



The Ghost Writer

MAY 2006

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

will resume in October
phone (239) 695-4593

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

will resume in October
phone (239) 695-4593

*Florida Native Plant Society
Annual Conference*

May 18th - 21st

Daytona Beach Shores
see www.fnps.org

"Endangered"

Photos by Rick Cruz

until July 9th

Biscayne National Park
(near Homestead)

phone (305) 230-7275
or see www.nps.gov/bisc/

THANKS to Rick Cruz for his very generous donation which represents 10% of the profits from the recent sale of his photographs taken in the Fakahatchee.

M•O ZONE

SEEN AROUND THE STRAND



photo courtesy of Jay Staton

This photo, entitled "Stages of a Ghost" was submitted by member Jay Staton who is a golf-pro in Naples and visitor to the Fakahatchee.

It has been reported that Ghost Orchid buds have been seen in the Strand recently. Unfortunately, there may be a problem with poaching so please let the Park know about any suspicious behavior that you notice

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

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

CSO Project Priorities List

We have submitted a detailed list to the Department of the projects FOF wants to accomplish to help the Park. They are summarized here in order of importance and time.

1. Write a grant proposal for replacing the Boardwalk and designing new parking and interpretation area.
2. Build extension to Preserve Office for Visitor Center.
3. Repair existing Boardwalk until new one built.
4. Hire and help pay for administrative assistant for the Park.
5. Provide interpretative information at the Boardwalk.
6. Provide interpretative information during swamp walks.
7. Provide interpretative information during canoe trips.
8. Design new Office and Visitor Center near Copeland.
9. Purchase radio-telemetry receiver, ethanol, conference room and dormitory furniture for new CSO cabin.
10. Purchase boom mower attachment for a tractor to keep trails clear.
11. Plant trees & shrubs in Preserve Office area.
12. Create and print large aerial map.
13. Find funds for scientific research (eg, monitor the effects of hydrological restoration).

The building of a **Visitor Center** (item 2) is crucial because Mike Owen, the Park Biologist, has moved into the front part of the office (the old Visitor Center). We need someone to draw up our plan for a 17x17-foot addition to the existing building so that we can submit it to the Department this summer and be cleared to start construction in the winter.

The hiring of an **office worker** (item 4) is also crucial because the previous one resigned for family reasons and there is nobody besides the Rangers to answer the phone, take reservations for walks, greet visitors, and help with paperwork. The position only allows for a part-time salary so FOF has offered to make up the difference

FOF RANKS HIGH

District IV, which stretches from Collier Seminole to beyond Tampa, is the largest in the State Parks system by area and budget. Of the 21 CSO's (Citizen Support Groups) within the District, Friends of Fakahatchee has the **THIRD** highest membership and ranks **FIFTH** in terms of finance.

The District is currently being reorganized after chief Michael Murphy left and second-in-command Robert Wilhelm is being posted to Tallahassee. We understand that the new head will be Valinda Subic who once worked at Koreshan State Park just up the road in Estero. We hope to publish an interview after she settles in over the summer.

TRAIL AS SCENIC HIGHWAY

Our February and March newsletters mentioned that the Collier County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is opposed to the designation of parts of US-41 (Tamiami Trail) as a Scenic Highway. FOF Board member Frank Denninger (who has been involved with this issue for some ten years) sent us a letter in which the salient points are:

My belief is that FOF should remain neutral on this issue to safeguard our beloved Fakahatchee from the marketing plan associated with Scenic Highways. The ultimate outcome will be the Disney-fication of the Fakahatchee. Does anyone want that? I don't.

It is understandable that FDEP and FOF desire short-term benefits (eg, Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk enhancement) but this Scenic Hiway designation will have negative long-range impacts, in my opinion, not only to the Fakahatchee but also to wildlife (eg, increased vehicle mortality) and to all US-41 travelers

I would hope that, of all the organizations in Florida, we the Friends of Fakahatchee would take the long view and proceed with extreme caution prior to supporting a program that will produce more construction and development and draw more traffic to the Fakahatchee and other pristine areas in the region

If you have an informed opinion on this subject, please write a letter to *The Ghost Writer* by post or email.

INTERESTING READING

by Marya Repko

Michael Grunwald's new book "The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise" is as thorough as, but more lively than, a doctoral thesis on Everglades drainage and subsequent reclamation. It made me go back to W. Hodding Carter's flippantly journalistic "Stolen Water; Saving the Everglades from its Friends, Foes, and Florida". Both books deal with the history of man's impact on the area and recent attempts to correct some of the damage. The subject led me to re-read S.V. Dáte's biography of Bob Graham and then to that author's "Deep Water", a funny/sad novel with a message.

A look at very current affairs is to read U.S. Senate bill S.2288 which can be downloaded by going to website <http://thomas.loc.gov>. The proposed legislation is now being considered by the Environment & Public Works Committee (www.epw.senate.gov). If you want to influence the deliberations, the members' addresses are listed on the site.

TRAIL AS SKYWAY

Although far away in Dade County and affecting the National Park more directly than the Fakahatchee, the Skyway campaign combines the topics of the two items above: the Trail and water flow restoration. The Sierra Club is sponsoring a website www.build-the.skyway.com which asks for support to raise US-41 above ground level for 11 miles near Shark Valley.



photo courtesy Mary Andrews of MACreative, Miami

Picnic Enjoyed by All

April 1st was a perfect day for the Annual Picnic which was attended by 86 members, some of whom joined on the day. Picnickers were taken from Gate 12 to Ballard Camp by buggy or truck along the narrow East Main tram but had a chance while waiting for the next convoy to buy raffle tickets for the many donated photos and Fakahatchee T-shirts and caps.

Local singer and song-writer Kim Lamp entertained while the pig roasted and side dishes (potato salad, coleslaw, baked beans, Cuban bread) were set out on the porch of the cabin. There was also dessert of brownies and fruit salad. To keep tummies from rumbling, each table had a dish of corn chips and salsa.

After the meal, President John Elting introduced Park Manager Dennis Giardina and then thanked the picnic committee (see photo below right). Some people walked off their lunches while other tried to count the alligators in the pond; there were at least 20 basking on the shore or swimming lazily in the idyllic setting.

Thanks to Craig Brittain for letting us use his camp as a venue, Elsa Caldwell for organizing the event, Allen Caldwell for taking care of the financial details, Greg Toppin for roasting the pig, Dennis and the rangers for providing picnic tables, Rick Cruz and Bud Scott and Bill Mesce for driving the vehicles, Mitch Mitchell and Patty Huff and Rick Cruz for donating pictures for the raffle, and to all the helping hands who served the food and cleaned up.



photo courtesy of Marya Repko

BOARDWALK REPORT

Although we do not have volunteers greeting people at the Boardwalk now that the main tourist season is over and our most active members have gone north for the summer, Jerry Winters reports that visitors have been very generous. He found several \$20 bills among the \$5's when he emptied the Iron Ranger recently.

An extensive project for a new Boardwalk is on the CSO Priorities List but we will keep doing repairs as needed, beginning again in the fall. We still have material that was bought last year so all we will need is strong bodies to carry planks and wield hammers.

Jerry also reported disturbing developments at Port of the Islands. The complex has been sold and the new owners are considering three high-rise buildings (10, 8, and 5 storeys) as well as dredging the canal for larger boats at the marina.



photo courtesy of Jim Woodard

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.

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS

The following directors were re-elected for their second (and last) two-year term: Signe Backus, Allen Caldwell, Elsa Caldwell, John Elting, Bill Mesce, Allison Nist, Jerry Winters, Jim Woodard, Niki Woodard. The results were announced at the Annual Members' Meeting on May 6.

At the Board Meeting which followed, officers were elected by the directors. John Elting remains as President for another year, Nelson Tilden takes over as Vice-President, Jenifer Adams-Mitchell becomes Secretary, and Patty Huff stays on as Treasurer.

Our thanks to Mayor Sammy Hamilton for letting us meet in the Everglades City Council Chamber.

MEMBERSHIP

We have 248 fully-paid members in the following categories: Individual (79), Family (140), Patron (23), Benefactor (3), and Business (3). There are also 21 members who are in arrears from the First Quarter of 2006. *If these lapsed members do not renew by May 30, they will be dropped from our list.*

Welcome to new members:

Paul & Chris Andrews, Sanibel
Ralph Bellman, Ochopee
Julie & Roger Ducoffre, Naples
David Ernst, Lehigh Acres
Harris & Anne Friedman, LaBelle
Margaret Johnson, Osprey
Brian McMahan, Naples
The Schultz Foundation, Jacksonville
Shannon Soltis, Naples
Jay Staton, Naples
Rick Varela, Naples

Many of them joined because of the picnic or after printing off applications from the website.

It was decided at the recent Board Meeting to drop our association with the Florida Panther Refuge immediately and to raise the annual membership contributions with effect from January 2007. The new rates will be \$20 for an Individual, \$30 for a Family, and \$50 for a Business.



**Bird nest and three eggs found by Niki along the road.
It was tiny and very precisely woven to the twig.**

PENNINGTON POST CLEAN UP

by Jim Woodard

On Saturday, 4/29/06 Tom Maish, Frank Denninger, Shaun Floyd, Niki and I cleared an additional 0.4 mile of hurricane damage from Pennington Post, off of Jones Grade. Progress is greatly slowed by vines that are now thriving on the downed trees. The water level is way down and alligators are looking for a damp spot, but the bugs are not a problem yet. Thanks to those that helped.

WANTED!

Volunteers to join the Membership Committee. The purpose of their activities is to

1. develop a broader membership to promote the value of the Fakahatchee
2. increase our funds to promote education and interpretative programs in the Preserve.

If you can help, please contact Tom & Judy Maish at tommaish@aol.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, SR-29, Fakahatchee Bay, and Picayune State Forest.

The Ghost Writer newsletter is edited by Jenifer Adams-Mitchell and Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation over 300 copies. (c) 2006, FOF. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter, including pictures, may be reproduced without permission.

OFFICERS: President – John Elting Vice-President – Nelson Tilden
Treasurer – Patty Huff Secretary – Jenifer Adams-Mitchell

BOARD: Jenifer Adams-Mitchell Signe Backus Allen Caldwell Elsa Caldwell Rick Cruz
Frank Denninger John Elting Cathy Hatch William Mesce Allison Nist
Bud Scott Nelson Tilden Jerry Winters Niki Woodard Jim Woodard