



# The Ghost Writer

**Festival Issue FEBRUARY 2006**

**NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc.**

## EVENTS

### **GUIDED SWAMP WALKS**

**February 7, 11, 18, 21, 25**

**March 11, 18, 21, 25**

**April 4, 8, 15, 22, May 2, 13**

*reservations required!*

*phone (239) 695-4593*

### **GUIDED CANOE TRIPS**

*We need qualified volunteers to lead canoe trips. Phone John at (239) 395-3760*

**Native American &  
Pioneer Festival**

**Sat/Sun, February 18/19**

**Collier-Seminole State Park**

**Marjory Stoneman Douglas  
2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Festival**

**February 20-25<sup>th</sup>**

**Museum of the Everglades**

***phone (239) 695-0008***

*"Bugging Out in Guatemala"*

**The Search for Parasites for the  
Mexican Bromeliad Weevil**

**by Dennis Giardina**

**February 7 at 7:00pm**

**see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)**

**Volunteer Appreciation Weekend  
Florida Park Service**

**March 24-26**

**Paynes Prairie Preserve**

**see [www.prairiefriends.org](http://www.prairiefriends.org)**

## Miscellany

### **TAMIAMI TRAIL AS SCENIC HIGHWAY?**

On January 20, 2006, representatives from state and federal parks and preserves that border this area of US-41 gathered at the Panther Refuge to discuss the appeal in May 2005 by the Collier County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) which would remove the "Scenic Highway" designation from the Trail. Not surprisingly, all the public land managers oppose the appeal and have support from environmental groups and individuals. It is expected that public meetings will be held to debate the merits of maintaining the Trail as a Scenic Highway. If you have an informed opinion on this subject, please write or email.

### **CELEBRATING MARJORY**

This year's MSD Festival features two Fakahatchee speakers. Mike Owen gives an illustrated talk about "Orchids of the Everglades" on Tuesday, February 21, at 4:00pm at the Museum in Everglades City. He is followed by Capt Franklin Adams who recalls his 30-year friendship with the "Mother of the Everglades". Other events during the week include a talk about Ernest Coe on Friday, bluegrass & country music on Saturday, and locally-filmed movies (including *Just Cause* with Sean Connery) on Wednesday.

### **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHER**

The Conservancy is hosting Mattias Klum on February 8 at Gulf Coast High School, Naples, and the next night at Bishop Verot High School, Ft Myers, when he will talk about his "Passion for Seeing Wildlife" all over the world. Phone (239) 403-4236 or see [www.conservancy.org](http://www.conservancy.org).

### **ORCHIDS IN THE GROVE**

Black and white images of the ghost orchid by Big Cypress neighbor Clyde Butcher are featured on the official poster of the Coconut Grove Arts Festival to be held February 18-20. Our own Rick Cruz will be displaying his photographs, many taken in the Fakahatchee, during that weekend in conjunction with the arts jamboree.

*We were sorry to learn that the Park's office assistant Verenethia ("Neicy") Fails lost her mother recently. Our thoughts are with Neicy and her family.*

**THANKS** to Everglades Island Properties and Snook Publications for reproducing this newsletter.

## Notes from the Park

by Dennis Giardina, Manager

*I recently updated the Manager's Message on the DEP's State Parks website*

<http://www.floridastateparks.org/fakahatcheestrand/default.cfm>.

*Because I come from a biological background, I wanted to share some of my perceptions and feelings about the ecology of the Preserve in my introductory message there. The first two paragraphs on the site highlight the ecological significance of the Fakahatchee Strand Swamp. I then mention that changes on an ecosystem-wide level are predicted to occur within the Fakahatchee over the coming decades as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) is implemented. This is an extract of my message:*

The restoration of the Prairie Canal which defines the western border of the Preserve is an especially important aspect of CERP. For half a century the Prairie Canal has hastened the drainage of water that the native plant and animal communities of the Fakahatchee Strand depend upon. Once the Prairie Canal is completely filled in, the surface water will move across the landscape, draining slowly instead of poring into bigger canals and gushing into the estuaries of the 10,000 Islands. It will recharge groundwater and pass through the natural filtration processes of swamps, prairies, marshes and mangroves before gradually mixing with salt water. It is and will continue to be an important source of fresh water for human and natural communities.

In spite of the ecological damage visited upon the Fakahatchee Strand in the past by clear-cut logging, road building and drainage, it has recovered remarkably well and remains a fairly intact and functional natural system. The raised railway beds or trams of the old logging train still crisscross the Fakahatchee Strand and they create a grid of trails, many of which are maintained for hiking. The Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk provides visitors a glimpse into the past as it winds through a stand of primary cypress forest. The Fakahatchee Strand is an ecological gem.



### **JILL BECOMES PARK RANGER**

Jill Waisley may be a new Ranger, but she's a familiar face because she worked with Mike in the biologist's office before joining the Park Service full-time. Jill grew up in the small town of McKean near Erie, PA, and earned a BS in Biology. Among her memorable experiences are a month in South Africa documenting endangered animal species and an internship at Destiny Big Cat Sanctuary where she worked with 4 tigers, a lion, and a lynx for several months. Jill says she came here "because Fakahatchee is large and wild".

### **FIRE TRAINING**

If you want to help with proscribed burns, you need to first qualify by taking a Fire Training course. The Department of Forestry is offering one in March (13-17) in Manatee County and a few positions are open. Contact Dennis (695-4593) before February 14.

### **Environmental Advisory Council**

There will be a vacancy on the Collier County EAC in April 2006, according to member Erica Lynne, who wonders if anyone is interested in filling her position. She says there is a need for a biologist to complement the pollution and engineering specialists when the Council considers environmental issues.

**We welcome articles for the newsletter. If you have read a good book that would interest our members or have traveled to another environmentally endangered area, send 300 words or less by post or email.**

## FIELD STUDY OF HAND FERN by Jack Berninger



*Cheiroglossa palmata* seems to be fairly rare in the Fakahatchee Strand and limited to a small section approximately 1000 meters along one of the trams. Another tram has two specimens while the remaining trams, that I have investigated, have no hand ferns.

A count was conducted on 1/5/06 to compare with the previous count on 1/28/05 when 20 ferns were located along the same section of the tram. In 2006 only 17 ferns were found. The largest of the ferns found in 2005 is gone due to possible bear damage, human collecting or destruction by a person taking boots from the Sabal Palm for a nearby campfire. However a small new specimen was found just 5 meters east of this tree. In 2005 nine ferns were located along the right side of the tram, heading from the gate to the end of the tram, and eleven on the left side. In 2006 seven ferns were located on the right and ten on the left.

Relative Humidity readings were taken along the tram to determine if it could be a limiting factor regulating Hand Fern habitat. The R.H. readings were fairly constantly 64% along the tram until the first Hand Fern location was reached; there the R.H. readings were in the 50.5-52% range and remained so for the next 1000 meters of the Hand Fern locations. Fifty meters past the last Fern specimen location the R.H. was 62.5%. Thus, R.H. seems to be one of the environmental factors regulating Hand Fern habitat.

Some stem rot (brown, dry, atrophied) was noticed at petiole base on three of the ferns. I do not expect these to survive. A decrease of Sporangia was also noticed this year compared to 2005. In conclusion: the Hand Fern is declining in numbers and vitality along the tram.

I would be interested to hear if any Hand Ferns have been found on swamp walks off the trams or by other observers along trams.

## BOARDWALK REPORT by Nelson & Caryl Tilden

We continue to have increasing numbers of visitors at the Boardwalk, many from Germany and other European countries, with the total exceeding 4000 for the first three weeks of the month.

Perhaps the most common comment we hear from returning visitors relates to the huge affect that Hurricane Wilma had on the canopy of the Boardwalk. What used to be predominant shade is now a large amount of sunshine. While there is a more open feel to the under-story, we expect to see rapid growth of lower-lying plants and the effects on the bromeliads and orchids are yet to be seen.

We continue to watch the adult bald eagles nearly daily, but there is no evidence yet of the hatching of chicks. We see an adult head sticking up from the nest likely indicating that the eggs have not yet hatched. Not far from the bald eagle's nest is a new nest being built by two red-shouldered hawks.

Our 7.5 foot long female adult alligator continues to be seen daily at the gator hole with three generations of juveniles totaling about 25 in number. Joining them almost every day are two to three red-bellied turtles and an occasional snapping turtle and soft-shelled turtle.

Once again this year we have a black-crowned night heron which joins the usual cast of great blue herons, great egrets and an unusually high number of ibis. Visitors were able to get good pictures of a handsome barred owl that has finally been seen close to the Boardwalk after being heard frequently for several months.





This photo of Roseate Spoonbills was taken by member Patty Huff on US41 several miles west of SR29 where flocks have been seen recently.

## MEMBERSHIP

We have 286 members, but almost 40 of these are late with their renewals and will be dropped on February 17. Reminders for the first quarter are included with this newsletter.

You can check your renewal date by looking at the envelope you receive: the symbols in square brackets after your name are the quarter and year. For example, [Q1/06] means your renewal is due in the first quarter of 2006; [Q4/R] means that you were due during the fourth quarter and have been sent a Reminder.

### Welcome to new members:

Rico & Nannette Gatti, Naples  
 Bob McNally, Naples  
 Mary & Paul Schwister, Hayward, WI



## JONES' GRADE

by Jim Woodard

On Saturday, 1/21, Niki and I were joined by Tom Maish, his son Greg, and Kevin Piotrovicz in our continuing effort to clear hurricane debris from Jones Grade - Pennington Post and over 6/10 of a mile was cleared on Pennington Post. A total of approximately 3.5 miles is now clear from the first gate on Jones Grade.

However, 3 more miles have to be cleared to reach the western boundary of the preserve. *More volunteers are needed to speed up the clearing.* Contact me at woodardlaw@aol.com if you can help

Dragonfly Expeditions of Coral Gables have generously offered to donate \$10 for each person they guide on swamp walks through the Fakahatchee Strand on their Backwater Tours. The company specializes in "eco-tours" and visits this area often, although not all their trips are as ambitious. They also organize visits to other out-of-the-way places in the tropics (see their website [www.dragonflyexpeditions.com](http://www.dragonflyexpeditions.com)).

## What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve**, 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 and SR-29. Its neighbor north of I-75 is the Florida Panther Refuge, with whom Friends may share associate membership.

*The Ghost Writer* newsletter is edited by Jenifer Adams-Mitchell, Patty Huff and Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation of approximately 400 copies.

OFFICERS:	President – John Elting	Vice-President – Allen Caldwell		
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