



The Ghost Writer

SEPTEMBER 2010

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturday
4th Tuesday

starting on November 13

Cost: \$50 (\$40 member), \$15 child

Reservations Required.

Phone (239) 695-1023

or email islandgirlm@msn.com

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

1st Saturday: resume in the fall

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2nd Saturday, 3rd Tuesday
resume in the fall

BOARD MEETINGS

2nd Sunday at 10:00 a.m.
resume in the fall

2010-2011 SEASON

Nov 6: Coastal Cruise

Dec 5: Welcome Back Dinner

Jan 22: Coastal Cruise

Feb 26: Fakahatchee SAFARI

March 20: Coastal Cruise

March 27: Family Day Picnic

April 10: Annual Dinner

WARNING: These dates may change.

AMAZING ADVENTURES

1st Friday at 6:30 p.m.

resume in the fall

See www.rookerybay.org

This is a Special Edition of
The Ghost Writer
focusing on the Boardwalk.

SPECIAL EDITION **BOARDWALK EXPANSION**



**YOUR WINDOW INTO
THE FAKAHATCHEE**



The Fakahatchee Boardwalk at Big Cypress Bend is on US-41 (Tamiami Trail) about 7 miles west of SR-29. It is visited by thousands of tourists every year but has minimal facilities. The Friends of Fakahatchee are working with the Florida Park Service on a major expansion project to accommodate more visitors with an extended Boardwalk plus safer parking and permanent displays.

FAKAHATCHEE BOARDWALK EXPANSION - UPDATE

As members of Friends of Fakahatchee you are aware of the deterioration of our Boardwalk plus the complete lack any facilities and parking. Over the past three years our Vision Committee has considered what is needed to improve visitors' experience at this window to the Fakahatchee.

In response to this work, the Park Service sent Sine Murray (Park Planner), Brant Chaisson (Supervising Architect), and Valinda Subic (Bureau Chief of District 4, Renee's boss) on a fact finding trip in December, 2009.

In April the Board sent a letter to Mike Bullock, Director of the Florida Parks Service, requesting a meeting in Tallahassee with top State officials. A video conference was scheduled on May 13, 2010.

The conference was chaired by Mike Bullock. Attending was Bob Ballard (Deputy Secretary of the Florida DEP, which oversees the Park Service) and the following people: Scott Robinson (Assistant Director Park Service), Scott Cannard (Chief of Design & Construction), Steve Dana (Budget Chief), Albert Gregory (Chief of Park Planning), Robert Wilhelm (Chief of Park Operations), Matthew Mitchell (Assistant Chief of Park Operations), Sine Murray (Park Planning).

Prior to the meeting copies of the Friends promotional DVD, "Window to the Fakahatchee" were sent to the group. Produced by Elam Stoltzfus as part of the FOF funding for his documentary "Big Cypress Swamp - The Western Everglades", Elam had taken graphic shots that displayed the deteriorating Boardwalk, lack of restrooms and the unsafe parking conditions along US-41.

FOF President Tom Maish, Vice President Dennis Giardina, Board member Glen Stacell, and Park Manager Renee Rau stated the needs of the Fakahatchee and made the case for the requested improvements: to renovate and expand the Boardwalk, to develop safe parking areas, and to construct a Visitor Center with eco-friendly restrooms.

The reception and enthusiasm expressed by Secretary Ballard was summed up in his statement *"that the Fakahatchee is the real Florida and must be preserved"*.

Mr Ballard further stated that he wants to *"hold up the Friends of Fakahatchee to other Citizen Support Organizations (CSOs) as an example of how a Friends group can really assist the Park Service"*. He said that we did not come just to ask for money, but that the FOF is providing seed money to improve the Park!

Bottom line was the State Budget had not been approved as of the meeting and money was going to be tight; BUT Secretary Ballard said that the Friends of Fakahatchee has done so much to help the Park that he *"committed the State to give us \$3.00 for every \$1.00 the Friends raised for the Boardwalk improvement"*!

In response to this video conference Mr Ballard sent a "Blue Ribbon" Team to the Fakahatchee to initiate our planning process. This Team consisted Albert Gregory, Scott Cannard, Robert Wilhelm, and Sine Murray who all took part in the conference plus Tom Napier (Professional Engineer) and District 4 staff Valinda Subic (Bureau Chief), B. J. Givens (Assistant Bureau Chief), Terry Hintgen (Biologist).

The Team met on June 15th at the Audubon Corkscrew Sanctuary. Ed Carlson, Executive Director, first showed their "living restroom" and then the showcase IPE Brazilian sustainable hardwood boardwalk. The Team was impressed that the 15 year old IPE boardwalk showed no appreciable wear or deterioration. Walking the 2.25 mile boardwalk the Team viewed the Wood Stork observation tower, rain shelters and observation loops off of the main boardwalk.

Ed explained that Corkscrew had 100,000 visitors per year with 20,000 alone in March and a single day count of nearly 1000. This information reinforced our need. The Fakahatchee Boardwalk has some 80,000 visitors yearly with 14,000 in a month and an actual one-day count of 691 – with NONE of the supporting infrastructure that Corkscrew has in place!

The following day the Team met at the Fakahatchee Boardwalk for a tour and an explanation of the Vision Committee's suggestions. Glen Stacell gave a talk on the possible loop trails and Jay Staton explained ideas for interpretation. The Team viewed potential trail loops around the lake and the possibility of using the abandoned stretch of old US-41 for parking and the Visitors' Center site.

Wrapping up the meetings Albert Gregory explained that the Team was sent by Secretary Ballard to assess not only the Boardwalk, but to plan for the future of the total Park for the next 10 years to be incorporated into the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park's Unit Management Plan.

Key points of the Team's initial survey were:

- there was 100% agreement among the Team on replacing the Boardwalk and adding a loop(s).
- that the old US-41 site is probably the best location for parking, restrooms, and some type of "interpretative center".
- that the site should include space for RV hook-ups for seasonal Park Volunteers.
- that the name be changed to "Fakahatchee Strand Boardwalk".

Scott Cannard, Chief of Design, stated that he felt that his design team could provide the Friends with a quality design. The Park Service wants this project to set a "higher level" of Park Service design. It will also be their "legacy to the Fakahatchee". All the planning will include the FOF as a partner in the design process, but if the Friends do not like the results then we have the option to go to an outside source.

To demonstrate to the Planning Team the commitment of the Friends; a Board Challenge "quickie" campaign netted over \$5000 from FOF previous and current Board members. The Park Team was quite taken with this gesture!

To keep a focus on Mr Ballard's offer of \$3.00 match for each \$1.00 that the Friends raise, we are beginning our campaign among members.

Please consider a significant contribution for the BOARDWALK FUND to meet the 3-to-1 challenge.

Cordially, Tom Maish, FOF President



The meeting on June 16 at the Fakahatchee Boardwalk included a "blue ribbon" team from the Park Service. See the Update on page 2.



Snapshots from the DVD "Window into the Fakahatchee" showing the need for Boardwalk repairs.



THANKS!

The Boardwalk Challenge got off to a good start with donations from:

Allen Caldwell
Elsa Caldwell
Art Cullman Family
Catherine Hatch
Howard Lubel
Tom & Judy Maish
Margaret & Richard Scott
Glen & Laura Stacell
Jay Staton
Nelson & Caryl Tilden
Jerry Winters & Signe Backus
James & Nicole Woodard

The 12 donors above have already contributed \$5050 – that is an average of \$420.

Our goal is to raise \$100,000 by November 1.

With over 300 names in our membership list, we might reach our target if everyone is generous.

DONATE ONLINE!

The easiest way to make your donation to the Boardwalk Fund is electronically. Just go to the "About the Boardwalk" page at www.orchidswamp.org.

FAKAHATCHEE BOARDWALK EXPANSION

date _____

____ I am donating ____ \$100 ____ \$250 ____ \$500 ____ \$1000 ____ other (\$ _____)
for the Boardwalk Expansion Project. Enclosed is my check payable to "FOF Boardwalk Fund".
____ Please send me a complimentary copy of the special DVD.

name _____

street _____

city _____ State _____ ZIP _____

phone _____ email _____

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 289 fully-paid memberships in the following categories:

Business	7
Family	138
Individual	107
Patron	36
Youth	1

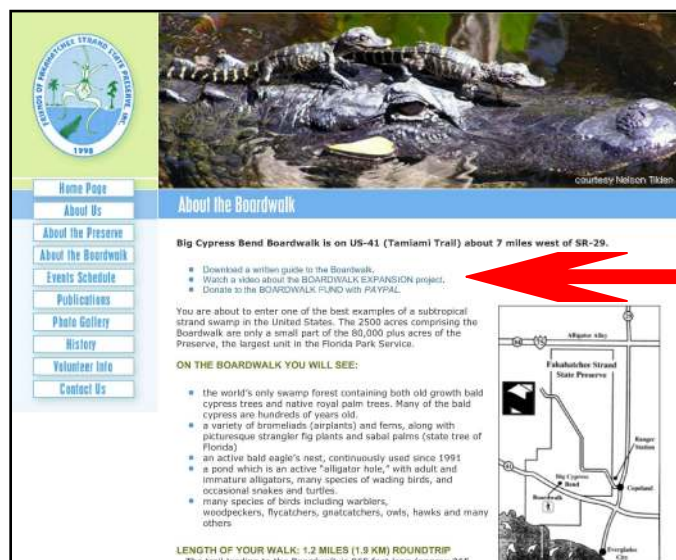
plus 17 members in arrears from the 1st and 2nd quarters and 23 Introductory members who joined after the SAFARI and Coastal Cruises.

Of the total 329 names on our membership list, 298 receive our news by email, saving at least \$131 in postage per issue.

Welcome to new members:

Jack Cane, Naples
Pete Corradino, Lehigh Acres
Richard & Luba Dewitt, Coral Gables
Evan T. Jones, Bergen, NY
Richard M. Levine, North Fort Myers
Chris Little, Murphy, TX
Frank Murphy, Saugerties, NY
Jay Pfahl, Key West
Shamrock Bank, Naples

Please copy this newsletter for your neighbors, friends, and work colleagues so they can read about the Fakahatchee and what FOF is doing.



DVD ON WEBSITE

Our promotional DVD about the Boardwalk Expansion Project is now on our website www.orchidswamp.org. You can find the link on the "About the Boardwalk" page.

This short film shows where the weaknesses are in the Boardwalk structure, how perilous the parking situation is, and how crowded the facility becomes during the busy winter season.

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.**, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation, is the Citizen Support Organization of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, 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 Friends of Fakahatchee strive to aid in the preservation of this ecologically unique area and to educate the public about its importance.

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 300 copies.

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OFFICERS:	President – Tom Maish	Vice-President – Dennis Giardina					
	Secretary – Susan O'Farrell	Treasurer – Saul Friess					
BOARD:	Allen Caldwell	Elsa Caldwell	Julia Cardenas	Frank Denninger	Saul Friess	Dennis Giardina	
	Cindy Hackney	Howard Lubel	Tom Maish	Susan O'Farrell	Glenn Stacell	Jay Staton	Carol Swingle

NEW ANNUAL 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) ___ Business (\$50) ___ Patron (\$100) ___ Benefactor (\$500) ___ extra (\$ _____)
___ Youth (\$10) birth date: month ___ day ___ year ___ (members under 18 years old must select this)

NAME _____
STREET / P.O.BOX: _____

EMAIL _____
ALTERNATE ADDRESS _____

CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____

CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____

MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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