



# The Ghost Writer

NOVEMBER, 2008

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

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday

Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child

**Reservations Required.**

Phone (239) 695-1023 or email  
islandgirm@msn.com

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

Dec 6, Jan 17, Feb 14

March 21, April 18

Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child

**Reservations Required.**

Phone (239) 695-1023 or email  
islandgirm@msn.com

### VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

	Tues, Nov 18
Sat, Dec 13	Tues, Dec 16
Sat, Jan 10	Tues, Jan 20
Sat, Feb 14	Tues, Feb 17
Sat, Mar 14	Tues, Mar 17
Sat, Apr 11	Tues, Apr 21

*Details about the work will be available closer to the dates.*

*For info, phone (239) 695-1023 or email Karen.Relish@dep.state.fl.us.*

### MEMBERS' DINNER/TALK

Friday, November 14, at 6:00 p.m.

Seafood Depot, Everglades City

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

### FOF BOARD MEETING

Sunday, December 14, at 10:30 a.m.

Big Cypress Preserve Pavilion

**Members Welcome!**

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

On 10/6, Bob Wilson, UPS driver, saw a **coyote** swim across the canal into bushes on the way to the Fak. On 10/6, Steve Houseknecht, Park Ranger, observed a **limpkin** on Janes Scenic Drive at the 10.1 mile curve. On 10/6, Jill Waisley saw 13 American **alligators** 4-6 feet long on Janes Scenic drive in the late morning and early afternoon. She also saw 2 **rough green snakes** on Janes Scenic Drive. On 10/6, Misty Miller, Administrative Assistant, saw a foot long **black racer** around the Ranger Station. On 10/6, Ron Kotliar saw an **Anhinga** out drying its wings on a tree NW of Fire- tower Pond. He had also observed the **Southern bald eagle** at the boardwalk, On 10/7, Renee Rau, Manager, and Steve Houseknecht saw a healthy adult **bobcat** near the end of Janes Scenic Drive. On 10/8, while doing some survey work in Fakahatchee, Aaron Eckerd saw a **Florida Panther** on Jones Grade. On 10/14, in the morning, Karen Relish, OPS Park Ranger, saw a juvenile **raccoon** in the canopy as it crossed over the boardwalk west to east. On 10/15, in the afternoon, while working on Janes Scenic Drive with Steve, Jerry Innis, Park Ranger from Collier Seminole State Park, observed an **Everglades mink** crossing Janes Scenic Drive between G3-G7. On 10/15, early in the evening, Steve Houseknecht saw a **Short-tailed hawk**, white morph, chasing after a **Belted Kingfisher** then circling with vultures.

On 10/20, Karen Relish delivered some of the collected non-native and road kill specimens to the University of Florida's Museum of Natural History Collection Managers. With the help of volunteers Laura Skinner and Ron Kotliar, specimens had been catalogued. They will now be either incorporated into the museum or used for educational purposes.

On 10/22, in the morning, Ron Kotliar saw 8 **Wood storks** perched on a tree near the beginning of the boardwalk. On 10/22, an injured **Red-shouldered hawk** was picked up by Fakahatchee staff and volunteers off of SR-29. The hawk was immediately captured and brought to the Conservancy. X-rays were taken and treatment was administered including pinning of its broken leg. The hawk is now on its way to recovery. Plans are to release it here at Fakahatchee near where it was picked up. On 10/25, Renee Rau and her dad Larry Rau, Fakahatchee volunteer, saw a 2-foot **Diamondback Rattlesnake** while working out on the east side of Fakahatchee. On 10/27, Craig Britton, private landholder, and observed a **Florida Panther** for two minutes in the am while cleaning up his camp in preparation to leave. On 10/30, David Moore, Law Enforcement Officer, saw a **Florida Panther** on Union Road.

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



## Research Report

In late 1989, Jim Whitley, a Master's student at Florida Atlantic University, began research for his thesis in Fakahatchee.

Whitley determined what plant communities were growing where based on water levels and logging and fire history. During a literature search for a project I have been working on with Mike Owen and my advisor at FGCU, Dr. Win Everham, I came across Whitley's thesis. Win and I decided it would be a really interesting project for my Master's thesis to try to find the original transects again and re-examine the plant communities there to see if they have changed. (A transect is just a study area – in this case, a rectangle 5x80 meters or 5x100 meters.)

And so, that is what we have done. On July 18, 2007, we set off through the cocoplum in search of 20-year-old rebar Whitley used to mark his transect corners. With only cardinal directions and rough distances from park wells along Janes Scenic Drive and West Main, we were not sure we could even find the original study sites. Let me tell you, everything in Fakahatchee looks like 20-year-old rebar!

But we did it! With the help of a lot of friends we found all 4 corners on all 4 transects. In January 2008 we began re-measuring the trees and shrubs on the transects to see how things have changed in the 20 years since Jim Whitley's study. In July of this year, despite swarms of mosquitoes, I completed my measurements and have begun analyzing the data. In August I will be doing some tree coring and tree-ring analysis in an attempt to tie changes in water levels in Fakahatchee over the last 50 years to growth rates in the trees of the Strand.

So stay tuned! As I complete the analysis of my data, I will update the Friends of Fakahatchee to let all of you know what I have found. My goal is to graduate in the spring of 2009, so you can expect to hear from me by then.

I have attempted to relocate Jim (William James) Whitley to collaborate with him on this project. If by chance anyone can point me in the right direction, I would be grateful.

See you in the swamp!

Brenda L. Thomas  
Master's Candidate, Florida Gulf Coast University  
and  
Environmental Education Specialist  
CREW Land & Water Trust

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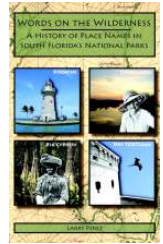
## BOOK SIGNING

Clyde Butcher will hold his traditional Holiday Book Signing at the Big Cypress Gallery in Ochopee on the weekend of **November 28-30**. He will be available from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

## Book Review

by Karen Relish

*WORDS ON THE WILDERNESS;  
A History of Place Names in South Florida's  
National Parks*  
by Larry Perez



Larry Perez, in his book *Words On The Wilderness*, brings to life a literary journey of "monikers" (origins of place names) in the Big Cypress, Biscayne Bay, and Dry Tortugas and Everglades National Park (ENP). Perez, a native Floridian and Florida park naturalist and ranger, begins with an introduction to each of the three National Parks and the origin of its name. Then, he alphabetically divides four hundred and fifty names by park and place. Each has a story. For example, according to Perez, Everglades National Park may be named for "an accepted" American English term for glade, or open meadow, or field of grass found within the forest.

Perez notes that some park and place names were named for some famous and infamous people in the area, such as David Graham Copeland, Miles Collier, and Marjorie Stoneman Douglas. Other park and place names were named after animals and plants in the area, such as Man of War Channel, and Paroutis Pond. The reader may find that some of the places and structures were identified with a sense of humor, others with dedication. Some place names are duplicated in parks, such as Arsenicker. In addition to the text, graphic features, facilities and structures are also illustrated and interpreted. For example, a Pinecrest campsite advertisement of Big Cypress National Park and a 1900's lard can is associated with the Lard Can Campsite of ENP.

Perez's extensive knowledge and experience provide the reader with varied sources and further reading. He even solicits the reader to offer additional information to unravel the mysteries of noted park place names. This is a fun read of South Florida cultural and natural history of South Florida's National Parks. It clearly organizes a set of historical short stories and opens up a world of countless characters.

For more info, see [www.wordsonthewilderness.com](http://www.wordsonthewilderness.com).

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## SICK GATOR

Friends of Fakahatchee member and swamp walk leader John Elting reports that on Saturday, November 8, he stepped on or very near an 8-foot alligator submerged in 2½ to 3 feet of water in K-2 strand. In all his experience, he would have expected it to react – thrash around and move away. However, this gator did nothing.

John contacted Kent Vliet at the University of Florida and was told that the gator was possibly suffering from a micro-plasma bacterial infection (breakdown of the cell walls) and was in severe pain in the joints with added cerebral fluid pressure. Apparently this disease is uncommon in the wild and is contagious.

He and Bill Mesce flagged the area and suggest that it should probably be avoided. If you come across an alligator acting lethargically, please contact us so we can pass on the information.

## President's Message

Our Volunteer Program got off to a fast start with the preparation the Big Cypress Boardwalk for the Season.

Your Board has selected the 2nd Saturday and 3rd Tuesday of each month to assist the Park in work that otherwise might be deferred (see the list of Volunteer Work Days on the front page).

Park Manager; Renee Rau, has learned that Florida Park budgets are being reduced and even days of operation cut back in some Parks. This means that the Friends need to step up our active involvement in the Fakahatchee.

Our **November 18** Work Day will center on Janes' Scenic Drive. We need to repair culverts; trim brush to enhance Visitors viewing areas, fill holes, and grade the road.

Karen Relish is our new Volunteer Coordinator. If you can help, please email [Karen.Relish@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Karen.Relish@dep.state.fl.us) or call the Friends Hotline at 239 695-1023 and leave word with Pam.



**Thanks to our Volunteers; the preparation of the Big Cypress Boardwalk for the coming season was completed on Saturday, November 8, the first of our scheduled Work Days.**

**The Boardwalk was repaired; brush trimmed, walk swept, signs cleaned, grass cut and litter removed including along US-41.**

The hard working crew included Signe Backus & Jerry Winters, Allen & Elsie Caldwell, Frank Denninger, Betty Gauthier, Kathy Hatch, Tom Maish, Betty Plum, HC Rackley, Bud Scott, and Jay Staton. They were ably assisted by Rangers Steve Houseknecht and Karen Relish.

It was a beautiful day to work and a job well done!

*Tom Maish*

## BOARDWALK REPORT

This is the initial boardwalk report for the winter season 2008-2009. On November 8, thirteen volunteers, led by FOF President Tom Maish, each spent about four hours clipping vegetation and sweeping leaves and bald cypress needles all along the 2300 feet of the boardwalk. Volunteers reported that the vegetation clearing was made easier due to clipping done during the summer by part-time OPS Park Ranger Karen Relish. We are indebted to Karen, Ranger Steve Houseknecht, and to the volunteers who got the boardwalk ready for visitors to enjoy.

An experienced birder reported that the bald eagle couple has been observed on several occasions bringing new sticks to the nest, in preparation for egg laying, which typically occurs in early to mid-December. This past season there was one successful chick which fledged in April and the year prior, there were two successful chicks. The eagle's nest is an estimated 10 feet wide and 5 to 6 feet deep. It was partially destroyed by Hurricane Wilma in October, 2005, but was quickly rebuilt. This nest has been in continuous use since 1991.

Water levels are about normal for November. There is water from the beginning of the boardwalk to the viewing platform. Most banks at the gator hole are covered with water at this point, although the water level typically recedes steadily all winter. Two mature female alligators were seen on November 10, along with several immature ones. The only wading birds visible were a Great Egret and an immature male anhinga. A pileated woodpecker and several warblers were seen as well.

We are hoping to repair several hundred feet of boardwalk railings during the next few months. A team of volunteers will provide the labor and will use lumber purchased by the Park Service. If you wish to participate in this activity, please call me at 239-732-5539.

Whether volunteering or just enjoying the beauty of the Fakahatchee, come and visit soon.

Nelson Tilden  
Chair, FOF Education and Interpretation Committee

## MARINE ANIMAL TALKS

Naples Preserve is hosting a series of talks about "Marine Animals of Southwest Florida" on Tuesdays at 11:00 a.m. The speaker is Dr Gary Pettit, marine biologist and environmental interpreter. The schedule is:

- November 18 - Mollusks: Bivalves and Cephalopods
- November 25 - TBA - Thanksgiving week
- December 2 - Invertebrate chordates
- December 9 - Bottom fish
- December 16 - Pelagic fish

Naples Preserve is just south of Coastland Mall on Fleischmann Blvd and Tamiami Trail North. Described as a "unique green space", it features the Hedges Family Eco-Center and a .4-mile boardwalk. For info, phone 261-4290 or see their website at <http://cs.naplesgov.com/>.

**MEMBERSHIP**

We have a total of 270 members including 10 in arrears from the third quarter and 29 in arrears from the fourth quarter. There have been no new members since the last report.

***New Directors to be Elected***

We are now seeking nominations for candidates for election to the Board of Directors for the election to be held in 2009. Our policy statement requires, with some limited exceptions, that nominees must: be a member of FOF at least 18 years old; complete and submit a volunteer form; participate in a minimum of two different volunteer projects approved by the Park Manager, documented by time sheets, within the 12 months preceding the nomination. Other conditions also apply.

We welcome your participation now, including attendance at the monthly Board meetings and volunteer projects. Please direct your questions, suggestions and nominations to James Woodard c/o [friendsoffakahatchee@hotmail.com](mailto:friendsoffakahatchee@hotmail.com).



**T-SHIRT SALE!!!**

**We still have T-shirts in some of the sizes and colors. The Board decided to hold a sale to clear out the stock. If you are interested in what is available, phone Marya at (239) 695-2905.**

**BOARD MEETING**

The FOF Board met for the first time this winter season on Sunday, November 9, and heard updates from President Tom Maish (seen right with attentive froggie guest), Manager Renee Rau, and from committee chairs.



The Fak now has a resident State law officer whose presence appears to have reduced poaching. The Board voted to purchase two outdoor video cameras which will also help in the fight against illegal activities, as well as be valuable to the biologist in observing wildlife.

Future projects scheduled for volunteers include exotic removal, canoe trail maintenance, preparing fire lines, signage, cleaning ditches, painting the ranger station, and pressure-cleaning the boardwalk.

There are some outside events in which FOF can take part. These are on the Calendar (attached).Volunteers are always needed to talk with visitors and sell merchandise.

Thanks to Bill Mesce for the use of the pavilion and to Judy Maish who provided a delicious lunch.

**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 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 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