



# The Ghost Writer

APRIL 2011

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

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

**Saturday: April 2, 9, 16**

Cost: \$50 or \$60 depending on length of walk, \$15 child (\$10 discount for members)

**Reservations Required.**  
Phone (239) 695-1023

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

**Saturday, April 2**

Cost \$50 (\$40 for members),  
**Reservations Required.**  
Phone (239) 695-1023

### VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

**2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday**

**Sat, Apr 9    Tues, Apr 19**  
Phone the Park at (239) 695-4593

### BOARD MEETING

**Sunday, April 10, 2:00 p.m.**

Port of the Islands  
For info, phone (239) 992-5963

### ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING & DINNER

**Sunday, April 10, 5:00 p.m.**

Port of the Islands  
US-41 in East Naples

5:00 – Meet & Greet Reception

6:00 – 3-Course Seated Dinner

Election results, awards

Speaker: Marya Repko

*Grandma of the Glades;*

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas*

cost \$20/member or \$25/guest

**RSVP to (239) 695-2905**

**or BOOK ONLINE at**

**[www.orchidswamp.org](http://www.orchidswamp.org)**

## M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 1/24/11, in the early evening, Joe and Pat Weber, volunteers, observed a healthy adult **bobcat** near headquarters. On 2/1/11, around 11:30 AM, Mike Owen, Biologist, observed off of the East side of the drive, in the recently prescribed burn area, 100 **Tree Swallows** landing in *Myrica cerifera* or Southern Wax Myrtle and then fly around again. On 2/4/11, in the late afternoon, Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, and Don Leonard, volunteer, observed a small sized adult **River Otter** near the Park shop. On 2/7/11, Steven Bass, OPS Ranger (Exotic Removal Specialist), observed four **cottonmouths** ranging from 1.5 feet to 3.5 feet along the drive.

On 2/14/11, Mike Owen observed an adult Bald Eagle circling about 600 feet high in the clear sky over Gate 2. On 2/15/11, Fred Townsend, volunteer, and Steve Houseknecht observed an **American Bittern** crossing Janes Scenic Drive (JSD) just past West Main. On 2/16/11, in the morning, Mike Owen, Don and Dee Leonard, volunteers, observed a **Roseate Spoonbill**, 3 **White Pelicans** and 2 **Wood Storks** about 3 miles West of Intersection SR-29/US-41 in the marsh, on the South side of US-41. On 2/18/11, in the morning, Dee Leonard and Steven Bass observed 9 **Wood Storks** just north of the Water Treatment Plant and 32 **White Ibis** about 3 miles from headquarters.

On 3/1/11 Jeff Kneisley, Park Ranger, observed a 7-inch **Ring-neck snake** off of Jones Grade and on 3/2/11 a **soft shell turtle** on the office driveway. On 3/6/11, Jay Staton and Carol Swingle, both volunteers, and Karen Relish, OPS Ranger, observed a male and female **wood duck** in the ditch off of East Main. On 3/19/11, around 1:30 PM, Amy China, volunteer, sat for a half an hour and observed an **otter** playing in the ditch near Gate 12 as well as saw a **raccoon** in the same area.

On 3/20/11, Dino Barone, volunteer, and Karen Relish observed and heard three **Eastern meadowlarks** calling in Dan House Prairie. On 3/25/11, Steven Bass, observed 7 **Spotted Gar** (1 live and 6 dead) in the ditch off JSD. On 3/26/11, in the late afternoon, Richard Fagan, volunteer, observed an **Osprey** fly over Lake Harmon going west to East.

On 3/26/11, Tom Maish, volunteer, and his granddaughter Emily spotted a **River Otter** and her two pups on JSD just south of K2. Mama and one pup came out, then they went back across JSD to get the second. On 3/27/11, in the late morning, Dan and Terry Wilson, volunteers, and Karen Relish observed a **Northern Harrier** flying and landing in the Pines near the Eastern boundary (SR-29) of the Preserve.

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

Bruce & Janet Bunch went on a Panther Tracking Day with Dennis Giardina on March 25 after winning the adventure during the SAFARI auction. She emailed:

The NPS folks located FP-161 near the Big Cypress headquarters. This was a 7-year-old female with 3 nearly-grown kittens. It was near Bass Lake, so out we went into the jungle with our radio-tracking antenna. We could hear her beeps loud and clear, but obviously every critter within 3 states could hear us coming, so we never saw the kitties. She was close enough to be watching us and I actually felt better knowing we weren't making her move to get away from us.



# ***Me and FP-163***

by Dennis Giardina

*photos courtesy of Ralph Arwood*



In February 2008, Ralph Arwood and I were on ATVs, scouting for tracks ahead of the Big Cypress Panther Capture Team swamp buggy when we came to a sharp bend on the trail. There was a high wall of palmetto on both sides and a deep pool of water in the middle of it. On the other side of the bend, approaching the pool was a female panther and her year-old kittens, including a juvenile male who would affectionately become known as FP-163. The family of panthers didn't hear us coming; we didn't see them coming and I don't know which species was more surprised by the sudden encounter. It was actually the first time I'd seen a Florida panther in the wild (unaided by dogs) and there were three of them, right there 50 feet away from me! We called Rocky McBride who was not far away and he had just loaded up his hounds in the dog box on the back of his swamp buggy. Five minutes later he pulled up to us and let his dogs out into the open pine and palmetto woodland where the cats retreated after the surprise pool party. It was interesting to stand there and watch the six hounds root out the panthers from the palmettos. I don't know how often the dogs get out of the box, sniffing on scent trails that fresh. They seemed almost ecstatic.

After a quick and somewhat comical chase through the vegetation, all the hounds focused on the male kitten and they treed him, while mom and at least one other kitten escaped. Deborah Jansen had the USFWS Endangered Species Coordinator and her colleague on the buggy with her and when the time came, she put them to work and they took their place, holding the capture net with the rest of the team. In fact I remember noticing that there were five females holding onto that net that day (a "You've come a long way baby" moment)! Anyway FP-163 did not fall into the net after he was shot in the hind quarters with a tranquilizer dart; he "hung up," or lost consciousness in the tree. When this happens my job is to quickly climb the tree to tie up and lower down a panther. He was only about twenty feet above the net in a pine tree. However, when I got up to him and started to get my rope ready to tie him up, he slid off his perch and I wasn't yet in place to stop his slide or fall. All I could do was sort of grab him and aim him towards the middle of the net below and let him go (pride bruiser #1).

Putting a radio collar on a panther is a bit tricky. You don't want it too loose or too tight so we measure the neck of the cat and then the inside of the collar over and over until we're satisfied that it's okay. When it came time to put on FP-163's radio collar, Deborah asked me what I thought of her size estimate and I told her that I thought it was too tight. A male panther can put on 20 lbs between his first and second birthday and I was worried about a tight collar choking him, so we made the collar a little bigger. Two days later when Big Cypress did their next scheduled panther radio-telemetry flight, FP-163's signal was coming from very near the capture site, which is never a good sign. When I went out to investigate, I was a fearing the worst, a dead panther. What I found was the second worst, a radio collar without a panther wearing it (pride bruiser #2). I left the field, dragging my self esteem behind me, wondering about FP-163.

In November 2010, I went to Belize for a couple of weeks. I got back on a Monday night feeling okay. Tuesday morning I woke up feeling so sick that I could barely get out of bed all day long. A couple of weeks before my trip, I committed to working with the Fish and Wildlife Commission Capture Team on Wednesday which meant that I had to get up at 4:00 AM to be out in the Addition Lands by 6:00 AM. When I got out there, I was feeling a bit better but still pretty shaky. I never imagined we would catch a panther or how hard I would work that day with a chain saw, cutting our way through overgrown trails and dense vegetation. Finally we arrived at the remote hammock where Roy McBride's hounds had a male panther treed. Once we had the cat on the ground immobilized, we saw that the cat had a number tattooed on his ear. I looked at it and thought, "163, do I know this cat?" Then it dawned on me, I sure did know this cat. He was now a robust almost four-year old male, 50 lbs heavier than when I last saw him. When I got home that evening I sent an E-mail and some pictures to Deborah Jansen saying, "Deborah, we got our boy 163 back! Don't worry; I didn't have anything to do with his new radio collar." Now I look forward to following the adventures of FP-163 and there is a chance that we will meet again... someday.

*Dennis Giardina is the Everglades Region Biologist, Invasive Plant Management Section, of the FWC and was formerly Manager of Fakahatchee Strand. He is Vice-President of FOF.*



## President's Message

This is my last column as President. The three years have gone by quickly; meeting and working with interesting folks as we have grown and enhanced the recognition of the Fakahatchee.

Through the Vision Committee, the Friends focused on what the FOF wanted to accomplish. Our primary goal has focused on the renovation of our aging Boardwalk and the addition of safe parking and clean, environmentally-sound restrooms that currently do not exist. Working with Florida Park Service Planners, the Friends now have three designs to consider as a starting point for the Boardwalk Facility Development. Our next challenge is to find the funds to start the process of planning, permitting and construction.

A successful campaign among our Members raised \$40,000. That increased our Partnership-in-Parks grant match to \$100,000 providing a match from the State of \$66,666 that will be used for the Boardwalk Facility.

Our goal is to prove the need for the Boardwalk Facility Development and that the Friends are out front raising money and not just coming "hat in hand" to the Legislature.

The Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park attracts over 100,000 visitors per year from all over the world making the Fakahatchee a major economic generator for rural Eastern Collier County. Yet, there is little infrastructure to accommodate these visitors.

On the financial side, our assets have increased over 80% in the last three years while providing thousands of dollars to Park Support each year!

The Fakahatchee SAFARI and Fakahatchee Coastal Cruise have expanded our interpretation programs plus provided funds.

This year a major milestone occurred with the FOF becoming the prototype of a legal entity to funnel "Mitigation Funds" into the Fakahatchee.. Documents were signed that will provide approximately \$14,000 per year in additional Park Support to maintain land that was added to the Fakahatchee in exchange for land being developed along Oil Well Road.

Our Organization has evolved from meeting "seasonally" into all year around. Starting in April the FOF will have scheduled meetings on alternate months in the fiscal year.

Other operational improvements include:

- Engaging a CPA to audit our accounts and prepare required tax and legal reports
- Securing liability insurance to protect our activities and assets
- Changing our By-Laws to add email voting to conduct business between scheduled meetings
- Acquiring an office in Everglades City Hall to provide secure storage of our records.

The Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park has become more well-known through the continuing media coverage that has resulted from our Board members actively escorting various media representatives into the Fakahatchee. There are soon-to-be-released documentaries on major TV networks featuring the Fakahatchee in addition to the FOF partial sponsorship of the PBS film "Big Cypress: the Western Everglades" that featured several of our members and Park Staff.

It will be a pleasure to assist the new Officers and Board as we continue the growth toward our Vision.

All the best,  
Tom Maish

## BOARDWALK REPORT

March has been a busy month on the Boardwalk with visitors from all over the world, as well as families and young people on Spring break from school. We enjoy talking to everyone and trying to answer their many questions. Children usually ask the best ones, and then the adults lean in to hear what they were too shy (or embarrassed) to ask! Everyone likes to borrow our binoculars to get a closer look at the eagles and ospreys on their nests with young, and the red shouldered hawk nesting near the twin bald cypress trees.

Our two eagle chicks are very visible now. The larger of the two is nearly an adult size and took a short flight on March 25. People are always surprised to hear that they are only 9-10 weeks old. We have several visitors that come regularly to photograph them and wait for hours to see the parents fly in with food. We have developed quite an appreciation for nature photographers. Patience is definitely required!

The swamp forest is so lush and green this year. Hurricane Wilma damaged our bald cypress canopy back in 2005 and for several years there was very little shade as you walked along the boardwalk. We now have a lot of shade, as the canopy has recovered. We have new growth of buttonbush and lizard's-tail, royal palm fronds, and the light green of the new bald cypress leaves is particularly pretty this year. Each year at this time, we have an adult art class that comes out to capture all those beautiful colors.

The boardwalk volunteer work group of Dick Hughes, Bud Scott and Nelson Tilden have been working every Tuesday as evidenced by all the new railings, supports, and decking repairs. There are many visitors coming and going as they work. Our donations have increased this year and possibly there is a connection. We are grateful to Dick Hughes who was able to repair our boardwalk counter. In the past, sending it away for repair was very costly and it took a long time. The park office reports these numbers to the state on a regular basis and it was important to get it working again. Edite Hughes has continued her work of keeping the boardwalk clean and Kathy Hatch has provided her valuable interpretation skills each week. All the volunteer help is highly appreciated.

Many thanks to all you faithful members who come back to visit several times during the winter season. Keep bringing your friends and families. You are enthusiastic ambassadors of the Boardwalk and we appreciate you!

Caryl Tilden, Volunteer Naturalist



Glen Stacell led 36 people on the March 20 Coastal Cruise up the shell mound on Fakahatchee Island to the old cemetery, pointing out the plants along the way and answering questions. The next Coastal Cruise will probably be in November.

**MEMBERSHIP NEWS**

We have 328 paid memberships including 44 from the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter who are in arrears plus 14 Introductory members. Reminders have been sent to those who have not paid. The breakdown by membership type is:

Business	10	Family	155
Individual	120	Introductory	14
Patron	42	Youth	1

You can join or renew on our website with a credit card.

**Welcome to new members:**

- Jackie & Arden McCurdy, Bonita Springs
- Dennis & Diana Newman, Columbus, OH
- Roger Spitzer, Hollywood

**Election for Board Members**

Ballots were sent by post on March 23. Please make sure your official return envelope is postmarked by **April 4** to give the new candidates a vote of confidence.



***Bike Ride Benefits FOF***

Some of the proceeds from the Everglades Ride sponsored by Naples Pathway Coalition on **Sunday, April 17**, will go to FOF this year. Bicyclists meet in Everglades City where they can take part in rides ranging in distance from 16 to 82 miles including a "fat tire" route through the Fakahatchee.

The deadline for entries is **April 8**. For info and to register, phone (239) 695-2397 or see [www.evergladesrogg.org](http://www.evergladesrogg.org).

**PICNIC PICS**



**Over 60 people enjoyed chicken and shrimp at the Annual Picnic in the Mesce Pavilion. Renee won the door prize donated by Bill and we sold \$150 worth of shirts and hats. Thanks to Bill & Pam Mesce for the use of the pavilion and to everyone who helped out.**

***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 – Tom Maish    | Vice-President – Dennis Giardina |                |                 |             |                 |
|           | Secretary – Howard Lubel | Treasurer – Saul Friess          |                |                 |             |                 |
| BOARD:    | Allen Caldwell           | Elsa Caldwell                    | Julia Cardenas | Frank Denninger | Saul Friess | Dennis Giardina |
|           | Cindy Hackney            | Howard Lubel                     | Tom Maish      | Glenn Stacell   | Jay Staton  | Carol Swingle   |

**NEW ANNUAL 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) \_\_\_ Business (\$50) \_\_\_ Patron (\$100) \_\_\_ Benefactor (\$500) \_\_\_ extra (\$ \_\_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_ Youth (\$10) birth date: month \_\_\_ day \_\_\_ year \_\_\_ (members under 18 years old must select this)

NAME _____	EMAIL _____
STREET / P.O.BOX: _____	<u>ALTERNATE ADDRESS</u> _____
CITY _____	CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____	STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____	PHONE _____

**MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:**

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