



The Ghost Writer

FEBRUARY 2016

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee, "Home of the Ghost Orchid"

EVENTS

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!!!

for dates & costs, see
www.orchidswamp.org
and select Tours & Events

GHOST RIDER TRAM TOUR

Thursday at 10am

MOONLIGHT TRAM TOUR

Feb 22, Mar 22

TRAM TOUR & SWAMP WALK

Tuesday at 9:30am

BIOLOGIST'S SWAMP WALK

Saturday at 9:30am

GUIDED BOARDWALK TOUR

Thursday at 9am

FOF BOARD MEETING

Sunday, February 14, 10:30 a.m.

Ranger Station, Copeland

Bylaw Amendments are on the Agenda.

Email FOF_90@hotmail.com for details.

EVERGLADES ULTRAS

Saturday, February 20

see article on page 5

ANNUAL VOLUNTEER

APPRECIATION PICNIC

Saturday, March 12

ANNUAL MEMBERS' DINNER

Sunday, April 10, 5:00 p.m.



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<https://www.facebook.com/orchidswamp>

WATER, WATER ... EVERYWHERE ...



Park Ranger Steve Houseknecht said, "It looks more like a very wet rainy season, not the end of January. I've never seen a winter with this much rain or such high water". Photo by Jay Staton on Janes Scenic Drive, January 29.



Dino Barone took these photos over the weekend of January 23-24 of water flow (Fakahatchee lifeblood) on the prairie canal going into the stair step canal and on the dozer line 1 mile south of Pennington Post, turning north onto the Florida Trail..

Visit www.orchidswamp.org for events, newsletters, glorious photos, and more ...

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Linda Koreny

11 or 24? That is the question of the day. Depending on the day or the time we have counted up to 24 baby alligators at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk! The mother **American Alligator** has been keeping them in the borrow canal in front of the Indian Village Gift Shop. Kathy Hatch, a Boardwalk volunteer who spends most Tuesdays there, said, "They are a big hit with everyone. Tuesday I counted 13. But who knows?"

Kathy also reported that "The **Eagles** were very vocal and moving about. People got a good chance to see and hear them. The **Ospreys** were noisy as usual and a pair of **barred owls** were chortling back and forth. **Pileated woodpeckers** were hammering away getting bugs. A flock of **blue grey gnatcatchers** and some **warblers** were seen high in the trees."

One of the Park Rangers took this report: "On 1/4/16, between approximately 8:40-9:40AM, while touring the Boardwalk, two Canadian visitors (birders) observed and/or heard 2-**Red-bellied Woodpeckers**, 1-**Northern Mockingbird**, 1-**Great Egret**, 3-**Black Vultures**, 1-**Turkey Vulture**, 12-**Yellow-rumped Warblers**, 43-**Tree Swallows**, 25-**Common Grackles**, 4-**Gray Catbirds**, 1-**Eastern Phoebe**, 18-**Blue-gray Gnatcatchers**, 1-**Blue-Headed Vireo**, 2-**Titmice**, 2-**Great Crested Flycatchers**, 2-**Carolina Wrens**, 1-**Black-and-White Warbler**, 2-**Osprey**, 1-**Belted Kingfisher**, 1-**Adult American Bald Eagle**, 1-**American Crow**, 1-**Pileated Woodpecker**, 1-**Yellow-bellied Woodpecker**, and a 1-**Red-shouldered Hawk**."

Have you ever looked up into the trees and seen what looks like a lot of birds' nests? These are air-plants, also known as bromeliads, and are related to the pineapple. All native bromeliads are normally epiphytic (a plant that grows on another plant, such as a tree). Air-plants are non-parasitic and don't harm their host plant. Air-plants don't require any soil to grow; they get enough moisture and nutrients from the air and rain to support themselves. Right now the beautiful bright red bracts of the **Cardinal Bromeliads** are visible. As spring progresses, look for the small bright purple flowers which protrude from the bracts.



As always, every day is different at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk so come often and spend some time. Binoculars will enhance your opportunity to see more. A Naturalist Guided Tour (reservations at www.orchidswamp.org) will expand your understanding of the area and this amazing place. Also art supplies and/or a camera will allow you to capture more memories of your visit.



How many baby gators? See Boardwalk Report in left column.



During January weekly butterfly counts along Janes Scenic Drive, they have been seeing primarily Zebra Longwings, Viceroy's, and White Peacocks.

Note: volunteers have been mowing the sides of Janes Scenic Drive and weather has been cool and windy in the mornings. Photos thanks to Skip Fisher.



Jay Staton sent this photo and report: After the wildlife Blitz on January 20, I drove up Janes and on my way back I saw this family of bears about 150 yards south of West Main, time: about 1pm. They went in and out of the swamp, eventually heading north.

President's Message

by Francine Stevens

The first big news is the Florida Dept. of Transportation (FDOT) has begun the work for the deceleration lane at the new parking site for the Boardwalk. FDOT told the FOF and the Park Manager that they expect the lane to be finished by end of March. Tom Maish and John Kaiser literally paved the way by finally getting Carmen Monroy, Director of the Southwest Area Office for State of FL Dept. of Transportation District One, at the new at the new parking site; once at the site the need for the deceleration lane was undisputed! We can now expect phase one of the Boardwalk Expansion project funded by DEP to begin in spring or summer of 2016.

The second big news is January broke rain fall records. To put this into perspective, in a typical January we get just under 2 inches of rain. This year, however, Page Field airport in Fort Myers (where climate records are kept) has received 12.98 inches of rain so it was a wet and wild month in the Fakahatchee. The excessive rain creates challenges for FOF volunteers and Park staff, Janes Scenic is not in the best of condition and work on the road is at turtle pace instead of at **Don Leonard's** speed – Don is a park resident volunteer who devotes much of his time to Jane Scenic Drive.

The FOF tours are dodging the rain and **Jinny Ball** is receiving calls daily on the FOF line with concerns of tour cancellations; aside from cancelling the Boardwalk tour on January 28 and the tram tour on the same day, all tours went on as scheduled. **I want to thank Jinny and all our Tours volunteers** for their strong sense of responsibility – they have been undeterred by the January weather and the success of the FOF tours would not be possible without them.

Visitors on the January tours are posting their satisfaction on **Trip Advisor** monitored by **Bruce Bunch**. A visitor from Plant City, FL, wrote *“Two of us traveled to Fakahatchee with*

the desire to walk in the slough with guides. We took a tram and swamp walk tour and Patrick and Jim escorting a total of four. All expectations of seeing and feeling the life in a wild preserve were met and exceeded. From Naples and Arizona there were these comments, “I live seasonally in Naples and brought a friend from Arizona to join me on the tram and swamp walk tour. What a great way to learn about the ecology of the area. It was fun and educational. Our guide was knowledgeable about the area and his enthusiasm was catching. I joined the Friends of Fakahatchee the next day”.

Let's not forget the **Fearless Fakahackers**, I can imagine **Dino Barone** doing the “enough rain already” dance, I know for a fact the Fakahackers don't like to stay idle too long; they have energy to burn and a long “to do” list.

I want to thank all our members for their generosity with the Annual Fund – together you donated \$9,365 and again showed your capacity to support the FOF. We will be able to purchase an ATV for Park Biologist Mike Owen. I also want to acknowledge **Rita Bleasdale** who has been extremely generous with both the Annual Fund and the Boardwalk Expansion project. Her group of friends, for whom she hosted a swamp walk, have also been generous; in December Rita's generosity along with friends Carol Hasting, Christine Hepburn, and Randal Getman donated over \$9,000. Randal declared that his first swamp walk was *“the most memorable day of my life”*.

Another generous donation came from **The Everglades Astronomical Society** who for 30 years have been setting their telescope in the darkest sky of the Fakahatchee. The not for profit Society www.naples.net/clubs/eas/ donated \$2,000 to the FOF's general fund as a gesture of gratitude for all that FOF volunteers do to support the Park.



Work has started on the Deceleration Lane for the new entrance to the Boardwalk on the north side of US-41. FOF member John Kaiser (*seen here at the site*) was instrumental in obtaining assistance from the Collier County MPO to get the project underway. *Photos thanks to Tom Maish.*

En Plein Air Artists Meet

Great weather, and even a gentle breeze, greeted us for the annual Fakahatchee Strand Preserve *En Plein Air* (Art in the Preserve) gathering on January 9. The event was well attended, with artists working in several different mediums. One was mono-printing using a portable gel plate. This plate is a gelatin base and with the addition of a piece of paper, acrylic paints, a roller and a twist of talent produces one-of-a-kind “gelly” prints.

Other artists used pencil, colored pencils, watercolor paint, watercolor pencils, and permanent markers to produce their artwork. Plenty of subject material provided inspiration, from the remains of Weaver’s Station to the two red-shouldered hawks patrolling the area. Artists stopped for lunch, sharing tips and enjoying nature and camaraderie. A good time was had by all!

With thanks to Karen Relish and Elizabeth Smith for report and photos.



FIRST DAY WALK

by Matt Kruse
Acting Park Manager

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park participated in its first “Florida State Parks First Day Hikes”. Park Biologist Mike Owen led 7 visitors on a 1-mile swamp walk through the Fak on New Year’s Day

Over 70 Florida State Parks participated; more than 1027 hikers covered nearly 2000 miles state-wide.



From left to right: Grant Maughan, Susan Jobe, Tim O’Brien, Dino Barone. Photo courtesy of Bob Becker.

Fearless FAKA-hackers

by Dino Barone

Sunday, January 24, was a cool morning in the Fakahatchee. Daybreak temperatures at the extreme north end of the park was in the low 40s. This did NOT slow down the FAKA-hackers from our days’ mission.

We were surveying and clearing trails in the NW section of the park, in anticipation of the Everglades Ultra being held on Saturday February 20.



The races (50m, 50k, 25k) take place in the Fakahatchee on **Saturday, February 20**, with the longest one starting off at 6:00 a.m. For info, see www.evergladesultras.com where runners can register. Thanks to organizer Bob Becker of Ultra Sports, FOF has already received donations via their website.

Fakahatchee Featured at MSD Festival



The 12th annual Marjory Stoneman Douglas Festival in Everglades City on **February 23 to February 27** will provide a lot of exposure for the Fakahatchee. The festival, sponsored by the Museum of the Everglades, features presentations by former FOF board member and official historian Franklin Adams; park biologist Mike Owen; FOF Vice-President Patrick Higgins; and “Ghost Writer” newsletter editor and author Marya Repko. Participants will also have a chance to take a swamp walk with Mike Owen and tour the park on the Friends’ Ghost Rider Tram.

Captain Franklin Adams will open the festival on Tuesday, February 23, at 10:45 a.m. by discussing “My Memories of Marjory.” Franklin met Marjory when he was a student and went on help her give speeches around the state about the importance of the Everglades. Reservations for the opening luncheon at Everglades Isle are \$25 per person or \$20 for Friends of the Museum members. Call (239) 695-0008.

Higgins will present “Fakahatchee: Jewel of the Everglades” at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, February 24, at the Museum. At 1:00 p.m., Marya Repko will discuss “Early Everglades Environmentalists”. Mike Owen will update attendees on the park’s orchid restoration project at 2:00 p.m. when he discusses “The Cuban Connection”.

On Thursday, February 25, Owen will lead an afternoon swamp walk that gets underway at 1:00 p.m. On the final day of the festival, a Ghost Rider tram tour of the park will begin at 9:00 a.m. To reserve a spot for either event, call the Museum at (239) 695-0008.

Reservations are not required for presentations in the Museum. To see the full schedule of events in this packed program, see www.evergladesmuseum.org.



GET ON YOUR BIKE

Sign up now for the Everglades Bike Ride on **Sunday, March 13**. One option is the “bumpy ride” on Janes Scenic Drive but there are also smooth rides around the Everglades City area. FOF benefits and FOF members get a discount. To register and learn more, see www.evergladesrogg.org/j/frogg and click on Everglades Ride or phone (239) 695-2397.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS DUE BY FEBRUARY 26

Nominations are being sought to fill positions on the FOF Board of Directors. The Board meets every other month during the summer and monthly from September through April (usually at 10 a.m. on Sundays). The Board sponsors events, raises money, authorizes expenditures, and sets priorities and objectives for both short-term and long-term improvements to the Park. As a Board member, you will get to know and work with Park staff and those with an intimate knowledge of what the Park has to offer.

A nominee will be a member in good standing of the Friends of Fakahatchee and will be at least 18 years old, verify a willingness to actively participate at Board meetings and activities during the two year term beginning in April, and be prepared to submit a brief statement of background, interests, and qualifications. All interested members are encouraged to apply, including seasonal residents.

Do not be afraid to reach outside current FOF members and encourage someone to join if you believe they will be a valuable addition to the Board or have needed skills such as a financial background or event planning. Please do not nominate anyone who has not agreed to serve. You may, of course, nominate yourself.

If you are willing to serve or know someone who is, please send the Nomination Form, with your name and contact information and the nominee's name, address, phone and e-mail to:

jskaiser@maine.edu
or
John Kaiser
3431 Lakemont Drive
Bonita Springs FL 34134
ph. 239-949-6934 or 207-659-1714

The deadline for nominations is **February 26**. Nominees will be invited to submit a short biographical sketch. "Bios" will be due by March 7. If you need a nomination form, please contact John Kaiser.

We look forward to your nominations,
John Kaiser, Ted DeGroot, Tom Maish
Nominating Committee

SCHEDULE FOR THE ELECTION

- Feb 4: Call for Nominations sent by email or post
- Feb 26: Deadline for Nominations
- Mar 7: Receipt of Bios
- Mar 18: Ballots sent
- Apr 1: Deadline for Posting Ballots
- Apr 6: Ballots Counted
- Apr 10: New Board Meets, elects officers
Results Announced at Members’ Annual Dinner

MEMBERSHIP

We have 268 current memberships excluding those in arrears from previous quarters. Renewal notices were emailed at the beginning of January for the 1st quarter.

Thanks to those who have replied promptly. The remainder will be reminded as will the 35 members in arrears from the 4th quarter of 2105.

You can join or renew on our website. For info, call Jinny at (239) 695-1023.

Welcome to new members since our last newsletter:

- Jan Backrach, Bonita Springs
- Jennifer Galloway, Naples
- Kenneth Johnson, Miami
- Elaine Middelsteadt, Everglades City
- Steve Rosen, Naples
- Karin Spronz, Largo
- Toby Steinberg & Bob Maxman, Naples

IN THE NEWS

There was a feature article "Have a Wild Time Exploring the Fakahatchee" in the *Fort Myers News-Press* special weekend section *Tropicalia* on January 24. It showed photos of the tram and the eagle's nest at the Boardwalk and included an interview with Bruce Bunch, FOF public relations guru. See www.news-press.com and search for Fakahatchee where you will also find an article about orchid restoration.

A TripAdvisor report headlined "great tour guides / made for a wonderful morning" quoted a Marco Island visitor: you can drive yourself into the state park, but you would miss so much of the everglades history and lore by not having two wonderful male guides on the tram. yes, it did cost \$25 pp. a steal to have such an informative tour by a retired pathologist and a retired biology teacher. bravo gentleman! ... a true get away ... might as well be 100 miles from civilization. great narrative about wildlife

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.**, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation Citizen Support Organization, provides financial and volunteer support to preserve the unique ecology and cultural heritage of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and to educate the public about its importance. The Fakahatchee is 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 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 400 copies.

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 Secretary – Jinny Ball Treasurer – Ken Shapiro
- BOARD: Jinny Ball Ted DeGroot Dennis Giardina Patrick Higgins John Kaiser
 Tom Maish Ken Shapiro Glen Stacell Francine Stevens
- LIFETIME PRESERVERS: Bruce & Janet Bunch
 LIFETIME FAMILY MEMBERS: Tom & Judy Maish, Van & Jane Saylor, Glen & Laura Stacell
 LIFETIME INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS: Rita Bleasdale, Warner Blow, Elsa Caldwell, Peter Haffenreffer, James Nici,
 Wendy Becker Payton, Ken Shapiro, Carol Vartanian
 BUSINESS PATRONS: EarthTech Environmental, Everglades Area Tours, North American Canoe Tours,
 Nathaniel P. Reed, Tour the Glades
 BUSINESS BENEFACTORS: Dragonfly Expeditions

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NEW 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) Supporter (\$50) Patron (\$100) Benefactor (\$500)

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MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC