



The Ghost Writer

OCTOBER 2013

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturday
Resume on November 9.

GHOST RIDER TRAM TOURS

Tuesday at 10am, 1st Saturday
Resume on December 10.

COASTAL CRUISES

will resume in the winter

You can download the FOF events calendar and reservation forms for the 2013-2014 winter season at our website www.orchidswamp.org.

BOARD MEETING

Sunday, October 13, 10 a.m.
Ranger Station, Copeland

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Board Development (Governance):

Francine Stevens, Kathleen DaSilva

Boardwalk Vision: Tom Maish, Francine Stevens

Fundraising Development: Tom Maish, Francine Stevens

Communications:

Website & FaceBook: Rose Flynn

Newsletter: Marya Repko

Budget & Finance: Jimene Rinehart

Education & Outreach: Glen Stacell

Resource Management: Howard Lubel

Membership: Jinny Ball

Merchandise: Jimene Rinehart

Signature Event (Toast the Ghost):

Jimene Rinehart

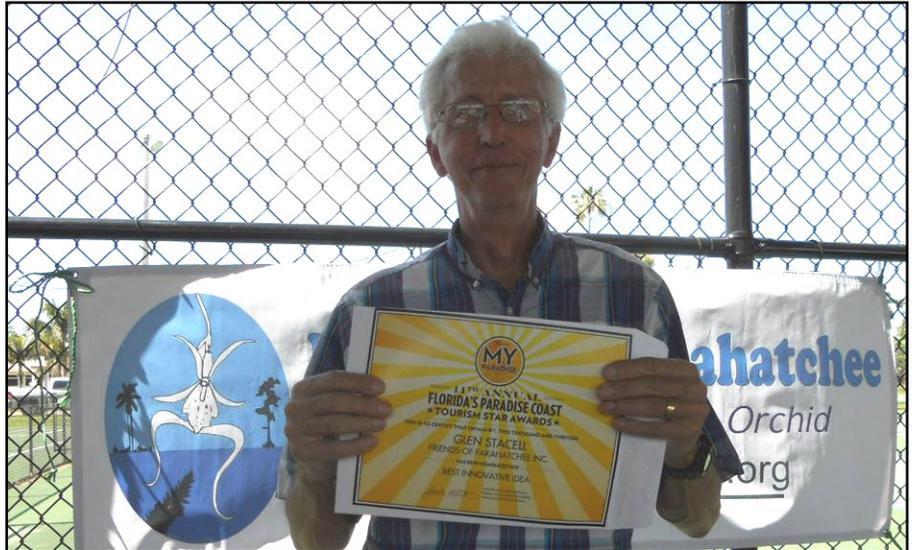
Traditional Events: Francine Stevens,

Jinny Ball, Marya Repko

Historian: Franklin Adams

Scrap Book: Jinny Ball

If you would like to help on any of the committees, contact (239) 495-6744.



CONGRATULATIONS to Glen Stacell who was given a Tourism Star Award by the Collier Tourism Board for the "Best Innovative Idea". It was Glen who started the Tram Tours in February and spent many hours explaining the Fakahatchee to passengers.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

FOF is planning a really ambitious schedule of activities this winter – tram tours, swamp walks, and coastal cruises – and help is needed for all of them.

Glen Stacell, who is coordinating all these events, says "We need a number of new volunteers. We need pickup truck drivers and guides for the tram. We could use some guides for the swamp walks. And we need naturalists and helpers for the coastal cruise. We are looking for people who could volunteer once or twice each month."

You can contact Glen at (239) 348-3455 or gstacell@comcast.net.



THANKS to volunteers who took part in National Public Lands Day on September 28 at the Fakahatchee, seen in this photo by Rose Flynn.

Visit www.orchidswamp.org for events, newsletters, colored tram map, history, and more.

M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 6/11/13, around noon, Steve Houseknecht, Park Services Specialist, and Steven Bass, Park Ranger, observed **Southern Ring-necked Snake** about 10 inches long and a **Scarlet King-Snake** about 1.5 feet long under plywood around the Park Shop. On 6/16/13, in the evening, in the first part of Janes Scenic Drive (JSD), Renee Rau, Park Manager, and her father Larry Rau observed **2 King Rails**, **2 Hispid Cotton Rats** and a **Yellow Rat Snake** and on 6/21/13, they observed a **Barn Owl** on the south shoulder of US-41 east of East River. On 6/20/13, at 9AM, Glen Stacell, Volunteer, observed a **Florida Box Turtle** on SR-29 on his way to Fakahatchee. On Saturday 6/29/13, before noon, both Steven Bass and Bob Becker observed an **Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake** up in the NW section of the park while spraying cogon grass.

On 7/9/13, and 7/12/13 in the morning, Bente Torvund, Administrative Assistant, observed a male **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** in the Visitor's Center Butterfly Garden (*see photo*). On 7/12/13, in the evening, Bente Torvund observed a **King Rail** flushed from Dan House Prairie, a Male **Eastern Towhee** singing as well as a **Florida Black Bear** walking down the access road. On 7/13/13, around 8AM, on Jones Grade, Steven Bass, Charlie "Barkley" Kneisley and Dino Barone, Volunteer, observed a 200-300 pound **Florida Black Bear**. On 7/13/13, while picking non-native potatoes and pulling potato vines off of Gate 15 tram, Steven Bass with volunteers Rose Flynn and Howard Lubel observed a Juvenile **Water Moccasin**. On Sunday 7/14/13, around noon, in the first mile of the drive, Dino Barone observed a **Hispid Cotton Rat** along the drive and a **Red-shouldered Hawk** drop what appeared to be a crayfish and then fly off.

On 7/15/13, in the afternoon, Mike Owen, Biologist, observed a **King Rail**, **20 White Ibis**, **3 Red Winged Blackbirds**, a **Little Blue Heron**, **3 Great Egrets**, and a **Red-shoulder Hawk** both in East and Lee Cypress Prairies. On 7/22/13, at 3:05PM, near West Main, Mike Owen and Renee Rau observed 2 adult **River Otters** cross JSD. On 8/1/13, around 4PM, over Harmon Lakes, Mike Owen and Jeff Kneisley, Park Ranger, observed 4 **Swallow-tailed Kites** and an **Osprey**.

On 8/1/13, Charlotte of the UF Marsh Rabbit Project found a five to six foot **Eastern diamondback rattlesnake** off of JSD that had eaten an adult 1.5-2 pound rabbit a day or 2 days earlier. On 8/15/13, at 10:33AM, around the Harmon Lakes, Mike Owen observed 40 **Barn Swallows**, **Red-winged Blackbirds** including a juvenile, and an **Eastern Kingbird** just past the lakes on the Drive. On 8/17/13, at 12:18PM, Howard Lubel and Dino Barone observed an impressively tall "Bass" walking in the east ditch off of East Main Trail. Around 1:23PM they encountered and observed a very large **swarm of bees** just over the canopy. About 15 minutes later the swarm seemed to settle down approx. 30 feet up in a Gumbo Limbo tree.

On 8/20/13, in the early afternoon, near the Administration Building, Bente Torvund observed a **Yellow-throated Warbler**, calling and foraging from a Sabal Palmetto, **20 Barn Swallows** flying low over the grass, and a **Southern Black Racer** eating a Southern toad. On 8/20/13, at 4:20PM, Steve Bass observed 1 **Eastern Diamondback** 4.5 long on SR-29 going West. On 8/26/13, in the morning, while close to Lake Harmon, Bente Torvund observed an **Osprey** sitting on the telephone pole, a **Solitary Sandpiper** flushed out and, while close to the Firetower Pond, saw 15 **Barn swallows** flying around and a **Belted Kingfisher** perched on the telephone wire across the pond. On 8/27/2013, around 10:30AM, over the Firetower Pond, Bente Torvund observed an **Osprey** and 2 **Anhingas** circling in the thermal as well as 20 **Barn Swallows** perched on tall grass and telephone wire near Harmon lakes. On 8/28/13, at noon, Renee Rau and Bente Torvund observed a **Whip Scorpion** on Park Premise. On 9/1/13, around 10AM, Jeff Kneisley observed 16 **Softshell Turtle** hatchlings emerge from a clutch into the Visitor Center yard.

If you want to report sightings, contact Park biologist Mike Owen or his assistant Karen Relish by phone at (239) 695-2886 or by email at FOF_90@hotmail.com



Thanks to Bente Torvund for this photo of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird seen in July at the butterfly garden.

PROTECT & PRESERVE

We had this email warning from Jim Woodard:

All who are inclined to post Ghost, and other rare plant, photos should remember that many photos taken with smart phones and other GPS-enabled cameras, can inadvertently transmit locations in their email posts. But, everyone should make sure the GPS information is wiped from pictures and/or the GPS function turned off when pictures are taken. The same goes for taking visitors with smart phones that you think will never find their way back to the spot.

Farewell To Jeff

Our thanks to Park Ranger Jeff Kneisley who has coordinated volunteers in the Fakahatchee. His final report is on page 6, written just before he moved away. We wish him well.

President's Message

by Francine Stevens

The abundance of rain during the summer, not seen in numerous years and still in force, continues to be a huge welcome to the Fakahatchee Strand. I recall a swamp walk on Memorial Day when already water was up to my butt; on that same day we drove all the way to the end of Janes Scenic and several miles into the Picayune Strand to satisfy our curiosity of the restoration that is taking place there and we discovered that nature had already aggressively taken over. I can only imagine how much more the summer's rain helped mother nature. On the flip side of the benefit of this huge rainy season, the Fakahatchee Park roads have eroded and many accesses into the Fakahatchee have become difficult if not impassable and the exotics are still having a field day – pun intended! The work ahead to prepare access to the Fakahatchee for the coming season will be more challenging than previous years so **I'm reaching out for Volunteers to call the Park at 239-695-4593 to see how you can help!**

It is with much sadness that the Fakahatchee was again victim of Ghost Orchid poachers, I will never comprehend the selfish and ill-intent behind these violations and WE are all victims. I can only hope that eventually the perpetrators will be caught. We are all keeping an eagle eye to anything suspicious in the Fakahatchee.

Now I have to take you indoors; after numerous summer hours behind PCs, on the phone, and doing research there's some pretty darn exciting stuff coming up – just to name a few: we are on the edge of offering our members a new FOF Website thanks to Rose Flynn who's been on the Board since April and has done a lot in very little time. We are also launching a new reservation system called Eventbrite which will increase tickets sales to our Ghost Rider tram, Fakahatchee Island Cruises, Swamp Walks and other events. For this improvement I thank Bruce Bunch, our media guru, who proposed Eventbrite and who is writing and posting on Eventbrite and Jinny Ball who will be monitoring it. Pam Mesce, at her request, will no longer be in charge of reservation but we are happy for her new employment and thank her sincerely for keeping up with reservations all this time.

I saved the "Big One" for last; FOF purchased a truck to pull the Ghost Rider tram and to assist the Park. This was possible with money in the budget that ends up in the budget **because of each one of you our members who support FOF** and because of a very generous \$10,000 from Tom & Judy Maish and another generous \$1,500 from Glen & Laura Stacell. Thank you just doesn't seem to be enough when I know how much of their lives Tom and Glen have dedicated to the FOF in addition to their generosity. Jimene Rinehart, Kathy DaSilva, and Glen Stacell dealt with several dealerships to find the best deal, I admire them for suffering the process of negotiating with car dealerships!

The work I highlighted is just the tip of the iceberg of what was accomplished during the summer, the routine work of keeping FOF in good standing is never ending and I extend my appreciation to the entire Board of directors for their energy and dedication during the summer's months.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

by Howard Lubel, Chair

Resource Management Committee

Resource management committee activities have included a continuation of the prairie hammock surveys, trail and road monitoring and maintenance as well as a review of park equipment and maintenance needs.

Patrick Higgins has continued his survey of prairie hammocks often assisted by Rose Flynn. Patrick visits hammocks in various prairies throughout the park and collects data on the plants, flowers, trees and wildlife found therein and on the surrounding prairies. All significant findings are documented in writing and with photographs. Oftentimes the walks are long, through high water and hot weather in the open prairies. The data is furnished to Mike Owen for use in documenting developments in the park's ecology as well as for use in the park's prescribed burn program.

Volunteers from the committee have assisted rangers, Jeff and Steven, with trail clearing work on the east and west main trams, Jones Grade from SR 29 to the gate and on Janes Scenic Drive. The water level in the swamp is quite high and the trams are overgrown and some were underwater in places. Additional efforts will be required to keep summer growth in check. A new volunteer, Paul Joslyn, joined by our volunteer coordinator, Dino Barone, participated in a number of these work days. Many thanks to Paul and Dino. *Photos of east main tram south of its intersection with Jones Grade are included below.* As the water recedes, additional efforts will be required to keep this tram open for staff and the Ultramarathon.

Janes Scenic Drive is covered with holes, large and larger from the prairies above the office all the way to the Picayune. Driving the road requires your attention and willingness to accept some jolts here and there. The Drive has standing water across its width in places so additional caution is required. FOF has agreed to purchase fill for the road, some of which has been delivered and used to repair some damage on the Drive's first mile. Further work will be necessary as park volunteers return for the season.

The Polaris Ranger is out of commission and needs a new engine. The Sonoma is likewise unusable presently. These vehicles are the ones used by staff to transport volunteers and equipment on Janes and the trams for resource management purposes. Their loss will make transport of volunteers to work sites problematic.

The park is also in need of trail maintenance equipment such as hedge trimmers and the like. Some of this equipment will be purchased from funds raised in the last annual campaign. The pumps for both the 60 and 25 gallon tanks used in exotic control efforts are in need of replacement. This loss inhibits the staff's never ending exotic control efforts.

The park has approximately 32 miles of roads and trams to maintain. It requires constant effort for the rangers to keep them open and safe for staff, volunteers and visitors especially considering manpower and equipment limitations. Their work is endless.

Taking Stock of Fakahatchee's Prairie Hammocks

by Patrick Higgins

Late this spring during a chance conversation with Karen Johnson at the ranger station's newly-planted butterfly garden I was outed as a 'cryptobiologist'. By that I don't mean someone who goes in pursuit of mythical creatures like Sasquatch, but rather someone who has trained as biologist but never practiced as one. As Karen's eyes lit up I could almost see the thought bubble with the word "RESOURCE" flashing in it. She quickly pounced and the next thing I knew I was meeting Park Biologist Mike Owen to discuss a couple of projects tasked by Tallahassee on his ever-growing, but completely under-resourced, 'to-do' list. This was the beginning of the Prairie Hammock Survey.

When we think of the Fakahatchee we tend to focus on the Strand itself but there are seven main prairies within the Preserve. These are wet prairies – the least flooded of any Florida marsh type covered by water for only a few months of the year. They are also very species rich, even without taking into account the myriad of tree islands (hammocks) dotted across them. These develop on limestone outcrops that raise them slightly above the surrounding terrain and are mini-ecosystems in their own right. *Their drier ground, abundant food supply and cover make them important resources for wildlife, but the Park does not have a lot of data on them.*

That's where the Prairie Hammock Survey comes in. It will provide data for input into the Park's Burn Zone Map. Hammocks containing oaks are of particular interest because their acorns are an important food source for white-tailed deer, which in turn are the favorite prey species of the Florida panther. Acorns are most abundant on the ground from October through December when the nutritional value of the prairies' other plant species are at their lowest. Knowing which hammocks are important for acorn production feeds in to the Park's panther management objectives, although acorns are also an important food for the Florida black bear, as well as wild turkey, gray and fox squirrels, mice, voles, rabbits, raccoons, opossums and foxes. The survey will help the Park identify which hammocks should be protected when the surrounding prairie is subject to rotational (prescribed)

burning and will also provide a baseline for detecting and monitoring any changes in species composition over time.

A typical survey day is on foot and often begins by wading waist deep across the borrow ditch after a careful check there aren't any alligators lurking nearby. Once on the prairie during the wet season, and this is a very wet one, water is usually calf deep except in the hammock interiors where you have to be alert for other critters seeking dry feet or bellies, as the case may be. Rose Flynn has been joining me recently and adding her knowledge of the Fakahatchee. So far we've concentrated on Lee-Cypress, Copeland and West Prairies. When we've collected enough survey data we may see trends in species composition. But you only have to look at a close-up of the Park on Google Earth to see that there are an awful lot of hammocks. It's rather like painting the Brooklyn bridge.

Each hammock is surprisingly different and brings a sense of discovery. We record its latitude and longitude, write a brief description, photograph it, measure its circumference, calculate its canopy height, do a transect, tabulate the quantity of each tree and shrub species, as well as log water depth, wildlife sightings, bromeliad and ferns present, and note nearby blooming flowers. This usually involves circumnavigating each hammock 3 or 4 times, so we cover a lot of ground, but the real time involved is getting there. Some of the prairies are quite remote and just to do one or two hammocks can take a whole day, especially when you are diverted by an interesting spider or some other natural marvel.

Still, it's a privilege to be able to tramp across such a beautiful landscape, even more so when there's a purpose to the trek, and as a new member of the FOF Board it's a fine opportunity to 'learn' the Park. Besides, there is something about open spaces and big skies that appeals to the human psyche – perhaps because mankind evolved in a similar savannah environment.

Patrick Higgins has been tromping around the Fakahatchee since 2004 and has helped with FOF Coastal Cruises and Ghost Rider tram tours as an expert interpreter. He operates his own eco-tour company www.tropicbirdsailing.com



Typical small hammock on Lee-Cypress prairie to the west of Janes Scenic Drive.



Photo by Rose Flynn of Patrick carrying survey gear on the way to the prairie.

Between the Leaves

by Marya Repko



Among the books I read over the summer, here are three that FOF members might also enjoy.

The Scent of Scandal; Greed, Betrayal, and the World's Most Beautiful Orchid tells the story of the new slipper orchid (*Phragmipedium kovachii*) named after the man who brought it back from Peru to Selby Gardens in Sarasota.

You might not agree with the description "most beautiful" in the sub-title but the narrative from journalist Craig Pittman flows, describing the controversy about the naming of the orchid and the way the plant was exported. The author has obviously done a lot of research. If he sounds familiar, he also co-wrote ***Paving Paradise*** and is a correspondent for the *St. Petersburg Times*.

Backcountry Lawman; True Stories from a Florida Game Warden is a new book by Bob H. Lee telling about his adventures as a game warden chasing illegal fishermen and hunters in the St. Johns River region from 1977 to 2007. He admires some of the outlaws who were polite to him and clever enough not to get caught.

Lee was first employed by the Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission but that merged in 1999 with the Florida Marine Patrol to become the FWC (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission) which has hundreds of law enforcement officers (who have full police powers and statewide jurisdiction). Although he grew up in Lutz, near Tampa, and received a degree in criminal justice from USF, his ambition was to "catch bad guys and work in the outdoors."

This is an easy read with lots of exciting incidents. The book is available in the Collier County Public Library.

Finally, a book by one of our FOF members. Gary Schmelz has written a memoir about exploring Southwest Florida's natural areas with his father in ***Journey to the Edge of Eden***. As an environmentalist, he knew what the flora & fauna were as they discovered remote regions, including the swamps of the Fakahatchee. Some of the incidents are amusing, like the giant spider landing on his dad, and other are poignant, as his constant outdoor companion grew into old age.

After working his way through college and graduate school, and a stint on a Navy research vessel to satisfy the draft board, he ended up on Marco Island advising developer Deltona about the environment. He later worked for the Conservancy and taught at Edison College. He feels that educating younger generations is crucial to saving our special surroundings.

Gary is the co-author with Glen Stacell of ***A Guide to Native Wildflowers of Southwest Florida***. He will be the speaker at our Welcome-Back Dinner on December 7.

If you've read a book that might interest other FOF members, send a brief (100 word) review to The Ghost Writer at FOF_90@hotmail.com.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Linda Koreny

Cape Flattery, WA, is the most northwestern point in the continental USA. From the trailhead to the Point, slightly more than a half mile, the trail descended the whole way often with steep stairs built into the trail. All this means, of course, is that the way back is entirely uphill and so much so that us "flatlanders" sometimes needed to stop for a break. Reaching the Point you are still several hundred feet above the water and the view is spectacular. With our binoculars we could see sea lions lounging on a distant rock island and below us, along the walls of the sea caves you could see bright orange and purple star fish and grass green anemones.

Diagonally opposite, the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk is nearly the most southeastern point in the USA with sights every bit as spectacular but at this end, it is more in the details. With binoculars we can watch the bald eagle and ospreys in their nests and on the ground black racer snakes, Florida black bear, alligators and amazing spider webs. Spring time often brings baby alligators, eagles and ospreys to add to the fun! The temperate and tropical vegetation with all its amazing changes over the season also beg to be noticed and appreciated.

In our travels across the country this summer we met many park volunteers who pointed out things we would have otherwise missed as our eyes are not accustomed to know where to look. We were glad to find them as their suggestions greatly enhanced our visit to their park.

Many people from numerous other states and countries will be visiting southwest Florida this winter and the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, as we all know, is one of the very best and most interesting places to stop. From my experience of the past couple of years volunteering on the Fakahatchee Boardwalk, most of these visitors do not know where or how to look to see the sights they came to see. You cannot imagine just how many walked right by the alligators without seeing them! As volunteers, we have an opportunity to greatly enhance their visit.

A benefit for me has been what I have learned from them too! For instance, birders always seem interested in pointing out birds and when I am asked a question I cannot answer, I find that when I've later gotten an answer from the park staff, I have learned something which enhances my own experience!

I've come to realize that this is also a very, very important opportunity because the more someone learns about the animals, plants, hydrology, etc., of the area, the more they appreciate it and the more they appreciate it, the more likely they will want to protect it.

This is an invitation for you to become part of all of this. You live here or spend time here so you already know more than our visitors. Of course, everyone does not enjoy engaging with visitors yet still have much needed talents to offer. Please consider volunteering a bit of time this winter. I look forward to seeing you and working with you when we return in November!

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 372 memberships including 21 who are in arrears from the 2nd and 3rd quarters of 2013.

There are 8 memberships in the new "Supporter" category who each donated a total of \$50 for their renewal.

FOF Board member Jinny Ball has agreed to take over the task of Membership Secretary using the new Gift Works software that we adopted last year. She will send out 4th quarter renewals soon.

Welcome to new members since our last newsletter:

- Shawn Beams, Naples
- Fay Brett, Naples
- Christine Girty, Pittsburg, PA
- Dennis Goodman, Naples
- Janice Newcomer, East Berlin, PA
- Josef Noebauer, Weston

NEW LIFETIME MEMBERS

Thanks to Glen & Laura Stacell who donated \$1,500 towards the purchase of the new tram and became Lifetime Family members.



VOLUNTEER CORNER



by Jeff Kneisley

First off, I would like to thank volunteers who helped with work on the Harmon building, Visitor Center, and Boardwalk all in the last week of September. It really helps the operation get prepared for season.

The park will need many volunteers to run the visitor center. The park will begin staffing it with volunteers in late October. Initially it will be the goal to have it open on weekends but later in season it will be a 7 days a week operation. This position will be vital in continuing to improve the visitor experience at Fakahatchee. If you want to volunteer, phone (239) 695-4593.

Lastly, I will be moving on to Silver River State Park which now includes the Silver Springs attraction. I have enjoyed working with and learning from volunteers at Fakahatchee.

What Are We? Who Are We?

The Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation Citizen Support Organization, provides financial and volunteer support to preserve the unique ecology and cultural heritage of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and to educate the public about its importance. The Fakahatchee is 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 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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 Secretary – Jinny Ball Treasurer – Kathleen DaSilva
- BOARD: Jinny Ball Bruce Bunch Kathleen DaSilva Frank Denninger Shaun Floyd Rose Flynn
 Dennis Giardina Patrick Higgins John Kaiser Howard Lubel Tony Marx Jimene Rinehart
 Ken Shapiro Glen Stacell Francine Stevens

- LIFETIME MEMBERS: Warner Blow, Peter Haffenreffer, Tom & Judy Maish, James Nici, Ken Shapiro, Glen & Laura Stacell
 LIFETIME PRESERVERS: Bruce & Janet Bunch
 BUSINESS PATRONS: EarthTech Environmental, Naples Bicycle Tours, North American Canoe Tours, Shamrock Bank, Shurr Adventures

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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) Supporter (\$50) Patron (\$100) Benefactor (\$500)

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