



President's Message

By Patrick Higgins

Dear Friends of the Fakahatchee,

It's certainly been cold lately, but despite the U.S. President's mistaken conflation of the terms 'weather' and 'climate' by wishing for a little bit more global warming, our recent cold snaps don't negate the overwhelming evidence of climate change. While we are shivering here in Florida with iguanas in cold shock dropping out of trees, on the other side of the planet they're sweltering. Australia's flying foxes are falling down dead from heatstroke and baby green sea turtles there, whose sex is determined by nest temperature, are hatching out 99% female.

Whilst we can't positively state any particular individual event is the direct result of climate change, atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ and the annual average global temperature are both continuously rising. According to NOAA, global surface temperatures since 1970 have been rising on average twice as fast as for the entire period of recorded observations from 1880-2015. This warming isn't necessarily uniform around the world, but it's all about the average. An increase of 0.3° F every decade may not seem much, but when you consider Earth's 196.9 million square mile surface area, that's one that one heck of a lot of extra energy going into our climate system. This rapid increase is ten times faster than the average paleoclimate rate of warming during ice-age recoveries.

From the very beginning of the debate on global warming, climate modeling predicted increases in extreme weather. Worldwide record breaking weather events from heat waves, floods, droughts, wildfires and super-storms - both summer and winter - seem to bear this out. Every summer, every winter, every year seems to set a new record. For example, globally 2017 was the second warmest year on record, and the warmest on record without an El Niño's influence. And weather patterns are changing too; for the first 5 months of 2017 we had 5 inches of rain and for the second 5 months, 5 feet of rain!

As for the 2017 Atlantic hurricane season, there were 17 named storms, ten of which were hurricanes. These hurricanes formed consecutively, without the usual weaker tropical storms in between and six were major category 3 or higher hurricanes. Harvey in August brought the largest amount of rain from any tropical system on record – over 5 feet, causing Houston \$200 billion of damages. This was the third 'once in 500 years' flood Houston has suffered in the past 3 years! Irma, which devastated the Caribbean (not to mention the damage it caused here), was one of the strongest Atlantic hurricanes ever, with sustained winds of 185 mph that lasted 37 hours - longer for that wind intensity than any tropical system anywhere else in the world. And then there was Hurricane Ophelia, which reached Spain and Portugal - the farthest east any major Atlantic hurricane has ever gone. Get the picture?

So it was with interest and a freeze warning, clad in my Berghaus mountaineering jacket, hat and gloves, that I set out in the dark on the morning of the 18th of January to record what was forecast to be the park's coldest day yet of the year. I caught a few good photos of shivering wading birds trying to catch the first rays of warming light in a grey landscape en route through the southern reaches of the park.

I only recorded a low of 36°F. For my purposes it was not as cold as I had hoped, although I don't think Park Manager Steve Houseknecht was as disappointed as I was. I found him in the park office warming his hands in front of an open oven door, wearing what was probably the only Florida Park Service winter parka in all of South Florida. The building's heater had failed.



Wading birds trying to warm up in the day's first rays of light, in the marsh south of US 41.

continued next page >>>

During my park visit that day there were no signs of frost along Janes Scenic drive. On the way up I crossed over the sensor hose of the newly installed traffic counter by the water treatment plant. It will give us a much better idea of visitor numbers. I stopped periodically to take some temperature measurements. At 7:25 AM at Six-Pipe Slough, with a nip on the tip of my nose, I recorded an air temperature of 37.6°F. The water temperature at a 1 foot depth, 3 feet into the slough was 54°F, a difference of 16.4°F. A few dead cichlids were caught in eddies; these cold snaps are good at culling some of our exotic fishes.

No doubt had I been more enthusiastic and penetrated a few hundred feet in to the slough, I would have found a higher air temperature. The swamp has a moderating effect. Even in the dry season the humidity radiated from accumulated peat is trapped by the forest canopy so it's always a little cooler in the summer and a little warmer in the winter. As the sun rose it began to cast long cold shadows, I heard the distant drumming of a woodpecker, punctuated by the languorous argh, argh of a great egret gliding overhead to its morning feeding station. Finally, the sporadic twit-twit of some small warblers could be heard as the swamp woke up.

Whereas alligators are at the southern limit of their range and have no problems dealing with these, or even freezing temperatures, this is not the case for the American Crocodile found in our brackish waters nearer the Gulf. They are at the very northern limit of their range and are very susceptible to cold. Over 150 dead American crocodiles were identified during aerial and boat surveys immediately after the severe cold snap in 2010. Apparently, rather than taking shelter in what is usually warmer water, they will continue to bask as the temperature drops, sometimes leading to fatal results. But by the time I was driving back home around 10:00 AM our alligators were hauling their black bodies in numbers out of the canal to catch the sun.

Unfortunately, although the cold weather slows the activity of Burmese pythons, the Conservancy of SW Florida reports that our local radio-collared specimens seem to have weathered this particular cold spell fairly well, as they can seek shelter in deep undergrowth and in armadillo and gopher tortoise burrows. A prolonged deep freeze is needed to hit them hard. The recent cold weather may, however have hindered the expansion of their range northward in the State

The Gulf waters are currently in the low 60s, which is too cold for our manatees. They go into cold stress when the water temperature drops below 68° and need to seek out natural warm water springs in places like the Faka-Union Canal and Henderson Creek. The outlets of power plants or areas of deeper water where a salty bottom layer may trap heat are other refuges from the cold. Our sea turtles have also suffered. Some 900 cold-stunned marine turtles were rescued throughout Florida as a result of this recent cold spell; they have since been released.

Three days after our record low, the afternoon air temperature has risen to the 80's, long trousers are put away and shorts on again until the next cold wave comes through. Fingers crossed; the days are getting longer and there won't be too many more. Happy New Year to everyone.



Patrick Higgins

President, Friends of Fakahatchee

The Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit Citizen Support Organization providing financial and volunteer support to preserve the unique ecological and cultural heritage of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and to educate the public about its importance.

The Everglades Ultra Race is on Saturday, February 17

We are now on our seventh year with this event in the Park and it continues to grow in popularity. More than 250 runners are expected and with its growth comes a need for volunteers, specially on the day of the event.

For weeks leading up to the event, the Faka-Hackers devote countless hours to clear the trails. This year's work was increased by the havoc created by Hurricane Irma in September. Bob Becker, Director of the Everglades Ultra Race, and the runners have been very generous towards the Friends of Fakahatchee. In addition to volunteering in the Park, Bob Becker's organization has donated over \$11,000 since the start of the event seven years ago. Their generosity is a testimony that Bob Becker does not take the efforts of all the volunteers for granted.



Come and spend the day in the Park and have fun while volunteering. To register as a volunteer for specific assignments, visit <https://runsignup.com/Race/Volunteer/FL/Copeland/EVERGLADESULTRAS> Bob Becker is available for your questions. E-mail him at bob@ultrasportslc.com or call him at 954-439-2800. The website for the Everglades Ultra Marathon is <http://www.evergladesultras.com/>

Cuba: So close, but a world away



Tom's family gave local children coloring books of Cuba's birds in Spanish, designed by Halifax River Audubon.

FOF Past-President Tom Maish has visited Cuba several times, and did so again shortly after Hurricane Irma passed through. His family found changes underway since Cuba has been 'discovered,' yet many things remain the same, artifacts of a socialist economy crippled by the Soviet withdrawal and US embargo.

He has penned an in-depth and insightful travelogue on his most recent Cuba experience; we have featured it in full on our website's Armchair Interpretive Walks page at <http://orchidswamp.org/category/armchair-interpretive-walks/>

News from the Strand

Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk Chickee a reality



The new Chickee provides a perfect place to introduce Boardwalk visitors to the Fakahatchee Strand.

Thanks to a generous \$13,000 grant from the Naples Garden Club, we now have a Chickee at the foot of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. Chickee is the word Seminoles use for "house." The chickee was constructed by Native Americans using natural high quality material.

Impressed by the chickee at the Naples Botanical Garden, we contacted the company that built theirs. The project was delayed by hurricane Irma, but we were encouraged to see how well the chickees around Naples fared during Irma's passage. Those right next to the Boardwalk on the Indian Village property also weathered the storm well.

The chickee provides a much needed place to educate groups visiting the Boardwalk about the Fakahatchee Preserve. In the near future we will add benches and a few more native plants near the chickee. A big thank you to Mike Duey Park Specialist who did a great job assisting Executive Director Francine Stevens with this project.

Membership News

Call for Nominations for the FOF Board of Directors

Due by February 16, 2018

Applications for positions on the FOF Board of Directors are now being accepted. Members are elected to our board each April to serve 2-year terms, and are term-limited to a maximum of six consecutive years.

The Board generally meets monthly and is responsible for the operation of the Friends of Fakahatchee, and for raising and managing funds in support of the Park and its objectives. Board members work closely with Park management and staff, both in the field and at the administrative level.

At this time, the Board is actively seeking applicants to fill positions within the Board who have a passion for the environment, especially those with a background in retail operations and general organizational outreach. Previous experience on a non-profit board member is a positive, but not essential. Interested parties should contact any member of the Nominating Committee.

Nominating Committee

*Ted DeGroot, Chair ted@all-florida.com
(or call Ted at 239-248-8788)*

Jinny Ball virginia.ball@comcast.net

John Kaiser jskaiser@maine.edu

Tom Maish tommaish@aol.com

Welcome Back Luncheon enjoyed by all



Park Manager Steve Houseknecht addresses the attendees at Kapnick Hall.



John and Pauly (behind the hat) Kaiser, Patrick Higgins, Janet Bunch, Steve Houseknecht, Glen Stacell enjoy each other's company.

Architect David Corban was another special guest of the Friends. We wanted to introduce David and his work with respect to the architectural designs of the Boardwalk Expansion project, especially the future Interpretation Pavilion.

Nick Ewy, NPG Director of Horticulture, opened the Friend's eyes to how much the Garden does behind the scenes for preservation and their important relationship with the Fakahatchee Preserve.



Speaker Nick Ewy, FOF president Patrick Higgins, and Naples Botanical Garden Deputy Director Chad Washburn

The Friends Welcome Back Luncheon held at the Kapnick Hall of the Naples Botanical Garden was a success. All enjoyed the venue and the buffet catered by Frisco, and many took advantage of the complimentary entrance pass to the gardens. The Friends are very grateful to Chad Washburn for his help in preparing the venue for the luncheon. We also extend a very special thank you to Laura Stacell, Martha Higgins, Pat and Ted DeGroot for their valuable help during the luncheon.

The Friends were honored by special guest County Commissioner Donna Fiala. Ms. Fiala was instrumental in connecting FOF to people who could support our efforts to raise funds for the Boardwalk Expansion project.



Collier County Commissioner Donna Fiala and FOF Executive Director Francine Stevens



Speaker Nick Ewy and Naples Botanical Garden Deputy Director Chad Washburn get a first-hand overview of the Boardwalk Expansion Project from Architect David Corban



Ken Shapiro and Park Manager Steve Houseknecht and Pam Talkin.

Fearless Faka-Hackers in action Nov-Dec 2017

by Dino Barone

Since the last edition of the Ghost Writer, your Fearless Faka-hackers joined up with Sand Pine Alliance to clear Mud Tram. Oh my, we have been keeping busy since.

Over the 4 day Thanksgiving weekend, working with Park Ranger Steven “WWSBD” Bass, the goal was to clear approximately 4 miles of trams (the top section of east main, then west across Pennington Post) caused by Hurricane Irma’s unwelcome havoc with a cannonball splash of mayhem, landscape non-enhancements, in the north end of the park. Upon learning of all the fun Steven and I were having, Debbie Kaprielian joined us on Friday as we chainsawed our way slowly across the tram.



Fearless Faka-hackers, left to right: Debbie Kaprielian, Steven Bass, Guy DiGiovanni, and Dino Barone spent hours of hard work clearing in the park in the past several weeks.

On Saturday our crew grew as Steve Irwin joined forces with the three of us. Let the real fun begin; we now have some serious backbone power! Two of us running chainsaws, while two picked up the debris piles left in the chainsaw dust. There were 3 locations where there was evidence of high velocity vortex disturbance, as large cypress trees, maples, cabbage palms and oak trees had succumbed to the wind forces, crashing down upon the tram. Time to break out the big boy saws; we now have some real cutting to do! By Saturday afternoon our goal was achieved when we broke through to the clearing on the west end.

In winter, water levels are dropping throughout the park. The sun-baked prairies are showing signs of resembling dryish land versus flooded plain. Wading birds are devouring crawfish with delight, along with other tasty treats in the prairies. The park is strategically planning for prescribed burns. In the early winter months, cold fronts typically have healthy north winds. The park endeavors to take full advantage of these winds to do prescribed burns in the northern sections, thus keeping smoke off of Alligator Alley.

On a beautiful winter day in December, Howard Lubel and I joined forces with all three park rangers – Steven Bass, Mike Duey and Guy DiGiovanni – and headed to the extreme NW section of the park to clear the established firebreak trails for future prescribed burns. On our way out we saw momma bear running west on the trail away from us. Then we noticed a cub, scampering down a cabbage palm and running to catch up with mom. We paused to allow them to gain some time and distance away from us.

We had an awesome day prepping the firebreaks, making them all ready for the fire equipment. On the way out we encountered a cypress tree laying under a large oak tree branch in the middle of the tram. Did momma bear enact



This reliable Polaris – purchased with the 2016 Annual Fund appeal, thanks to the generosity of our members – allows volunteers travel to remote areas of the Park.

some type of revenge on us for disturbing her quiet breakfast earlier in the day? Hmmm! We looked at each other asking, "Okay, who still has the strength to put on safety gear and chainsaw this blockage?" WWSBD accepted the challenge.

FAKA-hackers also regularly engage in helping with invasive plant removal throughout the park. We pick air potatoes on Gate 15, then treat the plant with herbicide. We are always keeping a keen lookout for old world climbing fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*), trying to catch this rascal before it literally takes over an area. Brazilian Pepper is an ongoing battle, and Caesar weed – Oh the pretty purple flowers – has stalks full of menacing burrs. The unwelcome, obnoxious hitchhikers will Velcro themselves liberally and tenaciously onto clothes, gloves, shoe laces – and have I mentioned hair?! ARGH!!!

The Hackers have also been busy preparing the Mesce Memorial site on the west main tram for the placement of a beautiful new picnic table. The site has been cleared of fallen trees and trimmed to create a lovely space Bill would have enjoyed. The table will be placed in the coming weeks, following a bit more in the way of site preparation. A memorial sign will be placed as well. Hikers have already been seen resting at the area.

Another project we have undertaken is to open up Gate 2 as another hiking trail. This is no small feat to accomplish. Howard Lubel, Paul Joslyn, Paul Bisset, and Steve Irwin have contributed greatly to this undertaking. Bob Becker, along with registered ultra-marathon runners, have also been helping us with the clearing efforts. The ultimate goal is to create a loop trail back to the top of Lake Harmon. We recently ran into a massive trail clogging Brazilian pepper thicket. This has slowed us down, but has in no way dampened our spirits or enthusiasm. Ring the bell; round three will commence shortly!

I want to give a special shout out to our favorite Uncle Dave Pickering. A bundle of perpetual energy from the land of snow and moose. Not unlike the vortex created by the Tasmanian Devil, Dave unleashes his zeal through his razor sharp-edged loppers onto any and all encroaching branches. Dave has once again, single-handedly cleared Gate 3. During the weekdays, Uncle Dave can usually be found trimming Janes Scenic Drive.

The Ultra marathon is right around the corner on Saturday, February 17. Bob Becker, Race Director Extraordinaire, is absolutely engaged, very hands-on in this event and all activities leading up to the race. One of the amazing qualities Bob possesses is that of being the pied piper to transform race runners into Fearless Faka-Hackers on a workday weekend. We had an amazing work day on January 6. Many thanks to those who helped us. In return for all the tremendous support Bob has provided to the Friends of Fakahatchee over the years, I'd like to ask that the FOF comes out on race day to help support the Everglades Ultra. Please contact Bob to let him know your availability at bob@ultrasportsllc.com



January 6th was a cold morning for getting ready to go-go-go Hack some Fakahatchee.



Runners at the Everglades Ultra Race may encounter one of these cold-blooded residents of the Fakahatchee – snapping turtle and alligator – as they traverse the trams.

Time to clean the equipment, tune up the chainsaws, sharpen the machetes! We have some work to accomplish. If you are interested in volunteering, opportunities are diverse, and not all require sweat and grit. Please contact Park Ranger Mike Duey – 239-695-4593, Michael.Duey@dep.state.fl.us He will gladly put you to work.

Annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic set for March 17

Save the Date!

Mark your calendar, and check next month's Ghostwriter for info on how to register for this free event.

You too can Volunteer at the Fakahatchee!
<http://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/>

March Cycling Event to expand recreation options

Fakahatchee Strand will host a cycling event on March 3, 2018. The goal is to use all the work put into trail cleanup for the Everglades Ultra to reach a wider range of people who enjoy outdoor recreation. The route will take advantage of the East Main tram that park staff and volunteers have been working hard to clear. The exact course has yet to be determined, but we hope to include opportunities to cycle through all the wonderful natural communities of the park. Watch for more information in the next Ghostwriter.

Annual Fund Appeal – There's still time to donate

Thanks to the generosity of our members, we have received \$8,572.00 for the Pole Barn project to protect the FOF and Park vehicles. It's not too late to donate by sending a check to the FOF or donating via PayPal at <http://orchidswamp.org>.

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

Gratitude for Swampwalk inspires new FOF members

Hi, Patrick,

Thanks for a very, very enjoyable day with you at Fakahatchee Strand, and thanks also for your nice photos. We couldn't have spent the day with a nicer and more knowledgeable guide and friend.

We've joined the Friends of Fakahatchee and you would see us at Friends meetings if the drive weren't so long. Thanks again for spending so much time with us and for a day we won't forget - we're already telling friends how great a time we had with you in the park and especially in the swamp.

Thanks again, Patrick, and thanks for all you do for the park.

John and Deetsy Armstrong



New FOF members from Seattle, WA, retired Marine Biologist John Armstrong and his wife Deetsy on their first ever swamp walk.



Ibis in flight. Photos by Patrick Higgins.



A nonvenomous Florida Water Snake (Nerodia fasciata pictiventris) takes advantage of a convenient cavity.

Members make a difference.

Lifetime Preservers

Bruce & Janet Bunch

Lifetime Individual Members

Rita Bleasdale
Warner Blow
Elsie Caldwell
Peter Haffenreffer
Don Harmon
Susan Hauze
Patty Huff
James Nici
Wendy Becker Payton
Ken Shapiro
Carol Vartanian

Lifetime Family Members

Tom & Judy Maish
Noel Nation
Van & Jane Sayler
Glen & Laura Stacell

Business Patrons

North American Canoe Tours
(Ivey House B&B)
Shurr Adventures

Business Benefactor

Everglades Day Safari

Thanks to our lifetime and business members!

Become a Friend of the Fakahatchee
Visit <http://orchidswamp.org/support/memberships/>



Follow us on Facebook!
<https://www.facebook.com/orchidswamp>

Our mailing address is:
Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.
PO Box 35, Everglades City, FL 34139



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.

A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION FOR THE FRIENDS OF FAKAHATCHEE, A FLORIDA-BASED NONPROFIT CORPORATION (REGISTRATION NO. CH9223), MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE OR VISITING THEIR WEBSITE HERE (<https://csapp.800helpfla.com/cspublicapp/giftgiversquery/giftgiversquery.aspx>). REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.