



# The Ghost Writer

MARCH 2005

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

October through March  
1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday  
phone (239) 695-4593 for reservations

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

October through March  
1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday  
phone (239) 695-4593 for reservations

### *Volunteer Clean-Up Day*

Saturday, March 12  
meet 9:00a.m. at Park Office  
phone Rosi at (239) 695-4593

### Art in the Glades

Saturday, March 19<sup>th</sup>  
McLeod Park, Everglades City  
1:00p.m. - Guided Walking Tour of  
Historic Buildings

### *"Killing Mister Watson"*

Saturday, March 19<sup>th</sup> at 3:00pm  
Smallwood Store, Chokoloskee  
*A Play in Two Acts*

### SW Florida History & Archeological Festival

Saturday, March 19<sup>th</sup>  
Rookery Bay Learning Center  
see website [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)

### *Members' Picnic*

Saturday, March 26 at 11a.m.  
Park Office, Copeland  
*RSVP to (239) 695-2905*

## M•O•ZONE

### SEEN AROUND THE STRAND

Is Janes' Drive becoming a commuter route for the **Florida Panther**? Three were seen between 4:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon: one on Feb 12 by John Elting; one on Feb 19 by Mike Owen, Jill Waisley and Rick Cruz; and one near Gate 12 on Feb 28 by Jill. Also around 4:30pm near Gate 12 several days later on March 5 Mike logged an **Everglades Mink** and several **otters**.

Ranger Dave Henley and Mike saw a **Short-Tailed Hawk** (white morph) over the prairie canal at the end of Janes' Drive on Feb 6. and there was a **Red-Tailed Hawk** (larger than the Red-Shouldered Hawk) about ¾ mile north of Gate 1 on Feb 15. An adult **Bald Eagle** was seen flying near the Park Office on Feb 21. At the Boardwalk, the two chicks in the nest are quite observable.

Mike and AmeriCorp assistant Jill, who helps with observations and office work, took part in the State-wide **Coyote** Station Survey. Pellets were put down on Feb 26 and observations were recorded on March 3. Although tracks were made by other animals, fortunately no coyotes were obvious.

To volunteer for wildlife observation or to report sightings,  
phone Fakahatchee's resident biologist **Mike Owen** on (239) 695-2886

The Members' Picnic is our last gathering before seasonal visitors return north. This event replaces the combined Annual Meeting and Picnic previously held at the end of January. A separate Annual Meeting to elect new board members will be held in early May, now that our fiscal year-end is April 30. Nominations for Board candidates should be in by March 11.

**CANOE TRAINING.** We need volunteers to help with canoe trips next season and expect guides to go out at least two Saturday's each month. A training and qualification course will be held on April 14 but before that you have to pass a "**Bobber**" test. This is available from the Coast Guard and is like the written part of a car driver's license. For more information, phone John Elting at (239) 395-3760.

Friends of Big Cypress National Preserve has just been formed and is looking for members and directors to help set up the organization. If you are interested, contact Clyde and Niki Butcher via their website [www.FriendsOfBigCypress.org](http://www.FriendsOfBigCypress.org). We wish them luck.

*THANKS* to Everglades Island Properties and Snook Publications for printing our newsletters and membership brochures.

## BUSY, BUSY FEBRUARY

From the Seafood Festival at the beginning of the month to the MSD Festival at the end, it has been an eventful time. FOF had a successful booth over the Seafood weekend of February 5/6 in Everglades City and attracted much interest (and a considerable number of donations). Members (and friends and relatives) all pitched in to help out.

February 19/20 saw the annual Native American & Pioneer Festival at Collier-Seminole State Park. Fakahatchee Manager Ralph Smith and Ranger Rosi McCluney were among the re-enactors who gave us the Battle of Royal Palm Hammock during which there was plenty of noise from the firing of ancient rifles. Volunteers (including former member Betty Campbell) sold T-shirts and collected contributions in the FOF booth that the rangers helped us to set up.

The following week was dominated by the First Annual Marjory Stoneman Douglas Festival held at the Museum of the Everglades. The Fakahatchee connections were the amusing and poignant personal recollections of "the mother of the Everglades" by member Captain Franklin Adams and the illustrated talk on native orchids by our own biologist Mike Owen.

## Photographers Receive Valuable Insights From Pro

The Friends of the Fakahatchee would like to offer sincere thanks to Saul Freiss for his interesting and informative presentation and workshop "The Challenges of Wildlife Photography Within the Fakahatchee Strand". Saul shared over 600 images of the flora and fauna of the Fakahatchee with a packed room during his presentation Sat. March 5<sup>th</sup> at the Oyster House in Everglades City.

On Sunday, Saul took his students into the Fakahatchee to demonstrate his techniques and to help them perfect their own styles. The photographers were very fortunate, not only to have Saul helping them, but also because they had the rare opportunity to photograph three different species of leafless orchids!

Thanks are also due to the Oyster House for making their function room available to us and to Jim Woodard for organizing this event.

## Calling All Volunteers ...

*We need help!!*

That was the gist of Ranger Rosi McCluney's volunteer meeting held on February 16<sup>th</sup> at Port of the Islands. The Fakahatchee is the size of the state of Rhode Island and has only three rangers to patrol and maintain its vast area.

Rosi outlined a number of committees that she would like to see formed. They include: fund raising, trail maintenance, interpretive, public relations, grant writing, recruiting, and signage. Along with the positive feeling you get when you help, other perks such as free camping, free annual passes and free Florida State Park training sessions are available to Fakahatchee volunteers.

If you have a special talent or would like the opportunity to learn something new, give Rosi a call at (239) 695-4593. She would love to talk to you about how you can help.



*photo courtesy of Ray Carroll*

**Volunteer Cleanup Day, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

The next volunteer cleanup day is scheduled for Saturday, March 12. Meet at 9:00a.m. at the Park office in Copeland. Clothing: closed-toe shoes, long pants, gloves, and long sleeves recommended. Bring your own lunch and plenty to drink. Please bring trash bags, too. Rain or shine.

## BOARDWALK NEWS

A Letter From Caryl & Nelson Tilden

*We have been described as having an "addiction" to the Boardwalk, and it really is true. We just love that place! In the winter months we might see two to three hundred people in a single afternoon. Many of them visit the Boardwalk often and have developed the same appreciation that we have for the wildlife that can be seen and the quiet beauty of the surroundings. But most visitors are seeing it for the very first time and they are the ones that we especially enjoy. We like sharing the history of the Fakahatchee and the surrounding Everglades area. It's also fun to show them the baby alligators and to identify the dozen or more varieties of birds that we see regularly at the gator hole. Each day it is a little bit different and we have to search with our binoculars to find the immature black crowned night heron or a little green heron. We know their favorite places now. Our white board that indicates "Today's Wildlife Sightings" always has more than a dozen things to see. It's always exciting when a bald eagle is sitting up on the rim of the nest or a barred owl is sitting on a limb very close to the boardwalk.*

*People linger at the end of the Boardwalk and we enjoy talking with them. We have met visitors from all over the world and often learn something from them about their own countries. As former teachers, we like answering their questions if we are able. There is a warm feeling of camaraderie on the end of the Boardwalk. Many times people sit down on the benches and stay for a while. We often remark how glad we are that the rangers and some hardy volunteers rebuilt the deck last spring. We feel a lot safer now when 45 people are gathered at the same end watching the baby alligators and the mother basking in the sun only four feet from the railing. It's easy to become addicted to the Boardwalk!*

Phone Jerry & Signe at (239) 389-7384 if you can spare a few hours to greet visitors to our special Everglades amenity. They would also still like to hear from anyone with a wheelchair or binoculars to donate.

## New Ground for Swamp Walks

Due to the drought, the swamp walks have now become swamp treks. According to FOF president and walk leader John Elting, the groups have had to go much further to find good conditions. Since February the guides have been calling all of the participants prior to the walks to let them know that it will be much more strenuous than normal and that they will be covering a lot more ground. "So far everyone's come back alive," said John.

Catbird Slough has been a good destination for the walks. Because the groups are going into less-frequently-explored areas, the guides have been finding all kinds of new and interesting things. John has seen a number of orchids that he can't identify as well as a lot of snakes and a number of otters. They've found panther scat, hand ferns, and unidentified animal skulls.

Although the dry conditions have changed the look of the Fakahatchee, it doesn't mean that the swamp walks are not worthwhile. On the contrary, it is a natural cycle that affords a different perspective and new opportunities to explore this ever-changing area.

Scheduled swamp walks will stop at the end of March but special groups of up to 15 in number can be accommodated at \$35 per person. Phone the Park office at (239) 695-4593 for more information.

## The Beautiful Night Sky

The clear night sky yielded many delights to the few lucky souls who attended the Star Gazing Party on March 4<sup>th</sup>. The Everglades Astronomical Society generously shared their huge telescopes along with their vast knowledge of the night sky. We saw Saturn and its rings as clear as if we were watching a sci-fi movie. We saw carnivorous galaxies. We saw star clusters, nebulae, satellites streaking across the sky, meteors, and the colorful star nursery present in the sword of Orion. Rick Piper of the EAS held the ladder steady as each person took turns looking into the eyepiece of the eight-foot telescope and patiently explained what they were looking at and how to see it better.

If you missed this opportunity to see the night sky in a whole new light, contact Rick at (239) 455-5787 to find out when the next event will be held.

## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Annual renewal notices for those members who joined in the first quarter of the year were sent at the beginning of February. Response has been very good but there are still 49 members who are due. *A bright green form is included with this newsletter if we have not received your renewal.*

You can see your renewal period on the address label. In the square brackets after your name, there are two numbers: the quarter and the year. Thus, if you have just paid, it should be [1/06].

In total, we have 290 members. Of these, 67 have opted for associate membership with the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge. There were 7 new members in February.

We save over \$80 on each issue of the newsletter because 224 members receive their copies by email. If we do not have your address, please send it by email to us at FOF\_90@hotmail.com

## Newsletter Design

We hope you like the new format of *The Ghost Writer*. Email recipients found it hard to print out our old newsletter on legal paper and we were running out of space for all the articles we wanted to include. Comments, please, to Marya at our email address or by phone on (239) 695-2905.

## IN MEMORIAM

The Board voted to introduce a plaque to commemorate deceased members who have been honored by their friends and relatives. The plaque will hang in the Copeland office. To qualify for a name to be added, a total donation of at least \$200 must be made by one or more contributors to the Friends of Fakahatchee in memory of the deceased. If you have questions, contact Marya at (239) 695-2905 or write to the FOF Treasurer at P.O.Box 35, Everglades City, FL, 34139.

## What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve**, a 501(c)3 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	
	Secretary – Betty Foster	Treasurer – Jack Horner	
BOARD:	Franklin Adams	Signe Backus	Connie Bransilver
	Patty Huff	William Mesce	Allison Nist
	Niki Woodard	Jim Woodard	Brian Call (FOFPR)
			Elsa Caldwell
			Jerry Winters

## ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

date \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to "FOF" and send to: **FOF Membership, P.O.Box 35, Everglades City, FL, 34139**

- Individual (\$15)   
  Family (\$20)   
  Business (\$40)   
  Patron (\$100)  
 Benefactor (\$500)   
 associate membership with Friends of Florida Panther Refuge (add \$5.00)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

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MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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