



The Ghost Writer

SUMMER 2008

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, "Home of the Ghost Orchid"

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

Will Resume in November

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

Will Resume in November

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2008:

Saturday, Nov 8 Tuesday, Nov 18

Saturday, Dec 13 Tuesday, Dec 16

2009:

Saturday, Jan 10 Tuesday, Jan 20

Saturday, Feb 14 Tuesday, Feb 17

Saturday, Mar 14 Tuesday, Mar 17

Saturday, Apr 11 Tuesday, Apr 21

Details about what the work involves will be announced closer to the dates. When needed, safety equipment will be supplied. For info, phone the Park office at (239) 695-4593.

The Florida Panther Refuge will be featured on WGPU public TV on Friday, June 20, and on WGPU radio on the following Monday, June 23.

The "Alligator Amblers" chapter of Florida Trails have walking and canoeing activities during the summer. For details phone (239) 878-6854 or see www.ambler.floridatrail.org.

Independence Day Celebration

Sunday, July 6

Everglades City

Phone (239) 695-2905 for info and to help on the FOF booth.



M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

A **Panther** was observed crossing the south portion of the boardwalk under the lower rail at Big Cypress Bend at about 10:20AM on 3/16/08 by Susan Maunz who said it was an adult and probably weighed about 80 pounds. A Panther was observed crossing Janes Scenic Drive to the west at about ¼ mile south of Gate 12 at 2:40PM on 3/23/08 by Sarah Skoglund. Three Panthers (1 female with 2 kittens about 12-14 months old) were observed on East Main tram north of the curve at about 3PM on 4/4/08 by biologists Dave Shindle and Ian Bartoszek. Two Panthers were observed on East Main tram in the same area on 4/10/08 by Ian Bartoszek. Four Panthers were observed on Janes Scenic Drive about 1 mile north of Gate 7 at 8:16AM on 4/30/08 by Glen Stacell who said they all looked healthy and the 3 kittens were "bouncy"!

A **River Otter** was seen running on Jones Grade toward the Stilt house gate and into the north ditch at about 2PM on 4/5/08 by Park Services Specialist Bob Newbould. An **Everglades Mink** was seen crossing Janes Drive about 2 miles north of the Copeland Fire tower at 7:40AM on 4/13/08 by biologist John Kellum. Bill Mesce and Nelson Tilden saw a 3'6" **King Snake** near the park office on 4/16/08.

On 5/2/08, Bob Newbould saw a large **Bobcat** on Jones Grade. On 5/4/08, Don Harmon observed an immature **Bald Eagle** at Lake Harmon. On 5/12/08 around 8:45AM, photographer Jay Staton observed a 2.5-ft. long **Rough Green Snake** on Janes Scenic Drive. He also noted a road kill 18-inch long **Yellow Rat Snake** on Janes Scenic Drive. On 5/14/08 and 5/17/08 in the morning Mike Owen heard a **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** calling around the park shop compound. On 5/14/08, while conducting the East River Roost count with volunteers Cyril Marks and Ron Kotliar, Karen Relish and Mike observed one **Great White Heron** feeding along the edge of the lake south of the canoe launch.

On 5/15/08, Mike and Ron Kotliar observed an **Eastern Mud Snake** 3.5-ft. long along West Main tram. On 5/17/08 around 11AM, Park Rangers Jill Waisley and Steve Houseknecht saw an 18-inch long **Mangrove Water Snake** above water on a mangrove in the East River. On 5/20/08 Bob Newbould noted a **Killdeer** giving its "broken wing act" with a nest nearby of 4 eggs on the ground near the borrow pits off of Jones Grade and on 5/22/08 he saw an 18-inch **Rough Green Snake** on Jones Grade. On 5/20/08, Mike heard a **Great Horned owl** along the East Prairies. On 5/21/08 at 5:02PM Renee Rau, Park Manager, saw a **Bobcat** on Janes Scenic Drive. On 5/25/08 around 9:15AM, Steve Houseknecht saw a 4-ft. long **Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake** on Well Grade Road. On 5/26/08 Win Turner, Ron Kotliar, and Karen Relish noted **Butterfly Orchids**, both young and blooming, and **Jingle Bell Orchids** as well as **Assassin Bugs** along Mud Tram. On 5/26/08, in the evening, Mike and Donna Glann-Smyth observed one **Gray Fox** on Janes Drive.

On 5/29/08, during the Annual Breeding Bird Point Count, Mike and Ron Kotliar saw two **Chuck-Will's-Widows** and a **Bat** along Janes Scenic Drive and then observed an **American Kestrel**, **Swallow-tailed Kite**, **Osprey**, **Black Vulture** and heard **Northern Cardinals**, **Mourning Doves**, **Eastern Meadowlarks**, **Red-winged Blackbirds**, **Red-bellied Woodpeckers**, **Eastern Tufted Titmice**, **Great-crested Flycatcher**, **Downy Woodpecker**, **White-eyed Vireos**, **Northern Bobwhite** and **Rufous-sided Towhees** during the count. They also saw a **Doe** and a yearling on Dan House Prairie.

On 5/30/08, in the early evening, Renee Rau saw an approximately 300-pound **Bear** walking around near SR-29. On 5/30/08 in the early morning, Karen Relish saw a 350-pound **Black Bear** off of West Main. On 5/30/08, in the morning, Mike observed a **Short-tailed Hawk** dark morph over Dan House Prairie.

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

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



ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING

by Marya Repko

New Park Manager Renee Rau joined 27 FOF members and directors at the Mesce Pavilion in Copeland on Sunday, April 13, for the annual meeting.

After the membership and treasurer's reports, President Nelson Tilden outlined our achievements over the year which include:

- Improved condition of Janes Scenic Drive because of the road scraper built by FOF
- Improved "iron ranger" at Boardwalk which can hold more money, has been repainted, and has sign on it to encourage donations
- Improved sign on US-41 pointing to Boardwalk
- Two new kayaks purchased from Nederveld fund
- Official state shirts for volunteers
- Work days at Boardwalk and Janes Drive
- Continuing interpretation and education at the Boardwalk, on swamp walks, and on canoe trips
- Persuaded FDOT to paint double-yellow lines on US-41 at Boardwalk entrance

Renee Rau thanked FOF for their support, especially in light of budget cutbacks. She said that the emphasis at the state is on "going green" and complying with the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). One issue that was sparked off by the letters FOF members wrote to the Park Service is better protection of the Fak boundary. About 500 signs will be needed to mark it out and, although there is only one patrol officer, she hopes one from another park might also be assigned to the Fak.

The results of the election for new directors was announced by Nominating Committee chair Allen Caldwell. He explained that 5 positions were open for the new 11-member board and that 5 candidates had been nominated. Of the 277 ballots sent out, 84 were returned. He welcomed new directors Dennis Giardina, Susan O'Farrell, David Shindle, and Glenn Stacell and congratulated Tom Maish on his re-election. The full list

of directors is on the back page of this newsletter. Outgoing directors were presented with certificates of appreciation, as were Vicky Nagle for her meticulous care of our merchandise, Pam Mesce for her handling of reservations, and Marya Repko.

Finally, Jim Woodard introduced Carol Swingle, a member from Miami who wandered into the Fak last spring in flip-flops and shorts with no water, compass, or map. She got lost. Three days later, Mike Owen and Karen Relish found her. Jim said it was lucky that she was here now, in good health. Thank-you gifts (and big hugs) were given to the rescuers. See photo below.

At the Board meeting that followed, President Nelson Tilden handed over the gavel (a stone crab hammer, of course) to Tom Maish. Also elected were Dennis Giardina as Vice President, Marya Repko as Secretary, and Vicky Nagle as Treasurer.

Standing committees (and their chairperson) are:

- Finance (Cathy Hatch)
- Public Relations (Dennis Giardina)
- Education & Interpretation (Nelson Tilden)
- Nominations & Elections (Jim Woodard)
- Events (Marya Repko)
- Vision (David Shindle)

Members who are interested in helping should make themselves known.



President's Message

The 2007/08 season came to a successful conclusion under the leadership of Nelson Tilden (see the list of accomplishments in the report on page 2).

Building upon this is our challenge for the 2008/09 season. Here is a list of the Friends CSO Priorities that was approved by our new Park Manager Renee Rau and submitted to the District.

- Plan to increase Boardwalk to complete the loop to accommodate more visitors
- Start planning for "green" interpretive/culture center at Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk at Old US Rt #41
- Increase volunteer participation in Friends of Fakahatchee activities and interpretative programs
- Publish (1) article each month about Fakahatchee Strand Preserve in local media on both coasts
- Develop a Service Award program for Friends of Fakahatchee Volunteers
- Set a schedule of (2) Volunteer work days each month for at least six months out of the year
- Improve informative and interpretive signage at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk
- Select a Volunteer Coordinator
- Develop an accurate map and explanatory brochure of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park for visitors
- Identify gates on Janes Scenic with names or numbers to match maps and brochures
- Design and produce a self guided tour brochure of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk
- Locate a Friends Visitor Center and meeting space within the park complex
- Improve toilet facilities for visitors at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk

These are ambitious goals, but with your help we can succeed.

Please schedule your time to help on the Friends Work Days; the 2nd Saturday or 3rd Tuesday of each month, November through April (see dates on front page).

People often ask: *how can I get involved?* Participating in a Work Day is one way.

Another meaningful way to help FOF is to recruit a new member. To preserve the Fakahatchee more people must be exposed to its beauty and the importance of its existence.

Come on out for a Work Day or Swamp Walk next season. And bring a friend!!

See you there,

Tom Maish

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson and Caryl Tilden

The boardwalk has been a "tale of two winters" this year. The first part of the fall and winter were very dry, with water levels much lower than usual, caused by lower levels of rainfall in July, August and September. Starting in mid-February the usual "dry season" became much wetter than usual. A rainfall of 6.6" filled the gator pond to a level not usually seen except at the end of the rainy season. Two more large rains in March contributed to April water levels that we have not seen for several years. The result of all the rain is a lush and beautiful boardwalk, with some of the largest alligator flag we have seen.

The **eaglet**, by the time you read this, will be fully grown, and may have fledged by now. As of April 18 an eagle parent was still seen on the nest with the chick. For 3 weeks or so the eaglet has been flapping its wings and occasionally hovering above the nest. As many of you know, the boardwalk area where the eagles can be observed gets very congested. We are hoping to construct a viewing platform at that spot to allow photographers and others to be less affected by the passing foot traffic.

This is the final boardwalk report for this winter and spring season. The number of visitors appears to be close to last year's record number of 48,000 (November through April). As we have reported before, probably owing to the low water levels in the fall and early winter, there was an almost complete lack of **wading birds** at the gator hole. Also fewer in number were **snake** sightings. Occasional **turtles**, **otters**, **raccoons**, and **white-tailed deer** gave visitors good photo opportunities. One or two photogenic **red-shouldered hawks** were frequently around, but the **barred owls** often seen in prior years, were heard but seldom seen. We counted approximately 20 immature **alligators** of three different generations and the same adult female that we have observed for at least five years. One frequent sighting this winter was a 7' to 8' female alligator and 4 or 5 recent hatchlings in the canal along the path leading to the wooden part of the boardwalk.

As Mike Owen always says, "You can never tell what you are going to see in the Fakahatchee!"

The boardwalk is open all year and we hope you will take advantage of it whenever possible. If you visit the boardwalk and see something unusual, we would enjoy hearing from you by email at nelsontilden@msn.com. Have a great summer.

MEMBERSHIP

We have a total of 286 members including 14 in arrears from the first quarter and 10 from the second quarter. *Reminders are being sent by post with this newsletter.*

Welcome to new members:

Dan Matarozzi, San Francisco, CA
 Patricia Marzula, Marco Island
 Robert Craner, Bonita Springs



THANKS to Jay Staton for donating copies of his "Stages of a Ghost" photo for our booth on April 26/27 at the Tamiami-80 celebrations and to other volunteers who helped out: Joe & Noreen Dillon, Pat & Ted DeGroot, and Barbara Brown. We sold \$463 worth of merchandise.



Member Jim Woodard sent this photo and email:

Ghost in bloom and seed found by Nicole Woodard on April 13, 2008. According to Mike Owen, this is the earliest reported Ghost bloom in the Fakahatchee. Also witness to the event were navigator Carol Swingle, Tom Maish (newly elected FOF president), Judy Maish, and water bearer James Woodard.

THANKS again to Bill and Pam Mesce for the use of the Pavilion for our annual members' meeting. *What a pleasant place to be stuck inside!*

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc.**, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation, is the Citizen Support Organization of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, the largest cypress stand 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 mission of the Friends of Fakahatchee is 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				
	Treasurer – Vicky Nagle	Secretary – Marya Repko				
BOARD:	Rick Cruz	Frank Denninger	Dennis Giardina	Cathy Hatch	Tom Maish	Susan O'Farrell
	Karen Relish	Bud Scott	David Shindle	Glenn Stacell	Nelson Tilden	

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