



# The Ghost Writer

Newsletter of the Friends of Fakahatchee

The Ghost Writer – May-June 2018

## Happy 4th of JULY from the FOF!



*It wouldn't be a holiday in Everglades City without the Ghost Rider Tram rolling through town. The Friends of Fakahatchee were a hit in the 4th of July Parade thanks to Dave and Patti Boesche.*

*The dignitaries riding on the Ghost Rider during the parade included County Commissioner Donna Fiala, County Tourism Director Jack Wert, Pastor Bob & Millie Wallace of Everglades Community Church, and a bunch of historical re-enactors from Marco Island.*

*Earlier, April 28 marked the 90th anniversary of the Tamiami Trail, and the Friends of Fakahatchee were there to celebrate. Our thanks to Ted DeGroot, who pulled the tram for the dignitaries at the celebration event.*



## Executive Director's Message

*by Francine Stevens, Executive Director, Friends of Fakahatchee*

As most snowbirds have now settled in their homes up north, we continue to be busy taking care of FOF business. It's now the time of the year when CSO reports are due to the Park Manager and District, along with our tax return and summary of accomplishments in 2017. These activities help us realize how much the Friends of Fakahatchee do to support the park, so here's the short list I want to share with you.

- The FOF expended \$40,000 on wetland determination, surveys and permitting in support of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk Expansion project.
- Successful advocacy for the Boardwalk Expansion project resulted a legislative appropriation of 1.35 million for Phase II funding in May 2017.
- FOF provided \$16,380 for maintenance and improvement of Park equipment.
- Our volunteers conducted 42 Interpretive tours to welcome and educate 509 visitors, generating a net revenue of \$17, 727 to support the park.
- Through the generosity of our members, the Annual Fund Appeal funded purchase of a \$22,000.00 Polaris Highlifter for volunteer use – the Polaris sure came in handy after Hurricane Irma.
- Secured a \$13,000.00 grant from the Naples Garden Club for the Chickee Hut at the entrance to the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. This beautiful structure is now standing ready for future educational programs.
- Received a \$47,620 Wayfinding project grant which pays for the five attractive and informative kiosks now in production; they will be in place when the snowbirds return.
- Funded a surveillance camera for the Parks building facilities to help prevent vandalism.



As you know, Hurricane Irma left us with a real mess in the Park! The State's quick approval for use of outside contractors was a welcomed surprise, and rumor soon had it that the Park was in better shape than Naples. However, these outside contractors could not be used to clear our miles of hiking trails, nor could they work on the East River. Instead, our fearless Faka-hackers and Park staff turned a humongous challenge into an impressive tour de force.

The Park Manager's 2017 volunteer records report an impressive 9,945 volunteer hours, the Board of Directors alone volunteered 4,576 hours. At an estimated value of \$24.00 per hour, that's a contribution of \$238,680.00. A bravo for all the volunteers. It is reasonable to say our hourly contributions are indispensable, essential, required and invaluable!

It is thanks to your membership dues, your donations, your volunteer hours, your moral support, your love for the Fakahatchee, and your help in spreading the word about its importance that makes us productive as we work to preserve this jewel of the Everglades. Together, let's be proud of our accomplishments – bravo!

The Park manager submitted the FOF reports to District July 2, and eventually the 2017 reports will be posted at <https://floridadep.gov/comm/comm/content/citizen-support-organizations-reports> where all Florida CSO's reports are posted.



FOF President Patrick Higgins completes the installation of the donor recognition sign at the new Chickee Hut at the entrance to the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk.



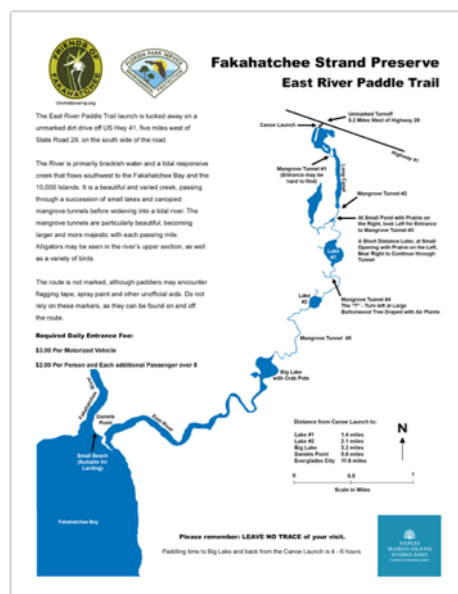
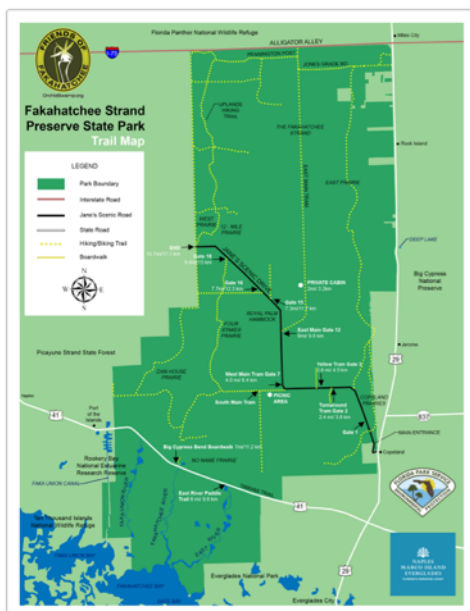
Thanks to a generous grant from the Naples Garden Club, the Chickee Hut at the entrance to the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk is now standing ready for future educational programs.

## News from the Strand

### New Maps for Fakahatchee Explorers

New maps of the Park's Hiking Trails and East River Paddling Trail are now available for download at [orchidswamp.org](http://orchidswamp.org) (<http://orchidswamp.org/plan-your-visit/trails-trams/>). The new maps, in conjunction with information kiosks to be installed this summer, will encourage visitors to safely explore the wonders of our park. Look for the kiosks – funded in part through the Tourist Development Council Wayfinding Project – at the Visitor Center on Janes Scenic Drive, the East River access, the West Main trailhead, the East Main trailhead, and the Northeast corner of the park.

These maps were produced by Georgi Goldstein, intern to our architect for the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk Expansion Project, David Corban. Our thanks for this generosity!





## Seen in the Strand

### The TAIL of the Gator Pond

by Dave Boesche, Boardwalk Volunteer



Hi, folks. This is an actual experience I observed at the gator pond at the end of the Fakahatchee Boardwalk. This area never fails to amaze me. This all unfolded on Friday, May 18, early afternoon. I arrived at the parking area to find only two other cars – typical summer crowd. So, I got my gear on, packed up some snacks and headed out with the sound of thunder in the distance. One of my first finds answered the time honored question, "Does a bear poop in the woods?" Answer: not if there is a boardwalk handy; I found quite a pile.

Arriving at the twin sister Cypress trees, it started to rain. Not real hard but cooling to say the least.

Put the camera in the pack and head onward. No water snakes today, most of the lubber grasshoppers taking shelter, but the peace and patter of the rain was wonderful. I arrived at the gator pond and it was very unique, with the rain drops adding texture to the water. Then, after a few minutes of solitude, it happened!

Almost invisible on the far side I see Mr. and Mrs. Gator about to take a swim. He was almost twice her size and she was likely over six feet. He guided her out to the deeper part of the pond and they both stopped. I was wondering what is going on here... After a few glances at each other, a nudge here and there, with little to no fanfare he pushed her under the surface! Then they were doing a ballet of sorts, tails up, then down. Torso's up then down. They were both submerged for over 15 minutes which of course was worrying.

Around this time two guest couples walked up and I tried to explain. Be assured that photos of this event have been posted by these four interested/amazed humans. After the aforementioned 15+ minutes, it was over. WOW what an experience!

I needed more answers so off to the library I went to get facts. (note: yes, I am still old school!)

Here are some facts I gleaned about alligator reproduction. Reproduction involves physiological preparation, courtship behavior, mating, nest building, egg production and laying, incubation, and hatching.

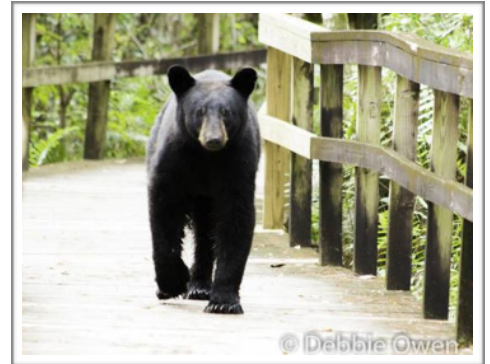
#### Mating

On warm April mornings at sun up both male and female alligators begin vocalizations and/or bellowing. Hormones released by each stimulate production of sperm and eggs. Vocalizations and hormones also draw other males, and fights may ensue, sometimes resulting in death.

Mating typically occurs only when the male is larger – if not, the female may attack and/or kill the suitor. The male climbs on the female's back, uses front legs to grasp the female's body, then employs his tail for positioning. Once mating occurs, females are capable of storing sperm in their oviducts for up to a year. Studies in Louisiana have revealed that alligators are not monogamous. Looking at 114 nests with 1,800 hatchlings, researchers found that most nests (51%) each held eggs fertilized by different bulls.

#### Laying eggs

Nest building and egg laying occur at night. Eggs are laid in either May or June, influenced by March temperatures as well as length of day. Not all females lay eggs every year. Nests are constructed of live plant material; approximately 6' in diameter and 2' tall. Females use calcium from their bones to form shells for eggs about the size of a goose egg.



*In answer to the time honored question, "Does a bear poop in the woods?" I found the answer to be, not if there is a boardwalk handy. I found quite a pile.*



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Alligator eggs incubate for 65 to 70 days. The sex of alligators is determined by the temperature of the eggs. When the nest temperature is 84 to 88 degrees Fahrenheit, all hatchlings will be female, while 91 to 92 degrees produces all males. A mix of genders results from temps in the 88 to 90 degrees range.

In Florida, 8 or 9 baby gators will successfully hatch from a clutch of 30 eggs; the most frequent egg predator is the raccoon. Once hatched, cannibalism claims up to 7% of juveniles.

#### Growing up

Alligators can live as long as humans. Fastest growth for an alligator is during the 1st year; it slows over time. Males and females grow at about the same rate until they are 3 feet in length. The male then grows more rapidly for 20 years. He will be approximately 8'5" at 10 years of age, and 11'6" at 20 years. Females grow more slowly, and reach about 6'11" at 10 yrs, and 8'5" at 20 years of age. The size record for Florida is 14'3.5" in 2010; In Texas, the record is 14'4" in 1998 (everything is bigger in Texas?).

*Well, I have more but we can share that another time.*  
Dave B.

## Membership News

### Does your employer have a “Matching Gift” program?

Several of our members have taken advantage of their employer’s matching program (General Electric, Exxon Mobil) for donations to not-for-profit organizations by sending us the “matching” form. We do the rest – it’s that easy! We have revised our Membership Form with a reminder.

## Annual Fund appeal to build the Pole Barn still open

You can still donate to the Pole Barn Project which will protect the FOF and Park equipment and vehicles. Give via PayPal through our website at <http://orchidswamp.org/>. If you prefer to mail a check, download the 2017 ANNUAL FUND APPEAL FOR POLE BARN form at <http://orchidswamp.org/support/>. Either way, many thanks for your ongoing support of the Park!

#### Members make a difference.

*We now have 324 members! A big thank you to Marya Repko for stepping in to help with the membership for Jinny Ball!*

Welcome to our new members: Anita Allen, Coral Springs, FL; John Caminiti, Brooklyn, NY; Peter Collins, Naples, FL; David Halpern, Miami, FL; Barbara Howard, Gulfport, FL; Don Inman, Millersburg, MI; Anna Miron, Homestead, FL; Andrea Naccarato, Naples, FL; Jenny Norman, Goodland, FL; Donald Pecora, Goodland, FL; John Shea, Sanibel, FL; James and Darlene Sidie, Naples, FL; Tony Szymanowski, Naples, FL; and Jack Whigman, Naples, FL.

#### Lifetime Preservers

Bruce & Janet Bunch

#### Lifetime Individual Members

Karen Berkley  
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



### Nice Introduction to the Everglades

*This boardwalk traverses a strand ... The strand stays wet and fosters growth of a variety of pretty amazing plants. This was so different than the 10,000 Islands area with the mangrove stands. Along the boardwalk are numerous descriptive signs, a nice addition to the trail. The end*

*overlooks a pond, and right below us was an alligator. Just laying there. It was so still that I thought it was a prop! Nice!*

– MikeB1952,

Colorado Springs, Colorado

### Friends of Fakahatchee Board

President – Patrick Higgins

Vice President – Glen Stacell

Secretary – Ken Shapiro

Treasurer – Scott Geltemeyer

Jinny Ball

Paul Joselyn

Donald Leonard

Tom Maish

Gayle Norton

Andrew Tyler

Stacy Wolfe

Executive Director – Francine Stevens

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### Become a Friend of the Fakahatchee

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

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### Follow us on Facebook!

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

### Our mailing address is:

Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.

PO Box 35, Everglades City, FL 34139z

Contact the Friends of Fakahatchee at FOF90@hotmail.com or

call 239-695-1023.

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](mailto: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.