



President's Message

By Patrick Higgins

Dear Friends of the Fakahatchee,

The great primate migration has begun and I'm pleased to welcome back our seasonal volunteers and visitors. The Park is in a remarkable state despite the ravages of Hurricane Irma and our tour program is up and running.

I've been leading my first swamp walks of the season. Unfortunately this coincides with the time of year when spiders are most numerous, so as the guy up front I'm constantly struggling with mouthfuls of nearly invisible, horizontally-strung webs (*Photo by Rita Bauer*). Aningas are also beginning to nest. Unlike our wading birds they didn't suffer from the deeper water conditions from Irma. I hope you all get out and enjoy the Boardwalk and Park in this gorgeous weather.



On November 8th The DEP held its mandatory meeting in the Park office for any parties interested in bidding for Concession operations in the Fakahatchee. What the DEP is really looking for is an organization to work with the Park Manager to coordinate all the disparate commercial operators currently using the Park, some of whom do not pay entrance fees or make any contribution to it. The representatives of some 13 different commercial operators attended.



*Pictured are swampwalkers admiring a huge hand of vanilla orchid pods (*Vanilla phaeantha*).*

The closing date for proposal submissions was the 6th of December and FOF has put in a bid to be in effect the Park's Master Concessionaire and 'air traffic controller'. Our appointment would be in the best interests of all parties as we are impartial and motivated by what's best for the Park and public, rather than profit. If successful we look forward to working with the existing commercial operators to protect the resource and ensure the public receive an authentic Fakahatchee experience. Whatever the outcome, FOF's existing tour and special events are grandfathered-in, so will be unaffected. We will keep you posted.

Just a reminder that as the December 31st approaches, if you are thinking of end-of-year giving to a non-profit, we hope you'll consider donating to the Friends of Fakahatchee. We just launched our annual appeal; this year for a much needed pole barn for storage of the park's vehicles and equipment to reduce maintenance costs. In any case we appreciate all of your support from memberships to tour tickets and iron ranger donations. Thank you!

I'd also like to extend a special thanks to Francine Stevens, our Executive Director, who works tirelessly, often in the background, to make many of the good things in this Ghostwriter edition happen.

Finally let me take this opportunity on behalf of your Board to wish you all well for the holiday season. I look forward to seeing many of you at this year's special Welcome Back Luncheon at the Botanical Gardens on the 16th of December. Remember to buy your tickets.

Season's greetings,

Patrick Higgins President, Friends of Fakahatchee



Give to the Annual Fund. Let's build that pole barn.

<https://tinyurl.com/buildthepolebarn>

Friends of Fakahatchee now on AmazonSmile

The holidays are approaching and we will all be busy shopping for gifts, decorations, and more. Amazon.com will donate to the Friends of Fakahatchee every time you shop, if you remember to start at smile.amazon.com when you shop online. Amazon continues this service throughout the year at no additional cost to you!

You can copy and paste this URL to start the process:
<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/59-3511352>

Thank you for your continued support of the park in all the ways you choose!



News from the Strand

Sandpine Alliance and Fearless Fakahackers join forces to clear Mud Tram *by Dino Barone*

Saturday, October 21, 2017 – 6 weeks after Hurricane Irma stormed through SW Florida – Janes Scenic Drive and our hiking trails were just about cleared of fallen trees. Three contractors, their dedicated professional crews all equipped with chain saws, machetes, bobcats, truck and trailers, have been tirelessly working, cutting and clearing our maze of trails in the park.

The intrepid group of Fearless Faka-hackers on this beautiful fall day consisted of past FOF Presidents Howard Lubel and Ray Carroll, Park Ranger Steven "WWSBD" Bass, and myself, Dino 'Chainsaw' Barone. We had the unique opportunity to work with Sandpine Alliance, a group of six highly skillful professionals.

Our mission this Saturday was to finish clearing approximately 2 miles of Mud Tram. Sandpine Alliance had cleared half a mile the day before. Anyone who has spent any time on Mud Tram understands the walking challenges of rocks and cypress knees, along with the undulation of the tram. The plant community (consisting of native Hog plum trees, the thorny Smilax, and the extremely invasive Brazilian peppers, along with some poison ivy, just to spice things up a bit), also wants to leave a memorable impression.



Members of the Faka-hackers and Sandpine Alliance getting ready to rumble on Mud Tram.

As if this was not enough fun, during high water season Mud Tram is literally underwater, anywhere from ankle deep to mid-thigh deep in a couple of areas. Now mix in broken branches with some fallen trees, thanks to Landscaping by Hurricane Irma, and we have a party! Sooooooooooooo, Ring Announcer Michael Buffer, please bellow out your famous catchphrase..."LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE!"

Chain saws come alive. The march into mayhem has begun. Two sawyers taking the lead, one cutting the left side, the other cutting the right side as they slogged along the watery trail. In places where the vegetation was impenetrable – making the trail look more like a barricade – a third sawyer would trail slightly behind, cutting the fallen materials into smaller, easier to manage pieces.

The remainder of the crew then followed with machetes and loppers on the smaller items not previously cut via chainsaw, cutting and then removing all cut materials from the tramway. Poetry in motion, as if this was a Bob Fosse choreograph

production. When the chain saws needed more motion lotion, this always appeared to be a natural time to rotate sawyers, bringing on fresh arms and legs. The march continued.

Around noon we stopped for personal nutrition fulfillment and a rest. We were soon fueled up, hydrated, rested and ready to continue. To this point we had cleared just shy of a mile, and had a little over a mile to go if we wanted to finish clearing mud tram from end to end. The gauntlet has been thrown down; the challenge was in front of us; safety is paramount. Could we accomplish the mission today?

Off we go, cutting, clearing, slogging. Rotating sawyers. Keeping the UTV close by for fuel and hydration. We passed the fourth of five ground wells on Mud Tram, a half a mile to go. It had been overcast most of the day. The cooling temperatures thanks to the shade had been beneficial. As long as we did not encounter too many large fallen trees, our goal appeared to be achievable.

We were focused. Heads held high, shoulders back, moral was solid – cut, clear, slog. The time is now 2:30'ish; we are trying to be done by 3'ish. We persist in our cut, clear, slog, repetition. About a half hour later, we finally began turning left. Arms raised high, the gate in sight – YIPPIE!!!!!!



Still smiling after cleaning the equipment at the end of a long, hard day!

I would like to heartily thank the Sandpine Alliance Group: David, Brooke, Adam, Will, Victor and Jessie. Highly professional, talented, hardworking, situationally aware and ready to help. The way they prepare at the shop for the day's activities, their fluid movements with strong communication in the field, then back at the shop at the end of the day cleaning/ maintaining/prepping equipment for the next deployment – truly dedicated professionals!

Volunteer opportunities in the park are diverse. Please contact Mike Duey, parks volunteer coordinator at 239-695-4593, or via email michael.Duey@dep.state.fl.us

For an overview of FOLKS volunteer opportunities, visit our website at <http://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/>

Mountain of rubble cleared with prescribed burn



Park Service Specialist Steven Bass, Park Service Specialist Mike Duey, and Park Ranger Guy DiGiovani after a long, hard day of dirty work. Thanks, guys!



Park Service Specialist Steven Bass on November 9, the last day of clearing gate 12 of the mountain of organic material left behind by hurricane Irma. The prescribed burn was under the supervision of Park Specialists.

What a Staff! DEP Annual Awards ceremony honors 3



Congratulations, Steve!
Park Manager Steve Houseknecht received an award for leading the largest prescribed burn in Florida Park Service history. Pictured left to right: FPS Fire Coordinator Sasha Ernst, Assistant Director Parks Small, Steve Houseknecht, and Assistant Director Chuck Hatcher.



Congratulations, Mike Duey!
Park Service Specialist Mike Duey received a Team Prudential Productivity Award for the Collier-Seminole State Park Campground Renovation. Pictured from left: Assistant Director Parks Small, Darren Flickinger, Assistant Park Manager at Myaaka River State Park, and Mike Duey.



Congratulations, Mike Owen!
Park Biologist Mike Owen received the Hank Smith Award for Excellence in Research at the awards ceremony at the DEP Annual Convention in Orlando. Pictured with Mike is Assistant Director Parks Small.

Welcome Back Luncheon tickets now available

Now's the time to get your tickets for the Friends of Fakahatchee Annual Welcome Back Luncheon. This year the event will be held at Naples Botanical Garden's Kapnick Hall on Saturday, December 16 at noon.

"We're excited about meeting in such a beautiful location that gives attendees a chance to tour the gardens after our lunch," said Francine Stevens, Friends of Fakahatchee Executive Director. "We hope the new time will encourage our members and the public to participate as we kick off our new season."

The luncheon speaker will be Nick Ewy, Associate Director of Horticulture for the Garden. A Michigan native with a degree in botany and plant pathology from Michigan State University, Nick worked at the American Orchid Society Botanical Garden in Delray Beach before joining the Naples Botanical Garden. Mr. Ewy oversees the Garden's diverse collection and display of native and exotic orchids. He is working towards conserving several of Florida's native orchids through propagation and re-introduction studies.

Nick Ewy, Associate Director of Horticulture for Naples Botanical Gardens, will be the speaker for the Welcome Back Luncheon on December 16.

The \$45 fee includes the buffet by Frisco Catering and admission to the gardens, which are located just a few steps outside Kapnick Hall.

Purchase your **Welcome Back Luncheon Reservation Tickets** at <https://tinyurl.com/fakahatchee>



Intrepid ladies of the Naples Garden Club with Tom Maish, Boardwalk Vision Chair at the start of their November 9th hike up to the Fakahatchee Hilton where a sumptuous picnic awaited them prepositioned by FOF Executive Director Francine Stevens. The Club are our generous benefactors for the chickee style outdoor classroom-cum-rain shelter just about to be built in the clearing at the base of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. Our their return trip they plunged into the swamp for an 1½ wet walk, only just emerging before the sun set. Photo by Patrick Higgins.



What's Blooming in the Park

*Seen at right: A flourishing clamshell orchid (*Prosthecha cochleata*) with its distinctive flattened pseudobulbs. It was planted out last year in the Boardwalk area as part of our future Epiphyte Walk. Photo by Patrick Higgins.*

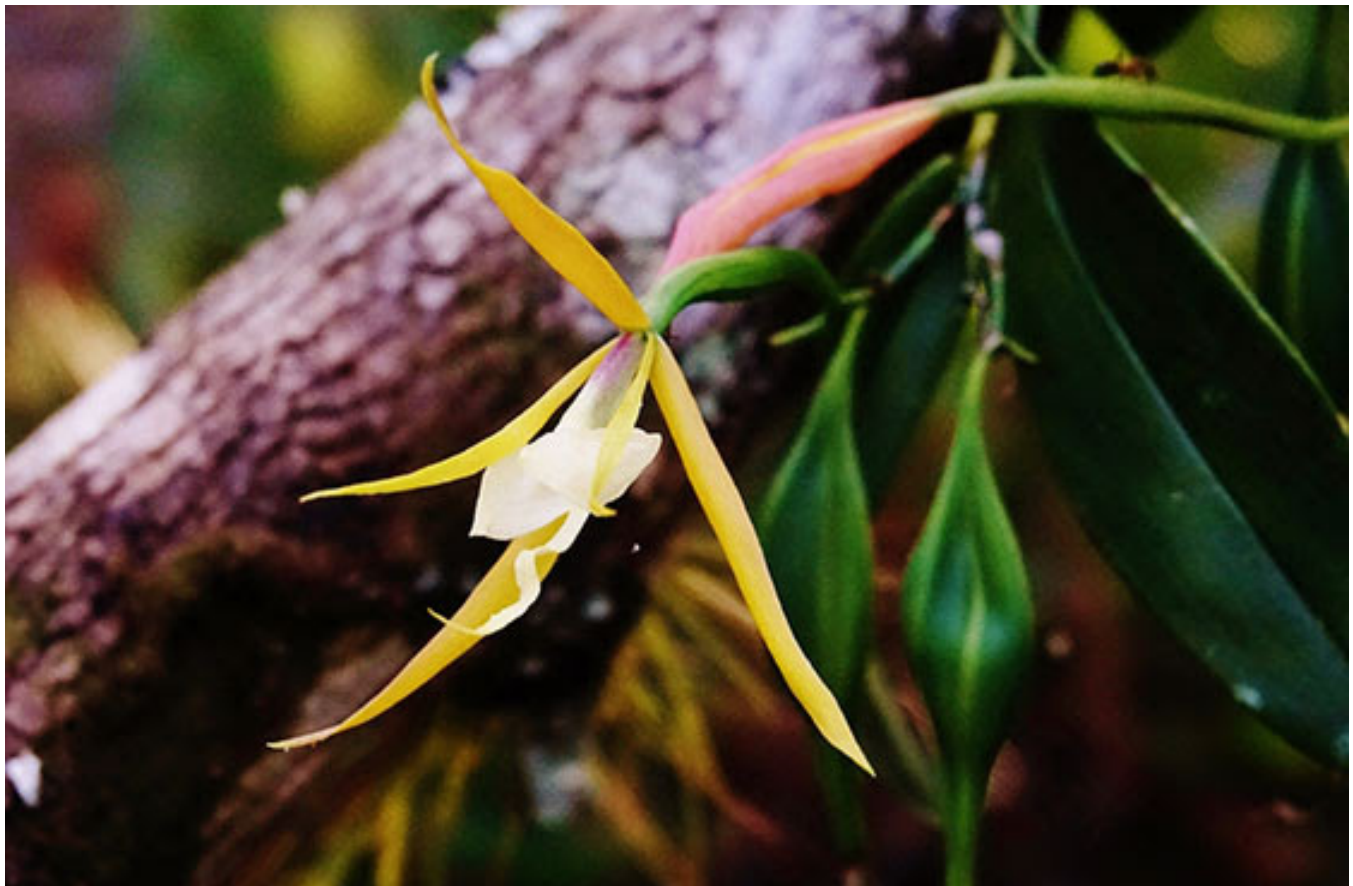
Readers are invited to submit their photographs of what's blooming in the park each month to news@orchidswamp.org, Subject Line: What's Blooming this Month. Each entry should have a photo credit for the photographer and an appropriate caption, preferably identifying the featured plant by genus and species.



When our Volunteers give back, so does the Fakahatchee

These gallant folks got together on a chilly morning at the end of October to clear the 6-Pipe Slough loop walk of hurricane debris in preparation for the new tour season. From left to right: FOF Vice President John Kaiser, volunteer guides Jim Winger and Sam Peters, FOF President Patrick Higgins, visitors Penny & Tony DeGance from Tulsa, Oklahoma on their first swamp walk, and hidden in the background 15 year-old Elijah, son of FOF Director Stacy Wolfe. *Photo by Stacy Wolf.*

They were rewarded by our largest-flowered and most distinctive species of Epidendrum, the night fragrant Orchid, *Epidendrum nocturnum*, in bloom. See below.



Spidery-looking and night-fragrant orchid (Epidendrum nocturnum) deep in one of our sloughs. Its scent is strongest at night to attract sphinx moths. Photo by Patrick Higgins.

Boardwalk Report, Nov 29 & 30 Gators Roar, Eagles Soar

by David Boesche, Boardwalk Volunteer

Hi all; boy, have I had a fun couple of days.

All season I have been waiting and hoping for some of my wildlife 'friends' to return. Finally on Wednesday afternoon, close to the Gift Shop, there she was! My favorite girl gator just lying on the bank, sunning herself, and offering all who passed by a 'special photo op'.

Few birds are back to their usual spots as of yet, but I could hear the Red Shouldered Hawks talking, and of course the Osprey sharing info with each other somewhere off in the distance. Note: Do you think they talk about good places to eat, like we humans? Along the boardwalk a surprising amount of Basilica Orb Weaver spiders. Interesting!

Then Thursday was my bonus day. Not a lot of guests, but I am noticing a general trend. There seemed to be a lot of Germans, young couples, some with babies visiting. I finally started to ask why. The answer was pretty much the same; the older generations still plan for a August 'Holiday', but the millennials seem to prefer later in the year. There are cold and gray skies at home, and cheaper flights to the USA now. Why the Everglades? Well, their research showed that it was a interesting environment, reasonably priced, and WARM as well as SUNNY. Heck I agree!

I was talking with a wonderful couple—she Columbian, he German (the beautiful 12 month old young lady didn't give her nationality but she sure smiled a lot). I couldn't answer questions fast enough. THEN IT HAPPENED...A massive bull alligator ROAR from the far side of the alligator pond. They were so very excited (me too if you must ask), even the baby got a excited look.

Well, Mr. Gator entered our line of sight and bellowed for what seemed like over 5 minutes. Perfect posture – front lifted, head and neck raised to the rear, and that big air filled double chin (at least that is what my wife calls mine). Then he rested for a few more minutes and started bellowing again. THEN IT GOT BETTER!

We heard an answer right beside us, right there by the single bench at the alligator pond. Mrs. Gator pushed herself free of the Alligator Flag plants and certainly let the Mr. know she was around but not in the mood for romance. She swam off to the connected pond right next to the boardwalk, crawled up on a root stump, feet hanging over either side, and took a well deserved nap.

The couple left, and later several others rushed up. "What was that ROAR?" they asked. "We had just entered the boardwalk, heard the roar, and almost turned around!" Now that is a long distance message system! So I was explaining, answering questions, and then MORE EXCITEMENT! An adult Bald Eagle, making circles right overhead at the Gator Pond. Cross your fingers we may have a new nest location. And again I heard several Osprey, several Hawks and even a Pileated Woodpecker. While it isn't the full inventory of exciting creatures, it's a good start.

Looking forward to meeting you all again soon.

David B



Gator head as seen from the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk – photo by Bruce Bunch

Please help us fill our tours!

Registration for our tram tours and swamp walks are getting off to a slower than usual start. This is not surprising considering that many folks are still trying to bounce back from Irma. While we list the tours on our website and work to promote them through the news media, the personal touch is often most effective. Here's what you can do to help:

1. When you receive a press release about our tours, please forward it to interested friends encouraging them to participate.
2. When you hear from friends planning a Florida visit, refer them the www.orchidswamp.org website and advise them click Tours and Events.
3. Take your visitors on one of the tours. There's always something new to see and our naturalists keep their commentary fresh.
4. If you have suggestions on how we can promote our adventures, please let Patrick or Francine know. Income from these tours is a major source of our financial support for the park.

Drivers needed for Tram Tours

We are in need of FOF volunteers to drive for the tram tours. A valid drivers license is required, but no previous experience is necessary. For more information, please contact Francine at 239-273-4442.

Photo by TripAdvisor.

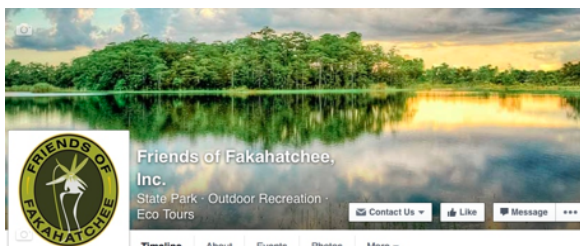


Tram Tour/Swamp Walk – Fun and Educational!



"A most wonderful experience. We loved Patrick. He was very knowledgeable. I can honestly say I learned something. Thumbs up!"

— Corinna D, November 2017



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Visit <http://orchidswamp.org/support/memberships/>

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.



The Ghost Writer, named after the endangered Ghost Orchid which blooms in the Preserve, is currently edited by Next Steps Collective, LLC, which also manages the Orchidswamp.org website. Contributions to Ghost Writer that relate directly to the business and purpose of the Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc. are welcome. Please write news@orchidswamp.org, subject line:

Ghostwriter.

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