



President's Message

The Value of a Swamp

By Patrick Higgins

Dear Friends of the Fakahatchee,

If you ask a group of hikers sauntering along East Main through stands of towering native royal palms under a blue sky, or gently proceeding through the waters of a slough in dappled light – What's the value of a swamp? – you would get very personal and deeply felt, almost spiritual answers. To us, as members of the Friends of Fakahatchee, they're obvious and would just spill out.

First, there's the joy and inner peace that any natural space generates, even if it's just a well planted little corner of your yard. In fact, as I was typing this in front of my office window, I was willingly interrupted first by a soft-shelled turtle emerging from the undergrowth to cross into a lake on the other side of my road, looking silly with its massive 24-inch carapace and thick neck ending in a tiny snorkel nose.

A little later a hummingbird made a fleeting call on some coral bean blooming in a patch of sunlight in the woods, and after that the primeval head of a Knight anole peered around a tree trunk. Each time I rushed out with my camera, I felt the sun's warmth on my back, breathed that earthy tropical Florida smell, and became distracted by something else in the garden. A half-hour easily passed each time – which is why it takes me so long to write these pieces – but back to the Fakahatchee.

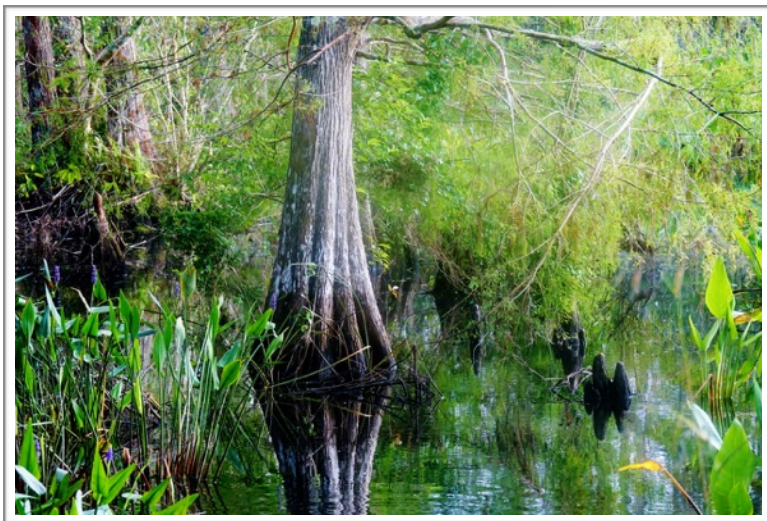
There's a special thrill about wild places – a feeling of discovery. Your senses are sharpened. You begin to notice smaller details. There are views into the depths of the swamp that are both beckoning and forbidding at the same time. And then there's the knowledge that large predators are about, even if they are usually unseen and only evident from tracks, scat and tufts of fur – unless of course they are scaly. However, when one does have a chance encounter with a wild creature, there's that momentary wondrous connection as you size each other up.

Sadly, much of our population has not had the time nor inspiration to experience the real Florida. To them, the sentiments above wouldn't be convincing enough argument for the value of a swamp. With the exception of warm winters and palm trees, so many new residents want Florida to be just like up north, which is where the second part of FOF's mission comes in – educating the public about the Fakahatchee's ecology and its importance.

Wetlands deliver a wide range of ecosystems services apart from opportunities for recreation and tourism. They are reserves of water for our ever-growing population. They serve as flood controls. Without them rainfall would rush towards the ocean without any brake. Instead they slow down the water's progress, acting like giant sponges, gradually releasing and cleansing it in the process.

Our swamp tree species sequester and store large quantities of carbon, helping to regulate our climate. And in our case, the Fakahatchee's deep sloughs create a unique microclimate that allows tropical plants to flourish in its interior. Along the coastal portions of our park, mangroves serve as buffers against storms. In fact, the mangrove swamp and its trapped sediment and associated ecosystems can store as much as 10 times the amount of carbon as the same surface area of terrestrial forest, what is referred to as blue carbon.

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Official economic impact assessments do not take into account the swamp's non-recreational services, but one of its greatest values is the tremendous biodiversity of plants and animals it supports. Photo by Patrick Higgins.

However, one of the greatest values of wetlands are the plants and animals that make up their communities, and the tremendous biodiversity they support. This is certainly the case of the Fakahatchee, which is one of the most biologically rich regions of the greater Everglades ecosystem. We aren't the orchid and bromeliad capital of the United States for nothing.

As guardians of this wonderful resource we need to be able to monetize this value as well, to convince the unbelievers. The state makes a pretty good first stab through its economic impact assessment for each park. Its 2016 assessment showed that visitors to the Fakahatchee supported 144 jobs in the area and contributed just over \$9 million to the local economy. This will rise dramatically when our Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk expansion project is completed. We're still expecting construction to start this year.

Unfortunately, our economic impact assessment does not take into account any of our park's non-recreational ecosystem services. The state's top 10 parks in terms of economic impact are all beach resources with high attendance. If the value of the Fakahatchee's other ecosystem services could be factored in, the ranking would be flipped.

While we ponder that, with temperatures running 10 degrees above average for the past month, you need to get into and enjoy our swamp before it prematurely dries up. There are still lots of opportunities to enjoy seeing large aggregations of birds on our southern salt marshes, but the water is going fast and wildfire risk is up. It feels like May already. Bring on the life-giving rain!



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.

Winners & Losers: Effects of Hurricanes on our Ecosystem

March 7, 2018 – 3:00 PM

Public Talk – Naples Central Library

Patrick Higgins – raconteur, naturalist, and President of the Friends of Fakahatchee – will present this multi-media presentation. He will focus on the many subtle aspects of hurricanes, particularly Irma. There can positive effects on the natural world when one of these storms makes landfall, as well as the obvious destruction that is so familiar to us.

Doors will open 30 minutes before presentation at the Naples Central Library, 3:00 PM, Wednesday, March 7, 2018. Seating is available on first-come, first-served basis.

Naples Central Library
650 Central Ave
Naples, FL

The FaKaHaTChEE GrinD Set

Sunday, March 11

The Fakahatchee Grind is an opportunity to ride your gravel bike or mountain bike through one of the most diverse and unique ecosystems in the state. Chances of seeing an alligator, panther, or bear on this ride are in your favor. This will be the fourth Fakahatchee Grind, and there are many new things this year.

There is a new start location at Fakahatchee HQ. Also new, the Park is offering camping for only five dollars a night, available the nights before and after the race, Saturday, March 10 and Sunday, March 11. This is a spectacular opportunity to camp in one of the most unique habitats in the southeast (*not usually permitted*)! All camping is primitive, with water and bathrooms available nearby.

The routes have also changed. The Full Grind has been shortened by 15 miles, 85 miles total, but contains more dirt and less road. The Half Grind has been increased by 10 miles, 64 Miles total, and also contains more dirt and less road. The Back Country is a 45 mile ride, and offers a one of a kind backcountry experience.

All riders will need to be able to navigate the route using one of three methods:

- Gps with a gpx
- Read a map
- Use the Ride with GPS app (*route purchased and downloaded before the race*)

All riders are self-supported during the event. Full Grind and Half Grind riders get lunch, plus water at a stop, some sodas and chips. Full Grind riders get an additional water stop. Back country riders get high-fives and encouragement and are completely self-supported and self-contained during the event. The riding promises stunning terrain and adventure. Prices range from \$10 to \$40.

More information and tickets are available at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-fakahatchee-grind-tickets-43187316426>

You can also e-mail Ranger Mike Duey at michael.duey@dep.state.fl.us for more information or questions.



7th Annual Everglades Ultras – Very Successful!

by Bob Becker, Race Director



By race day, February 17, fifty miles of trails were cleared, trimmed, mowed and flagged by volunteers to make the course race-ready and show the way home.

Seasonally late rains caused portions of the prairie to be muddy, and a few deeper holes held water. A cut-around was created for each of these, so no one ran through water.

Temperatures were above average in the 80s, and the sun was a factor, but a breeze all afternoon and an added water stop on Janes Scenic Drive helped temper the heat, especially during the last few miles to the finish line.

Sightings of deer, wading birds, gators and a few snakes made for an interesting day. But wild turkeys and roseate spoonbills, Florida mink, panthers and black bears all scattered and hid. They don't share their home turf with many people – except on Everglades Ultras race day – and they apparently prefer peace and quiet!

Eleven park rangers and resident volunteers served as course marshals, roaming all the active trails on UTVs and ATVs to support runners and monitor safety. The Wilderness and Expedition Medical Team from SUNY-Upstate once again was on site to assist as needed. Volunteers at six full aid stations, multiple water/ice stops and monitor sites all contributed to a highly supported, safe race in an otherwise challenging and unique venue.

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Athletes completed their races – many their first ultra or first trail race – then enjoyed some well-deserved R&R with a post-race feast and an adult beverage or two under the finish line canopy tent. For race results visit <https://tinyurl.com/ultra-results>



75 winners were awarded an autographed 2018 calendar of Florida State Park photographs by iconic photographer, Clyde Butcher, in addition to the colorful race medal.

Many thanks for helping to make Ultras a success!



Glen Stacell and Tom Norton coach children fishing at the lake.

We could not have done this without the Fakahackers and all the FOF volunteers who spent numerous hours helping before, during and after the race. Well done to all!

Thank you to Glen Stacell and Tom Norton who coached a few children fishing at the lake on race day. The children had a good time and caught several fish. Much to our surprise they were reluctant to quit when it was time for lunch!

Thanks to FOF volunteer Dave Boesche who gave a private race day tour to a small group at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk.

Thank you Howard Lubel and Paul Joslyn for conducting a swamp walk!

Thank you volunteers and staff members from other parks, for your contributions during the Everglades Ultras. This event would not happen without all your help. It means a lot to Park staff to have so many great people that they can count on.

–Mike Duey, Park Services Specialist

*"Please accept my sincere appreciation.
The runners were raving about the fantastic,
positive support from staff and volunteers, and
that's what it's all about. Thanks!"*

– Bob Becker, Race Director

News from the Strand

Bill Mesce Memorial Picnic Area completed

by Howard Lubel

After lots of hard work by Rangers Mike Duey and Steven Bass, seasonal volunteer Debbie Kaprielian, and Dino Barone, I am pleased to announce that the Mesce Memorial Picnic Area is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner from 8:00 AM until dusk, seven days a week. The site is located on the west main tram approximately 1/2 mile west of the gate.

We extend our most sincere appreciation for your donations that made this memorial picnic area a reality in honor of Bill Mesce.

Howard Lubel waves from the Bill Mesce Memorial Picnic Area, located on the west main tram approximately 1/2 mile west of the gate.



Boardwalk visit with friends from Switzerland



Swiss visitors Barbara, Petra, Urs, and Martin enjoy the shade in the new outdoor classroom at the Boardwalk.

Barbara, Petra, Urs and Martin visited the Boardwalk on February 21, with Executive Director Francine Stevens. They enjoyed some shade in the new outdoor classroom made possible with a generous grant from the Naples Garden Club. Benches and native plants will be installed in the near future.

The Boardwalk was a real delight to visit that afternoon. Hundreds of Ibis were observed feeding, a few woodstorks were perched high in the trees, a red shoulder hawk flew by and an owl was heard at a distance.



Can you spot all ten Ibis? Hundreds were observed feeding near the Boardwalk.



Thanks to our dedicated volunteers Dick and Edith Hugues! They built the new Boardwalk Lookout for viewing the new location of the eagles' nest. The nest was easily visible, and with a good pair of binoculars we could see one eagle feeding the chicks.



FOF volunteers serve as Boardwalk Guides

A big thank you to FOF volunteers Dave and Patti Boesche, who have been very busy with Boardwalk visitors. Their generosity in time spent educating visitors about the Boardwalk and the Fakahatchee is very much appreciated.

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

Seen in the Strand



Close-up of Yellow Bellied Sapsucker, January 28, Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. Photo by Ron Whittemore, Rehoboth, MA.



Great photo of King rails, spotted February 20 on Janes Scenic Drive. Photo by Rita Bauer.

Membership News

Volunteer Appreciation Picnic Saturday, March 17

The FOF Board of Directors is again hosting an afternoon Volunteer Appreciation picnic on the shores of lovely Lake Harmon in the Fakahatchee Preserve State Park from 4:00 PM to last person leaving.

The picnic is free to all Friends of Fakahatchee members and Fakahatchee Park Volunteers and Park Staff. Food and beverages will be provided; pot luck dishes are welcomed. RSVP – no later than March 13, 2018 – is required.

You can e-mail your RSVP at FOF_90@hotmail.com Receipt of your e-mail will be confirmed via return e-mail. Or you can RSVP by phone at 239-695-1023. A volunteer will return your call to confirm.

Annual Members Dinner set for April 14

Save the Date!

Watch for a special e-mail by mid-March with more details and information on how to purchase your ticket.

Now yet a member? Join now at orchidswamp.org/support/memberships/

Annual Fund Appeal – There's still time to donate

Thanks to the generosity of our members, we have received nearly \$10,000 for the Pole Barn project to protect the FOF and Park vehicles, but we need a bit more. 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

Members make a difference.

Thanks to our lifetime and business members!

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

A magical morning!



"In January 2018, on my fifth visit to the Western Everglades, I took a guided swamp walk arranged through the Friends of Fakahatchee, led by Patrick and assisted by Jim. This was the highlight of all my visits to the Everglades because Fakahatchee has the most biodiversity and Patrick is a naturalist and superb teacher who loves the swamp.

We were two hours in the water, wading round the centre of a cypress dome. Besides birds and alligators, I saw several orchids, including a beautiful vanilla plant, air plants, ferns and the huge stumps of old cypress trees. Overall we took three hours because there was so much else to see on our drive along Janes Scenic Drive: the limestone geology, alligators, butterflies and even a huge owl flying overhead.

Swamp walking is tiring (think aqua aerobics) but worth the effort as you are not just looking at it, you are IN it! This was my second swamp walk, but it was by far the better of the two, an experience not to be missed!"

— Margaret Hall, United Kingdom [New member]

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



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<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.

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