



The Ghost Writer

Newsletter of the Friends of Fakahatchee

November 2016

Put your talents to work on the FOF board

Interested in putting your talents to work to improve the Friends of Fakahatchee and support the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park? You can do so by joining the FOF board of directors. Applications for positions on the FOF board are being accepted through January 27, 2017.

The Board generally meets monthly. It is responsible for the operation of the Friends of Fakahatchee, raising and managing funds in support of the Park, and working closely with park staff both in the field and at the administrative level.

Members are elected to serve two year terms limited to a maximum of six years. The Board is seeking applicants who have a background in accounting, fund-raising, environmental science, or general management. Previous experience on a non-profit board member is a positive, but not essential.

Interested parties should contact Ted DeGroot, ted@all-florida.com, (239) 248-8788 or any of the following members of the Nominating Committee:

Jinny Ball virginiaball@comcast.net
John Kaiser jskaiser@maine.edu
Tom Maish tommaish@aol.com
Marya Repko mrepko@earthlink.net

Fall Fakahatchee bursts with berries, lushness

By Patrick Higgins



Clockwise from left: Phragmites in Fall wind, marlberry, beautyberry, and Dahoon holly.

Autumn has come to the Fakahatchee; not with the spectacular color display of the northern woods but nevertheless it's here. You just have to look a little closer for subtler signs and I don't mean the proliferation of out-of-state license plates. In early October it seemed like mother nature had suddenly turned off the tap and we went instantly to the brilliant blue cloudless skies of the dry season and to cooler nights.

Here though in southwest Florida, nearer the equator, our shortening of days has a less dramatic effect on foliage than up north and cooling doesn't become significant until much later in the season, so it's the dry-down which has biggest impact. We see one last fling from many plants and a super abundance of food. Holly, beautyberry, myrsine, sabal palm and wild coffee are laden with fruit, and our oaks are beginning to produce a welcome bounty of acorns just at the very time when the nutritional value of our prairie grasses are ebbing to their lowest.

– continued next page

Even though they don't hibernate our Florida black bears in response to primordial patterns will be fattening up on this excess in preparation for 'winter' denning from late December through March when they will reduce activity and the females will cub.

Already the water has left our marl prairies. Drying periphyton is leaving a khaki film that will add minutely to the very thin soil layer and the Muhly grass is beginning to cast a purple haze over the grasslands, especially in areas that were burnt earlier in the year.

Along the lower sections of Jane's Scenic Drive there's a lushness of impending senescence and an explosion of flowering in a rush to set seed. Tall tasseled phragmites are bending to autumn winds, spikes of goldenrod are adding color amongst the delicate white umbels of water dropwort that remind me of Queen Anne's lace back home in England, and masses of broom sedge are spreading their fluffy seeds. There's a riot of creamy-white climbing hempvine covering almost everything and the needles of lonely dwarf pond cypress are browning.

In the swamp, clamshell orchids are blooming under an already thinning canopy. Pop ash are casting off their leaves and the normally seasonally confused red maples seem to be getting their act together. Carolina willow just gives up: its leaves blacken, wither and quickly drop off. Dogwood foliage has a pretty scruffy end too, but the undersides of giant leather fern fronds now have a glow of golden brown spores.

Through a combination of evaporation and a fresh infusion of cypress branchlets, the water is darkening to the color of stewed tea. Our snakes are a little more visible as they climb more frequently up out of cooler water on to old stumps or cypress knees to thermoregulate.

Along our trams poison ivy and Virginia creeper are reddening and the saltbush have a dusting of white flowers. Fresh green toothpetal orchid stalks are thrusting upwards out of the leaf litter. There's a profusion of buckeye butterflies, their numbers augmented by northern migrants and I notice quite a few ruddy dagger-wings visiting the purple-tinged climbing asters which are now at their peak.

There's still plenty of water about elsewhere so there aren't yet huge congregations of wading birds in the Fakahatchee, but at the very beginning of Jane's Scenic Drive, just before the park entrance where the borrow ditch is most shallow, a mixed flock of ibis and egrets are feasting on newly concentrated prey and roosting in nearby trees in between. As the season and dry-down progresses, so they will advance up the Drive until they reach the deepest sections of the borrow ditch where their by then large numbers, will produce enough phosphate-rich guano to sustain the out of place cattails for another season.

Our swallowtail kites are long gone, but I saw my first wheeling flight of white pelicans newly arriving from the western lakes. The signs however are not just visual; there's the rattling of dried leaves and seed pods in the wind, and I think I heard the faint turkey-like wattle of distant Sandhill cranes. So we do have seasonal change, it's just a little bit slower and only apparent in the detail.

Filmmaker Richard Kern featured at Dec. 17 "Welcome Back" dinner

Filmmaker Richard Kern will present his 37-minute documentary "Ghosts of the Western Everglades at the Friends of Fakahatchee "Welcome Back" dinner December 17 at the Everglades Adventure Center in Everglades City.

Kern is a second generation filmmaker working together with his father, Rich Kern who co-founded the non-profit environmental education organization Encounters in Excellence in 1980. After graduating with a degree in Literary and Cultural Studies from the College of William and Mary in 2002, Richard spent several years working as a visual artist in Miami. In 2009 he joined the Encounters in Excellence team.



In addition to writing, filming and producing, Richard presents his films to over 50 Miami-Dade County Public Schools each year, reaching more than 40,000 students across the county. Kern footage has been seen on the Discovery Channel as well as networks in other countries.

The Everglades Adventure Center (formerly the Seafood Depot) is located at 102 Collier Avenue in Everglades City. The event begins at 5 p.m. with a cash bar followed by a 6 p.m. buffet dinner and Kern's presentation. For required reservations at \$40 each click on the link below.

[Welcome Back Dinner Reservations](#)

President's Message by Francine Stevens

The fall winds Patrick mentioned in his column are blowing back many of our snowbird members and volunteers. It is great to see you! I look forward to meeting more of you at the Welcome Back dinner mentioned above. Our film has many scenes that may be familiar to us and many more that show our beloved preserve in a surprising new way. This is an evening to rekindle old friendships and make new ones as our organization continues to grow. And as it does, our need for volunteers increases. If you have time and talent to share, please consider making time in your schedule this season to join us as a volunteer.



Studies show hiking in natural settings—like the Fakahatchee—increases creativity.

Hike in the Fakahatchee may spur creativity

by Bruce Bunch

Ever have a sudden brainstorm while hiking in the Fakahatchee? Have you come up with a solution to a thorny problem (other than avoiding snakes) while wading in the cool waters of the swamp? It turns out you are not alone. Several recent studies have linked hiking or walking in natural surroundings with improved creativity.

In a September 13 article titled “The Genius of Walk and Talk,” the **Wall Street Journal** reported: “Creative output increases by an average of 60% when people are walking, according to a 2014 Stanford University study of 176 college students and other adults. Study participants were asked to think of alternative uses for a given object while they were seated or walking. When people were walking, they produced more responses that no one else in the group had thought of when they were sitting.

Next time you are wrestling with a problem that needs a creative solution, give this concept a try. It might turn out that a walking stick is a more powerful creative tool than a personal computer.

Ghostwriter sponsors turkey hunt

To mark the next week's Thanksgiving Holiday, a photo turkey hunt is being sponsored by the Ghostwriter. Turkeys frequent the Fakahatchee, often being seen at dawn and dusk. Photographers are asked to "shoot" the wily birds and post the results to the Friends of Fakahatchee Facebook site, <https://www.facebook.com/orchidswamp/>

