



**T**he all-volunteer, non-profit Friends of Fakahatchee has launched a capital campaign to expand *Access for All* in one of our country's most spectacular areas of subtropical wilderness: Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, located in southwest Florida. The project focuses on the park's Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk site, which was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1966. It will open up new areas of the Park, protect and restore the resource, and enhance the visitor's experience.

The Friends of Fakahatchee donate over 8,000 hours annually to the Park to clear trails, provide interpretive programs, aid orchid restoration, remove non-native plants, and maintain the existing 2,200' privately-built Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, as well as provide direct financial support for the purchase of specialized equipment. Now over 30 years old, the boardwalk needs replacing and its amenities upgraded. Our members have already pledged or donated over \$300,000 to the project. We now need your help.



**The Friends of Fakahatchee**  
*Education, Preservation, Restoration*

**Sharing our vision for Fakahatchee Strand's  
Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk**



## Site significance

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve, located in Florida's Collier County 45 minutes south of Naples and 1 ½ hours west of Miami, is Florida's largest State Park. With an optimal boundary of 80,000 acres, it is as big as Florida's next three largest State Parks combined, but it is the least developed, with no gate and no roads except unpaved Janes Scenic Drive. It is designated as a preserve because of its unique ecosystem and microclimate. Nothing short of superlatives captures its significance. It is the orchid and bromeliad capital of the United States. It supports the largest population of native royal palms in the country, rivals Everglades National Park in fern diversity and is the largest forest in the world with a mixed royal palm/cypress canopy. It is also home to many endangered species including the Florida panther, Florida black bear, rare Everglades mink, wood stork, American crocodile and mangrove fox squirrel.

Remarkably, the Fakahatchee's Big Cypress Bend site was spared the logger's blade in the logging rush of the 1940s. It is one of only two remaining virgin cypress stands in Florida. Towering bald cypress entwined by ancient strangler figs, and royal palms still cast their shade over a dense understory. Bromeliads and orchids cling to the branches. Butterflies flitter by, birds call out, lizards scurry, the occasional alligator hauls out on a log or sand bar. Each year a pair of bald eagles nests within view of the Boardwalk. It is a place where wildness still reigns.

## Project Goals

In partnership with the Florida State Park Service:

Improve visitor safety by building a new arrival zone off the highway and new parking area complete with restrooms, picnic facilities, orientation signs, and viewing opportunities. Other improvements include a bridge over the canal paralleling the Tamiami Trail that will become a feature in itself and open up new areas of the park to the public.

Create the Fakahatchee's first ever interpretive pavilion. This will be on the far side of the canal and have a wraparound cracker style porch with expansive views of the surrounding prairie. Its contents will tell the story of the Fakahatchee and inspire visitors to explore further.

Link the new parking area, interpretive pavilion, and the original boardwalk site with a series of new ADA accessible trails and boardwalks, ensuring that all visitors will have the opportunity for number of loop walks and not have to enter and exit the same way. These new trails and boardwalks include:

- a low-level boardwalk across the salt marsh, with wheel stop edges, but no side railings to provide an uninterrupted view of the habitat,
- a "Canopy Walk" along the edge of the Strand that gradually rises to a 20' shaded observation platform with views over the wet prairie on one side and the forest on the other, before descending through the Strand,
- a crushed-shell path, overlook, and rain shelter with wildlife viewing opportunities around a newly accessible lake.

Upgrade and widen the existing aging boardwalk that winds through a section of virgin cypress forest to an alligator hole and repopulate the route with native orchids and bromeliads propagated by the park to create a unique "Epiphyte Walk."

Build an outdoor classroom at the original boardwalk site for school programs.

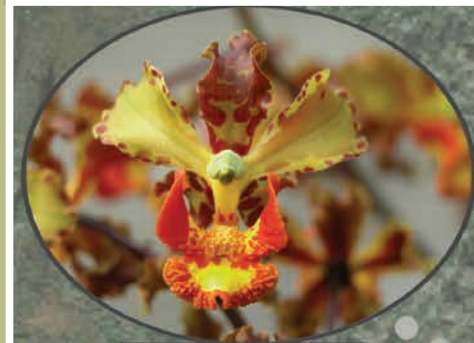
Develop interpretive panels and displays for the new interpretive pavilion and entire expanded site.

Secure access to protect the restored epiphyte population.

Increase annual boardwalk visitation from 80,000 to 160,000.



Ruddy daggerwing



EPIPHYTE WALK



OUTDOOR CLASSROOM



CRUSHED SHELL PATH



Zebra longwing



Barred owl





Wood storks



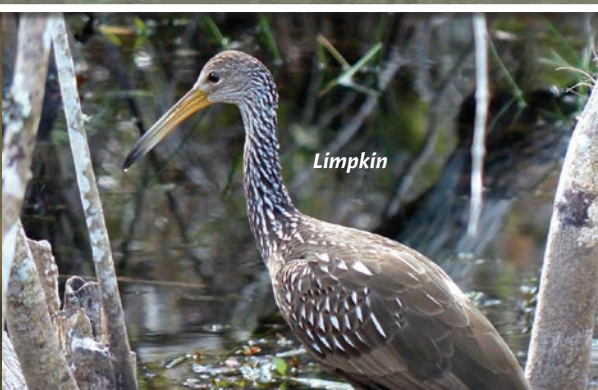
Florida Panther



Painted bunting



Ghost orchid



Limpkin



Clamshell orchid



## FOF mission

The Friends of Fakahatchee provides financial and volunteer support to preserve the unique ecology and culture of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and to educate the public about its importance.

## Call to action

Fakahatchee Strand's Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk is in dire need of structural improvements to enhance the experiences of visitors and protect its fragile resources. As the source of financial and volunteer support for Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, the Friends of Fakahatchee invite you to get involved in our work. This is a rare opportunity to help contribute to and shape the future of one of the last undeveloped areas of the Everglades' remaining subtropical wilderness.

To learn more about our vision for the Fakahatchee Strand and Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, visit [www.OrchidSwamp.org](http://www.OrchidSwamp.org) and register for our newsletter, or contact us by phone or email.

Visit! Experience the splendor of Fakahatchee Strand and Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk firsthand. We would be pleased to arrange a private potential donor experience.

Donate to support the Friends of Fakahatchee and know that your tax-deductible gift will be put to work immediately. You can do this via the donor button on our website, [www.OrchidSwamp.org](http://www.OrchidSwamp.org), or via email. Please make donations out to the Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.



[OrchidSwamp.org](http://OrchidSwamp.org)

To learn more about the project please contact the Friends of Fakahatchee

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