



The Ghost Writer

FEBRUARY 2012

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee, "Home of the Ghost Orchid"

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturday

Cost: \$70 (\$50 for members)

Reservations Required.

Phone (239) 695-1023

or email islandgirlm@msn.com

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2nd Saturday, 3rd Tuesday

Saturday, February 11

Tuesday, February 21

See article on page 6

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, Feb 19, 10:00 a.m.

Ranger Station, Copeland

For info, phone (305) 588-9886

Art in the Preserve

Saturday, Feb 18, 10:00 a.m.

See article on page 2

COASTAL CRUISE

Saturday, Feb 25, from 3:00 p.m.

Boat Trip to Fakahatchee Island

See article on page 2

PLAN AHEAD

Feb 11: Everglades Paddle-In

Feb 11/12: Jammin' Fest

Feb 25: Coastal Cruise

Feb 26: Everglades Bike Ride

March 10: Coastal Cruise

March 25: Members' Picnic

March 25: Coastal Cruise

April 15: Annual Dinner

For info, phone (239) 695-2905 or see www.orchidswamp.org where you can make reservations and download the calendar of events.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 12/18/11, in the afternoon, Donna Day and Ernie Winn, volunteers, while hiking about 1.25 miles on Jones Grade, observed 3 **Anhingas**, 2 **Double Crested Cormorants**, 2 **Great Blue Herons**, 5 Mature and 2 immature **White Ibis**, and heard **Barred Owls** and a **Red-shouldered Hawk**. They also observed 30 **Zebra Longwings** or **Heliconian butterflies**.

On 12/20/11, around 8:30AM, Tom Trotta, visitor, observed a **Baltimore Oriole** perched high in a Cypress tree around Gate 12/East Main. On 12/29/11, around 3:30PM, Howard Lubel, volunteer, observed a **Bobcat** on JSD about 4 miles north of Gate 12. On 12/29/11 at 8:56AM Tom Trotta saw a **Florida Panther** about 5 miles past the ranger station and at 3:30PM Jim Gibbon photographed one about 10 miles past the ranger station. On 12/31/11, Tom Trotta observed two **Rose Breasted Grosbeak** including 1 adult male on top a Red Maple about 5 miles North of the Fakahatchee Strand Fire Tower.

On 1/4/12, Mike Owen, Biologist, during the Ten-Thousand Island Christmas Bird Count observed 50 least **Sandpipers** along the shoreline of the Faka-Union River as well as observed about 100 **American White Pelicans** flying overhead. On 1/8/12, around 10:15AM, Michael Cullinan, visitor observed a **Florida Black Bear** at a water hole in the Picayune Strand at the end of JSD. He had heard a splash from the water hole and when he turned around he saw an **American Alligator** had gone underwater and the bear running away into Picayune possibly spooking each other!

On 1/14/12, in the early morning, Dave Peters, a Collier Seminole State Park (Canoe Series guide) volunteer, observed his first **Florida Panther** near the end of Janes Scenic Drive (JSD). On 1/14/12, around 11:30AM, visitors also noted a **Florida Panther** on West Main.

On 1/21/12, while having fun volunteering for race day, Dino Barone, FOF Volunteer Coordinator, observed a **Black Racer** and 3 **Great Blue Herons**. On 1/21/12, around 11 AM, Linda Gant, visitor and artist, observed a **Red Bellied Woodpecker** carving out its home in one of the Sabal Palm trees near the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk area. On 1/21/12 about 11:30AM, Karen Johnson, volunteer assisting on race day, observed a couple of **Red-shouldered Hawks** seemingly guarding Four Stakes Prairie from the edge of a Cypress dome.

On 1/22/2012 at 8:01 am David Sose observed an adult **Bobcat** crossing JSD from west to east, about 20 yards north of gate 15. Upon return at 11.30 AM, he observed a 2 ft long **Banded Water Snake** that was stretched out on JSD about 1 mile north of the Fakahatchee office. On 1/27/12, around 2:30PM, Steven Bass, Park Ranger, observed a young approx. 40 pound **Florida Panther** about 1 mile past Mud tram run right in front of him from North to South on JSD.

If you want to report sightings, contact Park biologist Mike Owen or his assistant Karen Relish by phone at (239) 695-2886.



VOLUNTEER REPORT

by Dino Barone

On January 14, we had a very dedicated, hard working crew that assembled on a cool winter morning and fearlessly worked our way down the Gate 16, affectionately known as the Mud Tram, clearing a path for the Ultra Marathoners to safely run.

Lead by our own Karen “scissorhands” Relish, we were trimming the overgrown areas, while simultaneously picking up and removing vines, branches and logs (sometimes this caused a crawfish to re-establish homestead rights at a new facility) from the tram trail.

Seen above in a photo by Rose Flynn are Howard Lubel, Dino Barone, Karen Relish, Jo & Ted Payton, and Cyndy Marquez.

See page 6 for next volunteer days.

FAKAHATCHEE COASTAL CRUISE

by Karen Relish

On Saturday 1/21/12, I had the opportunity to assist Marya Repko, organizer and historian, and Glen Stacell, biologist, as well as our Captain Terry and First Mate James on the Coastal Cruise. It was low tide. We saw dolphins swimming and feeding on the sand bars on the way out.

When we got to Fakahatchee Island, an Indian mound, Glen pointed out probably one of the largest pencil trees/cactus he has ever seen. We toured the Daniels Cemetery. Glen also pointed many of the tropical plants found on the island. He included some facts on ethnobotany (medical uses) as well as functional uses of some of the plants. Marya had a snack spread ready for us when we re-boarded the boat. On our return, we saw wading birds and Brown Pelicans flying to their roosts as well as enjoyed the beautiful sunset.

The next Coastal Cruise takes place on **Saturday, February 25**, at 3:00 p.m. from Everglades National Park in Everglades City. Future dates are **Saturday, March 10**, and **Sunday, March 25** (also the day of our Annual Picnic). The cost is \$75 per person and places are limited. You can download a reservation form on our website or book with a credit card there. See www.orchidswamp.org and click on Events. For info, phone Marya at (239) 695-2905.

Art in the Preserve – En Plein Air

by Karen Relish

January 21 was the first of this season’s Art in the Preserve gatherings. It was also the 32nd Worldwide SketchCrawl. This month our landscapes were drawn using pencil, watercolor, ink or journaled in the area of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. The weather and camaraderie of the 11 artists of all levels who attended was perfect. There were plenty of scenic vistas to choose from. Some drew sitting in a chair; others took their mats and sat right into their subject. One chose to draw the tree of the Sabal Palm, home of a Red-Bellied Woodpecker that was cleaning out its cavity for its nest. At the end, all had fun discussing and comparing their Fakahatchee Pieces of Art. We look forward to drawing with you next month on **Saturday, February 18**, from 10:00 to 2:00 PM. We hope to be at the Harmon Building near Park Headquarters.

YOUNG BIRDERS VISIT THE BOARDWALK

by Aubrey

3rd Grade Student at Seagate Elementary School

On Saturday, January 21, twelve members of the Audubon Young Birders Club and their parents visited the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. Our guide was Park Ranger Karen Relish.



We saw lots of birds, animals and insects. For example: a bluebird, bald eagles, red-shouldered hawks, egrets, a great blue heron, anhingas, immature ibis, and a yellow-crowned night heron. At the observation deck one of the red-shouldered hawks came so close we could almost touch it. *Photo Kenneth Nolturno.*

We also saw two alligators. One was six foot. The other one had babies which Caryl Tilden, volunteer, pointed out to us that were sitting on a log and on a bank. We saw the extremely large bees nest through our scope. We even saw an assassin bug and many types of spiders.

We filled out a checklist given to us by Ranger Karen which helped us to be more observant along our trip. We thank Ranger Karen for helping us. Ranger Karen said she also learned a lot from us kids.



First Mate James kept us entertained on the boat trip to historic Fakahatchee Island on January 21.

MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS FESTIVAL

The 8th Annual MSD Festival at the Museum of the Everglades has a number of contributions by people with Fakahatchee connections:

Tues, Feb 21:

10:45 a.m. Guardians of the Everglades
by Nicholas Petrucci & Connie Bransilver

Wed, Feb 22:

10:00 a.m. Flora/Fauna of Everglades
by Jack Berninger
11:00 a.m. A Personal Perspective of Marjory’s Everglades
by Capt. Franklin Adams
2:00 p.m. A Pleistocene Park in Your Backyard
by Mike Owen

Thurs, Feb 23:

8:30 a.m. Guided Tram Tour of the Fakahatchee
8:30 a.m. Fakahatchee Fern Fun Walk
by Jack Berninger
1:00 p.m. Guided Tram Tour of the Fakahatchee

Fri, Feb 24:

10:00 a.m. History of the Giants of the Cypress Swamp
by Cesar Becerra
1:00 p.m. Photography Workshop in the Swamp
by Dennis Goodman and Mike Owen
2:00 p.m. Traditional Culture of Modern Gladesman
by Frank Denninger

To book in advance, phone (239) 695-0008. For the full program, see www.evergladesmuseum.org.

Who Was MSD?

Marjory Stoneman Douglas wrote the influential book *The Everglades; River of Grass* and campaigned tirelessly for the environment up to her death at the age of 108 in 1998. She was primarily a writer but in her younger years, she was on the Committee to establish Everglades National Park which was opened in 1947. She became a persuasive speaker when she started Friends of the Everglades in 1968 in an attempt to stop the Jetport in the Big Cypress and later worked with Governor Bob Graham to restore the Kissimmee basin. One of her last efforts was to fight Big Sugar over the condition of Lake Okeechobee. She was given a Presidential Medal of Honor in 1993 by Bill Clinton.



Thanks to Niki Butcher for this photo of the visit to the “Fakahatchee Hilton” and the preserve by Elam Stoltzfus and Carlton Ward, Jr, from the Florida Wildlife Corridor project on January 28/29. To learn more about their aims, see www.floridawildlifecorridor.org.

Guardians of the Everglades

Members Connie Bransilver and Nicholas Petrucci have put together an exhibit of portraits of conservationists which is on show during February at the Museum of the Everglades, 105 West Broadway, Everglades City. They will also be presenting a program on **Tuesday, February 21**, during the MSD Festival. For info, see www.guardiansoftheeverglades.com.

PADDLE-IN



The Annual Everglades Paddle-In on **Saturday, February 11**, starts at 6:00 a.m. and ends up with a party at JTs in Chokoloskee. It will benefit FOF again; at the event last year, 37 attendees signed up for our Introductory membership. For more info, see www.evergladeskayakfishing.com and click on “EKF Events” or phone (239) 695-3633.

Jammin’ in the Hammock



The 5th Annual Bluegrass Festival at Collier Seminole State Park takes place on **Saturday/Sunday, February 11/12**. We will be helping our sister park with volunteers and will have an FOF booth to tell visitors about the Fakahatchee. The weekend is always great fun. For more info, see www.floridastateparks.org/collierseminole (click on Events) or phone (239) 394-3397.

“MUCK-ABOUT”

Clyde & Niki Butcher host their Presidents’ Day Open House and Swamp Walks on **Saturday-Monday, February 18-20**, at the Big Cypress Gallery in Ochopee. Clyde will give presentations on the first two days at 10:30 a.m. You can sign up for walk and learn more at www.clydebutcher.com or phone (239) 695-2428.

SMALLWOOD BENEFIT

If you want something to do before the Coastal Cruise on **Saturday, February 25**, join the 10,000 Island Paddle to benefit the Smallwood Store which is fighting a case to restore access to the historic museum in Chokoloskee. If you don’t want to start out at 9:00 a.m. you can still join the festivities at 12:00 noon to enjoy the music and food. For info and to register, call (239) 695-2989.

Everglades Bike Ride



The Naples Pathways Coalition is holding its annual ride, some of it through the Fakahatchee, on **Sunday, February 26**. The event benefits FOF and the Everglades River of Grass Greenway (ROGG). For info and to register, phone Patty at (239) 695-2397 or see www.naplespathways.org. Volunteers at the rest stations are also welcome.

CSO Meeting Report

by Tom Maish, FOF Past-President

The 2012 CSO meeting, hosted by the Friends of Florida State Parks and the Florida Park Service, was held in Gainesville on January 5-9. There were many workshops available on the packed days. The following are the ones I attended pertaining most to the FOF.



Donald Forgione, Director of the Florida Park Service, stressed the CSO's are very much appreciated for the 1.2 million hours volunteered for the Parks. The Park Service has a \$85 million budget with \$55 million income. There will be NO PARK CLOSURES! Tourism will lead Florida out of the recession. Donald said that 85 visitors to the Parks create one job for the local economy.

Damon Kirkpatrick returned again this year. He works for the Friends of Georgia State Parks and handles their **Social Media**. Damon's message was "Don't Fight - Join" the Social Media scene. Number 1 users are from 18-34 years old; Number 2 are folks from 55-64, our demographic. He stressed to have social media such as FLICKR, Twitter, Four Square, and You Tube used in the Park while the Visitors are there. Use QR codes; have visitors LIKE us on Facebook. Ask to text a donation in to the Park while they are engrossed there. Get our Visitors engaged on Social Media while they are on site. Use bit.ly to shorten our URL. Use Mad MiMi as a tool to engage our members. Set up and use QR Codes (Quik Response); these are the squiggly squares that you see appearing in ads. Monitor our site to ask visitors questions to keep the dialog fresh on our website. Have FaceBook links to every thing that we publish. Add pictures of Volunteers and participants Thank Volunteers on Facebook. *FOF needs some tech-savvy members to implement our Social Media program.*

One of the FOF major objectives in attending the CSO conference was to get a meeting with Donald Forgione concerning the status of our **Boardwalk Facility Development (BFD)** project. I met for about 45 minutes with Donald, Scott Robinson (Assistant Director), and Valinda Subic (Chief of District 4 and Renee's immediate boss, seen above with the author at the FOF booth).

Although Director Forgione has 160 Parks, he is very aware of the need in the Fakahatchee. The FOF must raise the money for the BFD, but the \$300,000 promised is being used internally to pay for staff design work. Donald also said that he will work to get a Concept Design with cost estimates to the Friends within 30 days! The Interpretation Design will also be expedited.

The results of this meeting are so important for the FOF to go forward. Grant Writing, plans for Fund Raising, all are "on hold" until we have the Concept plan with estimated costs to explain our BFD need to potential grantors and donors.

After this meeting I am confident that the DEP will get us the plans required for the FOF to make the next decision.

HAND FERNS, 2012

by Jack Berninger

Elaine and I went to the Fakahatchee to once again to see and count our old friends the Hand Ferns (*Cheiroglossa palmata*) on January 6 along West Main trail. We counted 21 in a 1000 meter section of the tram. Only 3 had sporangia and only 6 had multiple leaves. The others were one-leaf and droopy. This is the same condition we found in other Hand Ferns along other trams.

As in past years we found poison ivy to be a limiting factor as no ferns were found in Sable Palms that had the ivy in the boots. The life span of individual ferns seems to be 5-6 years in the ones we have monitored. Other factors that play a role in the life of the ferns is Relative Humidity, Light, (refer to past years data), and especially poison ivy.

Counts from previous years:

2005 = 20; 2006 = 17; 2007 = 11

2008 = 19; 2009 = 35; 2010 = 15

2011 = no count; 2012 = 21.

Hope to see you all next January 2013.

Jack & Elaine Berninger visit us every winter from Ohio to lead walks, conduct surveys, and give lectures.



Competitors came from all over the USA plus a few from as far away as Denmark and Germany for the first EVERGLADES ULTRAS trail races in the Fakahatchee. There were 25 runners in the 50-mile race, 21 in the 50-kilometer race, and 33 in the 25-kilometer race. Volunteers from FOF helped at aid stations and rangers rode around checking the runs in progress. For full results, see www.evergladesultras.com. Photos by Cynthia Peters and Karen Johnson.

President's Message

January, February, March, arguably the best time of the year to be a Floridian, provide us with exciting outdoor opportunities in the Fakahatchee. While many in our country are shoveling snow out of driveways or carefully coaxing their cars along icy roads, we are putting on our shorts or hiking boots and heading for our rivers and trails, wet or dry. Clear, cool days call us to the park, where exciting alternatives await.

You can take a swamp walk guided by our own volunteer leaders, Bill Mesce, John Elting and Paul Marinelli. The fun begins with the ride to the slough or tram and doesn't stop until you take your boots off at the walk's end. It's a adventure where you see rare sights and learn about the Fakahatchee while having a great time. Of course, you also might be lucky enough to go out with park biologist, Mike Owen, and find yourself so fascinated with botany and biology that you wonder why you didn't appreciate the topics in school.

You can visit the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk and stroll the newly renovated areas below towering royal palms and cypress trees. You can look for the eagles, ospreys, hawks, gators and orchids you know are there but whose appearance is always exciting. Look for our volunteer naturalists, Caryl and Nelson, who will generously share their knowledge so as to enhance the experience.

You can participate in a volunteer work day in the park and connect with new friends or reconnect with old ones while helping out our rangers. Enjoy the day and see the trams and trails, the orchids, birds and other animals and just feel good about yourself. Take a drive or a bike ride down Janes and look for the panthers that have been seen frequently at the north end.

Spend the day with other folks who appreciate the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve Park. Get your feet wet. There's nothing else like it. As always, contact me at lubelm@aol.com with your suggestions, comments and offers to help with FOF projects.

See you in the swamp.

Howard Lubel

NOTICE OF PROPOSED BY-LAW AMENDMENT

At the February 19 meeting, the Board will consider amending Article VII, Section 8(b) of the FOF by-laws to read as follows:

Directors shall each serve a term of two (2) years and shall not serve more than three (3) consecutive terms.

If you have questions or comments, contact Howard Lubel at (305) 588-9886.

BOARDWALK REPORT

January was a beautiful month on the Boardwalk. A large number of visitors got to enjoy the new observation deck at the gator pond. Our resident alligator is usually visible out there, basking in the sun on her favorite log. An anhinga, several ibis, great egrets, and often a black crowned night heron are around nearly everyday. An otter was spotted in the left pond, always a treat for visitors.

It appears that the eagle eggs hatched mid-month and the adults can be seen nearly every day, either sitting on the edge of the nest or bringing in food. We will not know how many eaglets there are until they are big enough to get up on the edge of the nest. The ospreys are also nesting at this time and can often be seen on their very high nest, visible from the Pond Apple marker. Recently an osprey was dive-bombing an eagle that was perched on the 'watching tree', about 50-75 yards south of the eagle nest. Perhaps it was a dispute over food or territory.

Visitors have been fortunate to observe the behavior of alligators in close proximity this year. A mother alligator and her 10 babies are seen nearly every day on or around the dead log that lays across the canal on the right side of the path just before the wooden boardwalk begins. Occasionally the babies can be seen emerging from a hole in the mud-packed bank at the far end of the log. Sometimes the mother stretches out right across the path in the sunlight! It has been three years since either of our females in the gator pond have had young so it's a treat to be able to see the little ones.

We have had several varieties of warblers identified by experienced birders. Karen Relish recently hosted the "Young Birders" out on the boardwalk and they were excited to compile an impressive list, including the Eastern bluebird. We love to see children that are bright, energetic and excited about nature. It bodes well for the environment. May their enthusiasm continue!

Last week Mike Owen, volunteer Linda Koreny, Nelson, and I completed the 2012 Royal Palm Count. We found 96 that could be seen within 50 feet of the boardwalk, our highest number since we began the count in 2004. Although we lost four as a result of the frost in 2010, we have several new ones that are coming along nicely.

The mosquitoes have subsided, the weather is beautiful, so take a day and join us on the boardwalk.

Caryl Tilden, Boardwalk naturalist

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 323 memberships plus 31 Introductory members and 16 in arrears from the 4th quarter who will be sent reminders, again, with this newsletter. Renewal letters for the 1st quarter were sent in January. Thanks to members who responded promptly.

The new membership categories created by the Board are now listed on the form below and on our website where you can pay with a credit/debit card.

Welcome to new members since our last newsletter:

- Ray Cicero, Davie
- Michael Fee, St Petersburg
- Hugh Kerr, Miami
- Steve & Linda Koreny, Lancaster, PA
- Stephen & Helen Kramer, Davie
- Daniel Kramer & Rachael Zurer, Denver, CO
- Mark Muething, Cincinnati, OH
- Jo-Ann Sanborn, Marco Island

Thanks to 2nd Lifetime Member

We have another Lifetime Member! Warner Blow of Naples signed up just as we went to print last month. We appreciate his support and the vote of confidence it gives to the goals and activities of FOF.



VOLUNTEER CORNER



by Dino Barone

New members Linda & Steve Koreny helped out during the Everglades Ultras on January 21 at the Pennington Post aid station. *See reports and photos on page 2 and page 4.*

The next work days are:

- Saturday, Feb 11:** festival at Collier Seminole
- Tuesday, Feb 21:** collect air potato sprouts at Gate 15.

Be at the ranger station by 9:00 a.m. Our typical work day ends around 1:00 p.m. Bring gloves, snacks, drinks. If you can help, please email me at sunnyg8tr@aol.com.

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.**, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, is the Citizen Support Organization of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, the largest cypress strand in the world and the deepest slough in the greater Everglades. Its 80,000 acres are bordered by I-75 (Alligator Alley), US-41 (Tamiami Trail), SR-29, Fakahatchee Bay, and Picayune State Forest.

The Friends of Fakahatchee strive to aid in the preservation of this ecologically unique area and to educate the public about its importance.

The Ghost Writer, named after the endangered Ghost Orchid which blooms in the Preserve, is edited by Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation of over 300 copies.

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- OFFICERS: President – Howard Lubel Vice-President – Glen Stacell
 Secretary – Francine Stevens Treasurer – Dino Barone
- BOARD: Dino Barone Frank Denninger Dennis Giardina Cindy Hackney Howard Lubel
 Tom Maish Cynthia Peters Glen Stacell Francine Stevens Charles Wright
- LIFETIME MEMBERS: James Nici, Warner Blow

NEW MEMBERSHIP

date _____

Please make check payable to "FOF" and send to: FOF Membership, P.O.Box 35, Everglades City, FL, 34139

- Individual (\$20) Family (\$30) Patron (\$100) Benefactor (\$500)
- Lifetime Individual (\$1,000) Lifetime Family (\$1,500) Protector (\$2,500) Preserver (\$5,000)
- Business Patron (\$200) Business Benefactor (\$500) Extra Donation (\$ _____)
- Youth (\$10) under 18 (birth date: month ___ day ___ year _____)

NAME _____
STREET / P.O.BOX: _____

EMAIL _____
ALTERNATE ADDRESS _____

CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____

CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____

MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

- JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC