



The Ghost Writer

NOVEMBER 2015

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
starting Nov 19, Thursday at 10am

MOONLIGHT TRAM TOUR
Nov 25, Dec 24, Jan 23, Feb 22, Mar 22

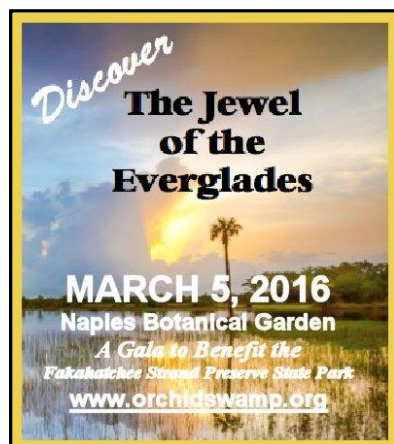
TRAM TOUR & SWAMP WALK
starting Nov 17, Tuesday at 9:30am

BIOLOGIST'S SWAMP WALK
starting Nov 21, Saturday at 9:30am

GUIDED BOARDWALK TOUR
starting Dec 3, Thursday at 9am

FOF BOARD MEETING
Sunday, November 15, 10:30 a.m.
Ranger Station, Copeland

WELCOME-BACK DINNER
Sunday, December 13, 5:00 p.m.
See right column and President's Message.



BOARDWALK PLAQUE STOLEN!

A bit of Fakahatchee history is gone ...

Sadly, sometime between the 17th and 21st of October the bronze commemorative plaque mounted on the rock at the base of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk was stolen, probably to be melted down as scrap.

The plaque marked the boardwalk's designation in 1966 by the Secretary of the Interior as a National Natural Landmark in recognition of the area's biological importance. This was a decade before the site was acquired by the State and added to the Park.

If anyone saw any suspicious activity please report it to the Park Manager and to the Collier County Sheriff's Office at (2329) 252-9300.

As part of the Boardwalk Expansion Project we will be adding security cameras to the area.



Thanks to Linda Koreny for the "before" and "after" photos and to Patrick Higgins for the report with close-up of the plaque.



RARE EVERGLADES MINK

Niki Woodard saw an Everglades Mink on Janes Drive south of East Main on 10/11/15. Biologist Mike Owen commented that they have collected two road-kill minks on US-41 but the last live one seen in the Fak was on March 29.

WELCOME-BACK DINNER

Join us on **Sunday, December 13**, to greet old friends and make new ones at our first formal event of the winter season. The evening starts at 5:00 p.m. with a cash bar followed by a buffet dinner. After some introductory remarks by our president, speaker Cesar Becerra will talk about logging in the Fak area. The event takes place in Everglades City at the Everglades Adventure Center (old Depot Restaurant). Cost is \$45 and reservations are required. See www.orchidswamp.org to book your places.



M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

Participants in the 18th Annual Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park **Butterfly Count** on 10/11/15 were members of the Broward County Butterfly Chapter, Marc Minno of Eco-Cognizant, Inc., Mike Owen, Biologist, and Fakahatchee volunteers. The count is along Janes Scenic Drive. We had the opportunity to "beat the bush" and concentrate on the **Skippers** such as Grass Skipper, Delaware Skipper, Least Skipper, Brazilian Skipper, Three-Spotted Skipper, Clouded Skipper and Twin-Spot Skippers. The Skippers come in all shades of brown but if you get close, possibly using close focus binoculars and expertise from the participants, one can differentiate them. We enjoyed the photogenic **Eastern Tiger Swallowtails** and **Palamedes Swallowtails** puddling. We also saw a couple of **Zebra Longwings**, **Cloudless Sulphurs**, **White Peacocks**, and **Ruddy Daggerwings**. Great time and Great Weather as written by Robert Fisher. *See photos below.*

In addition, on 10/11/15, between 10:30AM-4:30PM while on Janes Scenic Drive, the participants of the Annual Count also observed and recorded **American Bitterns**, **Great Egrets**, **Little Blue Herons**, **Black Crowned and Yellow Crowned Night Heron**, **White Ibis**, **Black and Turkey Vultures**, **Red-Shouldered Hawks**, **King Rails**, **Limpkins**, **Barred Owl**, **Belted Kingfisher**, **Red-bellied Woodpecker**, **Downy Woodpecker**, **Pileated Woodpeckers**, **Eastern Phoebe**, **Great Crested Flycatchers**, **American Crows**, **Carolina Wrens**, **House Wren**, **Blue Gray Catchers**, **Gray Catbirds**, **Northern Mockingbird**, **White-Eyed Vireos**, **Yellow Palm Warblers**, **Common Yellow Throats**, **Northern Cardinals**, and **Red-Wing Blackbirds**. They also observed **Green Treefrogs**, **Oak Toads**, **Black Racers**, **American Alligators**, and **Green Anoles** as well various **Dragonflies** and **Damselflies**.

If you want to report sightings, contact Park biologist Mike Owen by phone at (239) 695-2886 or by email at FOF_90@hotmail.com



Top: Three-Spotted Skipper

Bottom: Palamedes Swallowtail.

Photos by Mark Minno, Eco-Cognizant, Inc.



Fakahatchee SWAMPBEES We Build ...We FAKA-hack!

by Dino Barone

On Saturday 10/10/15, led by FAKA Ranger Extraordinaire Steven Bass, Howard Lubel and myself headed out to West Main to rebuild a bridge over the collapsed culvert just west of the cabins – approximately 1.5 miles west of the gate.

Using both of our FOF Kubotas', portable generator, AC power drill, DC battery power drills, and a big box of wood screws, we removed the old/loose materials, then laid out 4x4's and planks in an optimum design maximizing strength, thus providing superior support for the traffic it will need to endure. *See page 6 for more volunteer news.*

President's Message

by Francine Stevens

Let's start with some good news –it's time again for our **Welcome-Back Dinner** and this year Bill Odrey welcomes the FOF to hold their dinner at the Everglades Adventure Center. Bill renamed the former Seafood Depot restaurant in Everglades City and, after a lot of work and determination, met all the permitting requirements to open for business. At our dinner on **Sunday, December 13**, energetic and engaging speaker Cesar Becerra will keep us captivated with his presentation on "Giants of the Swamp; the history of the Logging Industry at Copeland and Jerome". See the information provided in the newsletter to buy your tickets for the dinner.

I need your help with our Discover the Jewel Gala on the 5th March, especially on the evening of the Gala. We need folks to help welcome our guests as they arrive, help them find their way around, find their table, help with the auction, wrap up the evening, and so on. This is the one time when we need volunteers outside of our "regular volunteers" because there is just so much to do when you are expecting over 250 guests. Remember that as you will be helping the FOF you will be spending the evening at the beautiful Naples Botanical Garden. **Please call Ted DeGroot at 239-248-8788** who will explain the Gala dinner arrangement for the volunteers and how you can help make the Gala an evening our guests will remember and talk about.

On the 21 October I walked the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk something I had not done in a while, I noticed the Bronze plaque at the entrance of the Boardwalk was missing and presumed Park staff had removed it to repair or clean – it never dawned on me that it could have been stolen and so I did not report my observation to anyone. Today I found out that the plaque was stolen and the only reason would be to get money for bronze; insult over injury! See the front page for pictures and do your own detective work; maybe we'll find a scrap metal place that would have been brought the plaque for cash – and possibly find the culprits.

I look forward to seeing you at the Welcome-Back dinner!



Howard Lubel, Dino Barone, and new ranger Tom Mosley spent the weekend of October 17/18 clearing Mud Tram. See page 6 for how you can volunteer.

PARKS; THE HEART OF NATURAL FLORIDA

Tom Maish attended the Florida Audubon Annual Meeting on October 24 in Maitland as a member of Audubon but thought FOF members would be interested in the discussions about Florida parks which was the theme of the gathering. Here is his summary.

Various panels discussed the major issues:

- Amendment Funds of \$750 million were misspent to pay \$227million of Park expenses that had previously been funded by Legislative appropriation. Only \$17million went to Florida Forever!
- Lack of transparency in the Legislative budgeting process,
- Cattle grazing in the Parks,
- Hunting in the Parks,
- Timbering in the Parks,
- GRASI agreements that allow Military Operations in selected Parks,
- Park Service goal of self sufficiency.

Eric Draper, Executive Director of Florida Audubon, and Don Philpott, President of Friends of Florida State Parks CSO, invited Gary Hart, Deputy Director of DEP, and Donald Forgione, Park Service Director, to meet with stakeholders from Florida Audubon, Florida parks, and others interested in the future of our park system.

Each of the 40 plus participants introduced themselves with their affiliations and then told of specific problems they felt needed to be addressed by DEP. The issues brought up to Director Hart were specific and pointed.

After each person had commented, Director Hart explained the perspective of DEP. The new position of using the "charrette system" of taking notes and not allowing public comment to "protect DEP staff from getting beat up" garnered considerable derision from the panel.

The take-away message from Director Hart was that, although "we " may not agree with DEP positions, he would try to find common ground. Mr. Hart also stated that he would consider the panel's comments.

After Mr. Hart and Mr. Forgione departed, Audubon's Eric Draper posed the question, "Was the meeting beneficial?" The answer was YES – communication had been established, but there is much more to accomplish. Specifically:

- A determination be made of why the Legislators are ignoring the 75% mandate of the voters to purchase additional land to protect our water and natural resources.
- Ask the Park Service to raise entrance and camping fees to meet DEP goal of 100% self-sufficiency rather than resort to grazing, timbering, and similar non-compatible uses.
- Fees have not been increased since 2009. With 30 million visitors per year, a small increase would yield considerable revenue.
- Purchasing land for public recreation should be like other infrastructure planning similar to building roads for the future.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Linda Koreny

The forecasted thunderstorms arrived in the afternoon but in the morning it was just cloudy on our first walk on the Boardwalk this season. It's good to be back; I love this place. I've been told that the rains arrived later than usual this summer but the rains *did* come and the Strand *is* hydrated, water is everywhere along the entire length of the boardwalk. It is quiet today and the vegetation bright green.

From the parking lot we walked along the limestone tram and spotted an adult **American Alligator** floating in the borrow canal, only her eyes and nose visible. Walking onto the boards we came across a cypress tree with scratches from a black bear's claws where he/she had climbed the tree. An adult **Florida Bald Eagle** was sitting on the watching tree; we turned the corner, arriving at the tripod viewing area just as another Florida Bald Eagle with a branch grasped in her beak was landing into the nest. We watched as the branch was then carefully fitted into place along the upper edge of the nest. Nice! They are repairing the nest so we will be watching for hatching eaglets in January!

The 'Gater pond area at the end of the boardwalk was quiet; with so much water present in the strand, the alligators could be anywhere. As the water continues to slowly travel toward the Gulf, the levels will lower and the resident alligators will soon be concentrated in this area where the water is the deepest. We heard a **Pileated Woodpecker** in the distance and then spotted one at the very top of a tall snag (a standing dead tree).

Back at the picnic table area off the boardwalk, a **Green Heron** was fishing on the far side of the east pond. The season is just beginning and I'm looking forward to it.

You are heartily encouraged to stroll the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk anytime from sunrise to sunset and to do so often. To see more, walk it slowly and quietly; your camera and binoculars will enhance your visit.

This year the Friends of Fakahatchee are offering a new experience, a **Guided Tour of the Boardwalk** – see our website www.orchidswamp.org for information.



Yes, there is water in the Fak. This photo was taken by Dino Barone on the Florida Trail in the NW corner of the park on October 24.

Alligator Flag

by Karen Relish

Alligator Flag (*Thalia geniculata*) is a native plant found in Florida in the water of swamps, marshes, wet ditches, and margins of streams or lakes. It is commonly seen at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk where it grows upright up to 10 feet or more in height.

Flowers are unusual since they are paired or twinned. That is, what appears to be one flower at the top of the stalk is actually two, each one the mirror image of the other. Blooms are pale to dark purple with yellowish centers. Flowers are pollinated by bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.

Alligator Flag is the larval plant for the Brazilian Skipper butterfly. Single gray eggs are laid on the leaves. After emerging, Brazilian skipper caterpillars make shelters out of leaves by cutting portions of the leaves, folding them over, and securing them with silk. As the caterpillars grow, they create larger pockets until they are ready to pupate.

The caterpillars emerge from their shelters at night to feed on the leaves, often causing major defoliation. Prothonotary Warblers, Tufted Titmice, and Northern Cardinals, among others, feed on the pupae and caterpillars.

Keep an eye out for them, especially at the north end of the Boardwalk.



Photo of flower thanks to Donna Day.

Photos of Brazilian skipper adults mating and caterpillar thanks to Dick Brewer.

WALKING ON GATORS

by Patrick Higgins

Anyone who sails in the skinny waters of the Ten Thousand Islands, as I regularly do on my catamaran Tropicbird, will occasionally bump the bottom. And so I suppose it's inevitable that if you stomp around the swamp often enough, you will eventually step on an alligator. I did so for the first time a few weeks ago.

Far from scary it was quite Pythonesque (of the Monty variety). Mike Owen and I were alone deep in the Fak about 1,000 yards west of East Main surveying some ghost orchids. It was just before the September deluge and water was scarce.

We found ourselves in a broad shallow depression where there was still 6-8" of water and were focusing on pop-ash trunks about 6 feet above the ground. Mike was ahead as I was determined to make my own discovery, which I didn't, of course – at least, not of a ghost.

As I put my foot down a gator whipped around in a lightning splash and grasped onto it. Now, you got to look at this from the poor gator's perspective. It had nowhere to go as there wasn't water elsewhere; so it probably had elevated down as I approached, pressing itself hard against the bottom to gain a few inches of cover. It can't be pleasant to have 240 pounds step on your back. Its reaction was purely defensive.

Luckily I was already raising my foot as its teeth fastened onto my boot, so it had a grip on the sides on my sole rather than the top of my foot where I would have felt the bite force. Also, it was only a five-footer.

So there we were; the gator's teeth stuck momentarily in the rubber sides of my boot's sole and me hopping backwards on one leg dragging the creature with me whilst trying to keep my balance with my stick – all the while trying to shake the darn thing off and shouting, "Mike, I got a five foot gator on my foot!" This impasse lasted only a few seconds. I think the gator was as keen to let go as I was for him to do so and maybe even had his teeth stuck.

Mike almost stepped on a cottonmouth coiled on a dry patch during the distraction but was most solicitous, insisting if there was any skin broken I go to the hospital because of the risk of infection. But the only injuries were my pride and a few small perforations in my boot sole. I did get some kudos, though, because scientist to the end, even in my excitement, I hadn't exaggerated the gator's length. When we approached him afterwards sure enough he was five feet and with nowhere to hide he rotated around to face us and scowled.

I suppose seeing the humor of the moment even as it happened comes from a long, albeit sporadic, association with reptiles. Growing up my father wouldn't allow us to keep any pets that could harbor fleas and so by eleven years old I had a caiman living in my bath tub and a collection of snakes and lizards.

I should mention for the benefit of those whom I lead on swamp walks, that it was entirely my own fault and that when I lead the public groups I always pre-reconnoiter the route so I can concentrate on their safety and enjoyment. In any case, our swamp walks are during the cooler months when gators are less active or inactive. As I often tell my parties: they normally avoid humans, don't feed when the water temperature is below 70°, and like all predators are very cautious about injury so won't tackle prey bigger than themselves, and even if you're not six foot one like me, when you're in a group you seem like a big organism.

I've never actually encountered an alligator on a public swamp walk in the water. If we see one it's usually on the tram and by that, in case I'm alarming any potential tram tour participants, I mean on the old logging trails which in the Fakahatchee we have come to call trams, not on the tour vehicle! But just knowing they are out there, along with black bears and panthers, adds to the enjoyment of being in one of Florida's last remaining wilderness areas.

Patrick Higgins is a National Association of Interpretation Certified Interpreter, Vice-President of the Friends of Fakahatchee and Project Manager for the development of the Boardwalk Master Interpretive Plan..



MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 284 current memberships excluding those in arrears from previous quarters. You can join or renew on our website www.orchidswamp.org, click on "Join Us". For info, call Jinny at (239) 695-1023.

Welcome to new member since our last newsletter:

Michelle Seto, Hurleyville, NY

DO YOU LIKE US?



Over 300 people have "liked" us on our new FaceBook page:

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

Our thanks to volunteer Dee Leonard for spending her time and expertise on this.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

by Dino Barone

Anyone interested in a good hearty workout, outside in the fresh air, in a remote yet scenic environment, please come on out and join the ***Fearless FAKA-hackers*** on a volunteer work day. We start at 8:30 a.m. and try to finish around 3:00 p.m.

We will be clearing paths for the Ultra Marathons on **November 21, December 12, January 9, January 23, and February 6.**

Those are special days but we work most weekends somewhere in the Fak (*see report on page 2*).

Please contact me by the previous Thursday at sunnyg8tr@aol.com so I can plan equipment.

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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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)

☐ Business Patron (\$200) ☐ Business Benefactor (\$500) ☐ Extra Donation (\$_____)

☐ Youth (\$10) under 18 (birth date: month ____ day ____ year ____)

☐ Lifetime Individual (\$1,000) ☐ Lifetime Family (\$1,500) ☐ Lifetime Protector (\$2,500) ☐ Lifetime Preserver (\$5,000)

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