayne Aquifer – our drinking water supply.

PROTECTING  
THE WATER  
YOU LOVE  
IN 2017





## SUCCESS STORIES

### Stopping Sewage Leaks

This summer, we investigated a concerned citizen's tip and ended up uncovering a sewage leak that Miami-Dade County had ignored for over a year – resulting in an estimated 10 million gallons or more of partially treated sewage entering the Atlantic Ocean and Biscayne Bay. We took immediate action and filed a notice of intent to sue the County for violations of the Clean Water Act. Just a week later, the County patched the leak. We have been keeping a watchful eye on these issues since filing our first notice of intent to sue in 2012 when we asked the County for more resilient and climate-ready sewage infrastructure. Sewage leaks are a prolific problem in our waters, contributing to beach closures, public health advisories, and harmful nutrient loading of our waterways. Sewage pollution introduces pathogens, heavy metals, and excess pollutants into water that contribute to fish kills, algae blooms, and human illness. This year's victory was made possible through your support. **The Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation** has funded Miami Waterkeeper's work to ensure swimmable, drinkable, fishable water in South Florida for several years.

### A Resilient South Florida

Our ongoing work for clean water, healthy marine ecosystems, and sea level rise readiness are all closely tied to improving our resiliency. Our Waterkeeper served on the City of Miami's Sea Level Rise Board, Miami-Dade County's Shoreline Development Review Board, and we participated in several Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities events, always advocating for clean water and green solutions. We are very honored to have been chosen to receive **The Miami Foundation's** 50th Anniversary grant to support our resiliency work.



## Protecting our Coral Reefs from Dredging in PortMiami and Port Everglades

In February 2017, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency overseeing local dredging projects, held public meetings to provide information and solicit public input on the Port Everglades dredging project in Fort Lauderdale. We collected 295 petition signatures and facilitated more than 10,000 comments asking the Army Corps for better protections for our coral reefs. At the meetings, dozens of citizens spoke in favor of stronger reef protections in Port Everglades, specifically asking for third party oversight, expansion of monitoring and mitigation, mandatory turbidity and sedimentation limits, and further analysis of reef damage in Miami.

Thanks to the generous support of Patagonia, our efforts to hold the Army Corps accountable for the damage caused to reefs in PortMiami continue. First, we discovered that the Army Corps filed a photograph in federal court that purportedly showed a healthy post-dredging staghorn coral-- a threatened, once thriving species in Miami. However, our research revealed that this photo was actually taken 25 years prior in the Cayman Islands, not in October 2016 near PortMiami. We demanded that the false photo be immediately removed and corrected. Soon thereafter, we reviewed a Corps "fact sheet" that explained dredging risks to corals and other marine life. The Corps distributed the fact sheet widely at the Port Everglades public comment meeting.



Again, they included a photograph that purported to show healthy staghorn coral after the PortMiami dredging, but we verified that this photo was actually taken before the dredging had even commenced. The Corps had to remove this fact sheet after we again exposed their distribution of faulty information.

## NOAA's Habitat Focus Area: Biscayne Bay

In 2015, NOAA selected Biscayne Bay as one of its Habitat Focus Areas. Miami Waterkeeper was selected as the principal investigator in a two-year grant partnering with Florida Sea Grant and researchers at the University of Miami. As part of this work, we were able to expand our Junior Waterkeeper Ambassador program, host multiple "Day on the Bay" tours, conduct an economic valuation, perform citizen-led water quality testing, and create a Biscayne Bay GIS database.





## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

### Junior and Senior Ambassadors

Our Junior Ambassador program, now in its third year, has continued to grow. The program now includes four service-learning events and four advocacy trainings during the academic year for South Florida high school students. More than 20 students are involved in the current cohort, learning about threats to marine ecosystems, advocacy approaches, and public speaking skills. The students learn about local environmental issues and threats through hands-on experiences including kayaking, snorkeling, community service opportunities, field water sampling techniques, classroom sessions, and more.



### Continuing Legal Education

We hosted our first accredited Continuing Legal Education course for attorneys. Attendees learned about home rule, state preemption, and what local municipalities can do to best protect their environmental resources. Our Staff Attorney, Kelly Cox, lectured about the history of home rule, municipal authority, and its evolution over time. The course also featured a panel of experts, including City of Miami Commissioner (now Mayor) Francis Suarez.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### Bay Day

In December 2017, more than 150 people joined us for our annual celebration of Biscayne Bay – Bay Day! Attendees were treated to bay tours, kayaking trips, sailing adventures, music, local brews, and more. We raised over \$20,000 for clean water through this community SPLASH event, presented nationally by Toyota.

### Volunteer Events

Miami Waterkeeper engaged hundreds of volunteers this year, together picking up thousands of pounds of trash and debris from our parks and shorelines. We were recognized for our work as one of the “on the ground” organizations after Hurricane Irma for mobilizing volunteers to help restore public spaces impacted by storm surge and high winds.

# BY THE NUMBERS

## A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF MIAMI WATERKEEPER

We're on the road speaking to diverse audiences

**3x**  
a month



Collected more than  
**2,500**  
pounds of trash from our shorelines



Filed  
**9**  
technical comment letters to government agencies



Graduated

**17**  
Junior Ambassadors – our future environmental leaders



Staffed by a team of only

**3**



Hosted more than  
**24**  
community outreach events



Backed by more than

**300**  
volunteers



Submitted  
**12**  
public comments for policy change



Over  
**2,300**  
hours worked on legal actions by our attorneys to date





## CHAMPIONS SPOTLIGHT

Miami Waterkeeper is able to defend, protect, and preserve South Florida's watershed with the generous support and involvement of our dedicated partners and donors. Each contributor inspires and empowers us to forge onward, and we are eternally grateful. Among them are:

**Rubio's Coastal Grill:** Known for pioneering the fish taco, California-based Rubio's® Restaurants announced in summer 2016 that it was making its first expansion to the east coast and opening restaurants in Florida. With their arrival to the sunshine state came their commitment to sustainability and their community. Rubio's made a generous contribution to further our coral reef programs and to support new projects this year. The company has become a wonderful partner to us, also providing delicious food and sustainable seafood dishes for many of our community outreach activities, such as our Junior Ambassador program and special events around World Oceans Day. Thank you Rubio's!



**Whole Foods** is a dedicated Miami Waterkeeper partner. In April 2017, we benefited from 5% Back Day, receiving proceeds from sales at all Whole Foods throughout Miami-Dade County and a sustainable dinner with celebrity chef Jeremy Ford – resulting in a significant contribution of nearly \$49,000. Dedicated to sustainable agriculture and offering the finest natural and organic foods available, Whole Foods also delivers on their commitment to improving the lives and opportunities of people in their communities. We are so thankful to regularly partner with Whole Foods on so many of our community outreach programs, benefiting from their sponsorship and in-kind support of sustainable, healthy fare.



**Patagonia** has provided crucial support of our efforts to protect South Florida's coral reefs from the impacts of dredging at PortMiami and Port Everglades. Both ports' shipping channels bisect our fragile reef tract, which has lost over 80% of its coral cover in just the last few decades. Dredging sedimentation at PortMiami smothered and killed tens of thousands of corals, including Endangered Species Act-listed staghorn corals. Thanks to Patagonia's support, our litigation has already catalyzed the relocation and rescue of hundreds of threatened corals by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), who thus values their rescue at an estimated \$14 million in benefits to the American public. Thank you Patagonia!



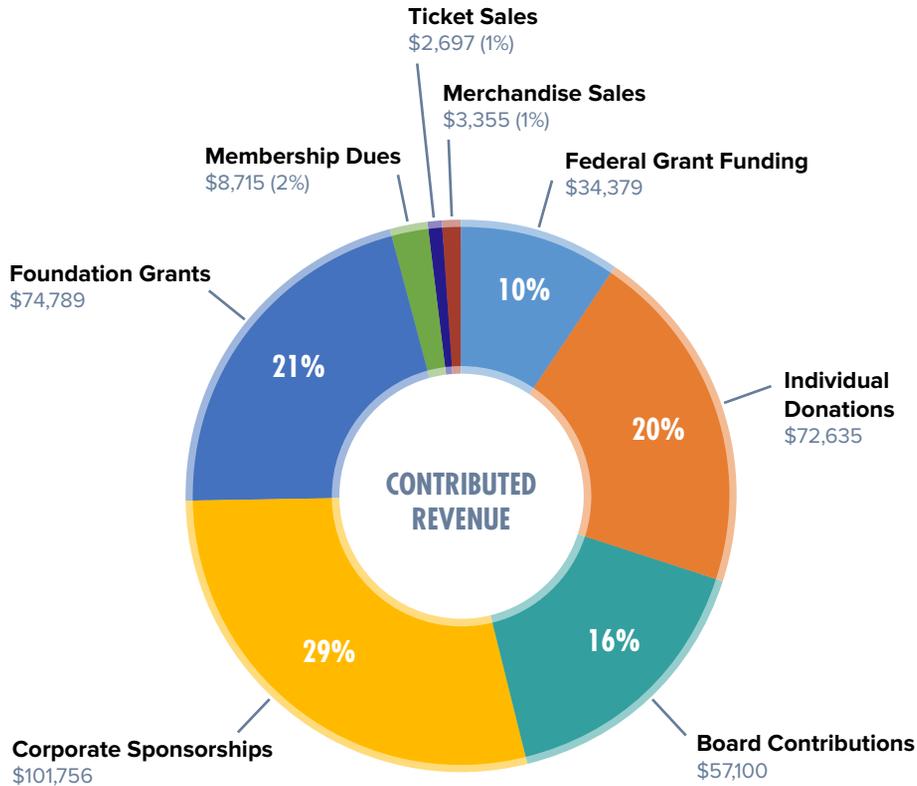
## BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**David and Maria Schwedel**, co-chairs of Miami Waterkeeper's Board of Trustees, have generously supported our work and been instrumental in broadening our scope. David, a Miami native and energy technology investor, is the founder and CEO of Gables Energy Partners, LLC. Maria, originally from Cuba, has nearly a decade of career experience in banking, audit, and finance. The couple shares a commitment to our natural environment and spends all of their leisure time on the water in Miami, the Florida Keys, and the Bahamas with their three young children. Their eldest child, and only daughter – Simone – is ahead of her years as one of the youngest graduates of our Junior Ambassador program. Last year, she spoke at a City of Coral Gables commission meeting to help us advocate for the successful passing of the city's plastic bag ban – the first in Florida!



# 2017 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

JULY 1, 2016 - JUNE 30, 2017



Total Revenue: \$355,426

Miami Waterkeeper relies entirely on external support to enable our efforts to promote clean water, healthy marine ecosystems, and a sea level rise-ready South Florida. We maintain a strong foundation of sound scientific research to guide our work, a commitment to collaboration with diverse partners, and a focus on long-term sustainability to keep us moving forward.

We wholeheartedly appreciate our corporate sponsors, foundation and federal grantors, our dedicated Board of Directors and Board of Trustees, and our growing base of individual donors, members, and patrons who make our work possible. Together, we are ensuring everyone's right to swimmable, fishable, drinkable water in South Florida.

# MIAMI WATERKEEPER TEAM

## Staff

Rachel Silverstein, PhD – Executive Director & Waterkeeper  
 Kelly Cox, Esq – Staff Attorney & Program Director  
 Dana Tricarico, MPS\* – Outreach Coordinator  
 Andrew Carter, PhD, Esq\* – Research Director  
 Emily Hernandez – Operations Assistant  
 \* Joined Miami Waterkeeper staff in 2018

## Board of Directors

Our Board of Directors works primarily to guide the strategic direction and operations of Miami Waterkeeper.

Greg Clark  
 Amy Clement  
 Lauren Brown Hornor  
 Philip Kushlan  
 H Weitz

## Board of Trustees

Our Board of Trustees works to build Miami Waterkeeper's capacity through marketing and fundraising.

Roger Baumann  
 Kenneth Broad  
 Marcelo Fernandes  
 Joseph Hernandez  
 Michael Laas  
 Cindy Lerner  
 Wirth Munroe  
 Jill Reiter\*  
 Angel Reyes  
 Judd Rosen  
 David Schwedel – co-chair  
 Maria Schwedel – co-chair  
 Richard Shellow  
 Caroline Szjaman  
 \* Joined Miami Waterkeeper in 2018

## Photo Credits

Cover: Constance Mier  
 Page 2: Constance Mier  
 Page 3-4: Map - Google Maps  
 Page 5: Stork - Constance Mier  
 Page 6: Fish - Evan D'Alessandro  
 Page 9-10: Top - Greg Clark  
 Page 12: Evan D'Alessandro  
 Report Design: Greg Workman

## Thank You

Amplifying our small but impactful staff and our dedicated Boards of Directors and Trustees, Miami Waterkeeper is fueled by a growing army of volunteers, members, petition signers, and event participants. We could not execute our mission without all of your involvement, thank you!

## Who We Are

We are a proud member of the Waterkeeper Alliance - the largest and fastest growing nonprofit solely focused on clean water - made up of over 300 Waterkeeper organizations and affiliates protecting more than two million square miles of rivers, lakes, and coastal waterways on six continents.





**MIAMI**  
**WATERKEEPER®**

2103 Coral Way, 2nd Floor, Miami, FL 33145  
(305) 905-0856

✉ [hello@miamiwaterkeeper.org](mailto:hello@miamiwaterkeeper.org)

📷 [@miamiwaterkeeper](https://www.instagram.com/miamiwaterkeeper)

f [/miamiwaterkeeper](https://www.facebook.com/miamiwaterkeeper)

🐦 [@MiamiWaterkpr](https://twitter.com/MiamiWaterkpr)