



The Ghost Writer

Newsletter of the Friends of Fakahatchee

The Ghost Writer – November 2018

President's Message

by Patrick Higgins

Disturbingly, the past few weeks have been full of gloomy environmental news; California wild fires, CO₂ levels rising again, lingering red tide, dozens of dead dolphins washing up on Collier and Lee County beaches, stronger hurricanes, the likelihood of a new El Niño developing, bats dropping dead from the sky in a sweltering Australian heat wave, the North Atlantic's ocean circulation being at its weakest for 1,500 years, the U.S. government rubbishing its own climate report and so on. If people think immigration is an issue now, wait until climate change forces mass global migration!



We of course have our own immediate issues in the park. Southwest Florida's fire season is fast approaching, and we have lots of extra fuel from Michael in our hardwood hammocks. Many of their canopies are now wide open. Normally the deep shade of their interiors creates microclimates with higher humidity that keeps them safe from fire. They will be very vulnerable this season. The acorns from their oak trees play a key role in the park's ecosystem as a food source for the white-tailed deer that support our panther population.

But there are lots of positive developments too. Our concession operation is up and running. Apart from the extra revenue our new commercial partners will be contributing to FOF to help support the park, the program will also result in higher gate receipts – one of the measures on which Tallahassee grades the park, and it will provide the Park Manager a mechanism to better regulate usage and protect our unique resource.

I've been very active on the Friends' board for almost 6 years, but now want to focus more on advocating for climate science for the sake of our children and grandchildren, and our whole biome. I have therefore decided to retire as your President with effect from the 14th of December. This will allow for a smooth transition and enable FOF to select a new President at the December 15th board meeting for the coming year.

I will be devoting my energies to education and outreach, and it will finally give me time to more fully explore and study our wonderful Fakahatchee. I of course will still be volunteering in the park and actively supporting the Friends of Fakahatchee, but from the ranks.

On a lighter note you may have noticed that some of our rangers look like they are suffering from some strange wasting disease. Don't be alarmed. This is because they are sporting the new tactical style uniforms with sewn badges that were sized to be able to wear a bullet-proof vest underneath. These are going to be reissued shortly with the newly designed DEP and Park Service emblems, and now everyone knows to order a size smaller than usual!

I'm looking forward to seeing many of you at our Boardwalk Expansion Groundbreaking and welcome-back luncheon on the 7th of December to celebrate FOF's 20th anniversary. Thank you all for your past support and friendship.

Patrick Higgins

Patrick Higgins

Executive Director's Report

by Francine Stevens

Executive Director, Friends of Fakahatchee

Having walked in the FOF President's shoes for four years I know from experience how much time it consumes especially when someone has a strong sense of responsibility. I remember when Patrick first joined the Board in 2013 I had the audacity to ask him if he thought he would have time for the Board, this because he was also volunteering at Rookery Bay, he responded that when he makes a commitment he keeps his word. A few years later, in 2016 I was presenting Patrick with the Mel Finn award with the remark to our members that Patrick constantly surpasses our expectations. Surpassing expectations is a choice made out of a desire to excel regardless of the difficult challenges ahead. As I have said before "when the student is ready the teacher appears" and I am grateful for all I have learned working with Patrick and most importantly for paving new roads to increase FOF's capacity to support the Park. I take comfort knowing Patrick will remain involved with the FOF and that he will be able to once again put some wind in the sails of his beautiful Tropic Bird Gemini cruising catamaran.



News from the Strand

Breaking Ground on Boardwalk Expansion

Friday, December 7 - 8:30 to 10:30 am

Please join the Friends of Fakahatchee and State officials for the groundbreaking of a multi-year joint project that will enhance all aspects of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk.

8:30 am - Seating and refreshments

9:00 am - Keynote address by Eric Draper, Director of Florida State Parks

Remarks by State Senator Kathleen Passidomo

Remarks by Collier County Commissioner Donna Fiala

Location: Just East of the Miccosukee Indian Village located 27027 Tamiami Trail East / US 41. (Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk sign is on South side of US 41.)

Please RSVP for the groundbreaking to:
kitmaran@aol.com. Call 239-262-0987 if you have questions.

Note: The Friends of Fakahatchee will celebrate their 20th anniversary with a luncheon at the Everglades Adventure Center in Everglades City at noon following the groundbreaking. For details and required reservations, see next page.



20th Anniversary Celebration Luncheon tickets now on sale

Join us for the Friends of Fakahatchee's 20th Anniversary on Friday, December 7 with a luncheon in Everglades City. Our guests of honor are Director of State Parks Eric Draper and Environmentalist Franklin Adams. We will also honor the FOF founders and all FOF Presidents.

All FOF Past-Presidents received a personal invitation and we hope that most will attend this special milestone event. We look forward to going down memory lane with all who have paved the way since 1998. Going forward, the future looks good! We will have a few silent auction items so bring your check book!

Luncheon tickets for members of the Friends of Fakahatchee are \$20.00 each. Non-members are welcomed at \$45.00 per person, which includes a one year membership for each reservation. Non-member reservations are available by telephone only at (239) 695-1023.

Members, get your tickets now by copying and pasting this link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/friends-of-fakahatchee-20th-anniversary-celebration-luncheon-tickets-51560049496>.

Tickets are also available through our website (orchidswamp.org) [event page](#).



Ready? Set! Go!

Get your FOF Guided Tour tickets now!

The race is on to get your tickets for the 2018-2019 FOF guided tour program! The following link leads to our entire tours list – <https://tinyurl.com/FOFevents> . Please share this news with all your friends.



Private Tours will Customize your Fakahatchee Experience

Our swamp-walk season got off to an early start with a private tour at the end of October for the Lake and Orange County chapters of the Native Plant Society during which we managed to visit two sloughs. These specialized group tours are becoming a growth area for FOF. Pictured Marc Godts, leader of the group relaxing after the walk. *Photo by Patrick Higgins*

Biologist Carol Mears (on right, below) organized a private swamp walk to celebrate her girlfriend's Birthday. Carol drove all the way from Indian Rock Beach to Celebrate at the Strand.



Visit the FOF Tours page at <http://orchidswamp.org/adventures/> to how you too can arrange a private tour of the Fakahatchee, or contact FOF Executive Director, Francine Stevens at info@orchidswamp.org.



"Francine, we had an absolutely fabulous day with Mike and Guy! (Park Biologist Mike Owen and Park Ranger Guy DiGiovann.) Saw tons of orchids, alligators, epiphytes, deer and just missed a panther sighting. Totally exceeded our expectations and we also stopped for crab cakes and beer at the Camellia Grill – loved it all and we will be back! Thank you!"

— Carol Mears

Plan your next Fak adventure with these FOF partners

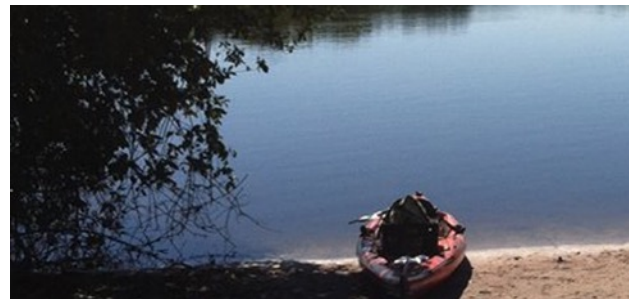
by Bruce Bunch

In November, the FOF began its exciting new role as the Park's master concessionaire. The FOF now is responsible for assuring the quality of visitor services offered by outside firms in the park by issuing permits and collecting fees from the companies. The goal is to improve the experience of park visitors by providing services the park would otherwise be unable to offer. The lion's share of the permitting revenue will be reinvested in the park, its facilities and FOF conservation and education programs.

Here's a look at the first five firms to participate in this new program. They all deserve our patronage, so spread the word.

Everglades Day Safari — Owner Pete Corradino operates a fleet of six vans. His permit is for tours at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk which is a stop on his full day tours that include air boat rides, lunch and more. A generous FOF supporter, Pete donated \$500 to the Boardwalk Project. <https://ecosafari.com/activities/everglades-day-safari/>

The Ivey House — This Everglades City landmark is both a popular guest house and one of the largest tour operators in the area through its Everglades Adventures business. Its permit is for paddling the East River and offering boardwalk tours. <https://iveyhouse.com/everglades-adventures/> continued page 4 >>



Important Reminder

As of November 1, 2018 all commercial operator's conducting any tours or commercial activities within the boundaries of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, including on the East River, must have entered into an Independent Subcontractor Agreement with FOF and display an FOF issued permit badge on their vehicle windshield or face FWC enforcement.

For more information about the Concessionaire Program, see <http://orchidswamp.org/concessionaire-program/>

Wild Lime Adventures — Operators Ben Ruby and Stacy Wolfe offers a wide variety of eco-adventures on both Florida coasts. Their permit is for boardwalk tours and swamp walks. Their full day tours include lunch and other Everglades stops. Interpretive guides Stacy and Ben hold PhDs and are committed environmentalists.
<https://wildlimeadventures.com/>

Adventure Paddle Tours — Operator Kyle McKenzie has a permit for paddling in the East River and boardwalk tours. Kyle specializes in semi-private tours with a maximum of two families. Kyle says he realizes that just enjoying the outdoors is not enough, but guiding and sharing these experiences with others is really what makes him happy.
<https://www.adventurepaddletours.com/>

Naples Bicycle Tours — Certified Florida Master Naturalists lead three hour bicycle tours through the Fakahatchee on level, hard packed roads and trails. The pace of a bicycle tour is perfect for observing the many wonders of the “Amazon of North America.” Participants ride high-quality geared bicycles and are provided with helmets, binoculars, snacks and water.
<http://www.naplesbicycletours.com/>

Seen in the Strand

A Wildlife Welcome

by Rita and Eric Bauer

Hi everybody!

Here are all the pictures of our panther encounter just after our arrival.

We arrived at the Port of the Island after an 8-hour drive, quickly unloaded the car and decided that unpacking could wait. The Faka Fever had a hold on us and we had to drive to Janes Scenic Drive. Within the first half hour we already saw a mink crossing the road and then bouncing around in the ditch near Gate 3. We were very excited! What a great start.

Ten minutes later we took a little stroll just before Gate 7 and saw two moving brown colored objects coming towards us. All I can tell you, we experienced all the emotions of high stress. Disbelief, Acceptance, Exhilaration, followed by rapid heartbeat, hyperventilation, dry mouth and as they came closer and closer “how quickly can we get back to the car”?

Look forward to seeing all of you soon!
– Rita and Eric



A Lizard's Tale

by Patrick Higgins



Green Anole surveying its surroundings. Photo by Patrick Higgins.

Our native green anole (*Anolis carolinensis*) seems mundane in comparison. It is however, very versatile and a remarkable survivor in the face of collection for the pet trade, habitat loss and invasion by its cousin, the Cuban or brown anole (*Anolis sagrei*), native of course to Cuba, as well as to the Bahamas and nearby islands.

The natural distribution of green anoles is southeast United States from East Texas to North Carolina and the Florida peninsula. Ironically, they've been introduced and become invasive in Hawaii, Japan's Ogasawara Islands and Guam, although in the latter, they in turn are now threatened by an introduced brown tree snake. There are also a few isolated introduced populations of greens in California.

Even though greens can turn brown, browns and greens are easily differentiated by head shape; the green has a longer, more slender snout, rather analogous to the difference between crocodiles and alligators. The short-snouted browns exhibit a great deal of color or rather brown variation. Females often have very distinct dorsal striping and the heads of juveniles sometimes an orange tinge. Browns can change color from brown to black, but not to green.

Both species have foldable throat fans called dewlaps which they use for courtship and territorial display. On the brown this is usually orange, rimmed or speckled with yellow as shown in photo. (*Photo by Patrick Higgins*). Here in Southwest Florida we have our own green subspecies, the southern green anole, *Anolis carolinensis seminolus* that has a pale cream-colored dewlap in contrast to reddish dewlap of the more common and widespread northern green anole, *Anolis carolinensis carolinensis*.

Our anoles mainly feast on bugs and such, typically using a dash and seize technique that results in an appalling display of table manners as they chomp their prey with legs sticking out of the mouths in all directions. The introduced green iguana starts off as insectivorous but evolves into an herbivore as it matures much to the chagrin of Florida's gardeners. Perhaps as a nod to their iguana relatives our greens occasionally lick nectar and eat pollen or even the odd flower petal.

The other day I was leading a tour under a perfect blue sky across some rocks in the recently dried-out borrow ditch onto Lee Cypress Prairie. As we pushed through shoulder-high goldenrod on the far side, a bright green anole inspected us from perch just below the dried flower heads.

It made me recall as a child when every U.S. five-and-dime store sold green anoles as chameleons, along with baby red-eared turtles. Although our anoles can change color, chameleons they most certainly are not. Anoles are creatures of the new world and members of the Iguana family. They are very limited in their color palette compared to the rather prehistoric-looking true chameleons of Africa and the old world. These have feet with two toes facing forward and two back to better grip branches in common with parrots and woodpeckers, independently rotatable eyeballs, prehensile tails and famously, projectile tongues to seize their prey.



The brown anole probably arrived in the Keys in the 1880s. A century later it had colonized the whole peninsula south of Gainesville. Movement of landscaping materials during Florida's population boom rapidly spread their range. Browns now extend into Louisiana, westward as far as Houston and into central Georgia. Further northward expansion is currently limited by winter temperatures. As new arrivals they are more cold sensitive than the greens, but natural selection may breed this out, or climate change make it less relevant.

In areas where they overlap, numbers of greens plummet as the two species compete for food and habitat. There is somewhat of a natural resource partitioning as browns are more terrestrial, favoring the ground and perhaps 3-5 feet above it, whereas the greens are distinctly more arboreal favoring a higher zone with a slight overlap. Greens are creatures of the canopy. The rub is that both species have to come down to the ground to lay eggs, and browns are more prolific egg layers. I have greens in my suburban Naples yard because I have lots of vertical structure (trees) to create habitat for them. Sadly, many Floridians favor a bare expanse of lawn with no room for greens.

Many visitors mistakenly refer to both species as geckos. I usually instruct them to grab a flashlight and check the eaves of their house after dark and they'll soon see the difference; geckos have big eyes suited to a nocturnal life, padded suction cup-like feet, a very flat posture and squiggly running motion. Most of Florida's geckos are introduced exotics. However, one could argue they're not really invasive as they fill an unoccupied niche in our lizard-scape, mainly competing for prey in urban areas with our invasive Cuban tree frogs.

However, there's a new threat, the knight anole (*Anolis equestris*) the largest of the anole family that grows up to 19 inches - another Cuban import that probably arrived in the 50s. When I first came to live in Florida in 2010, they were mostly confined to around Coral Gables' Fairchild Botanic Garden, but within a few years I made the occasional sighting on the palms by Naples Pier and then one day I spotted something peculiar peering around the trunk of a Dahoon holly in my back yard.

Knight Anole climbing. When I went out to investigate, it expertly played hide-and-seek as I walked around the tree, so that it was always tantalizingly on the opposite side. Finally, it made a dash for the canopy and I saw it was a huge green muscular lizard with very heavy jaws and a bright yellow flash on its shoulder. It was a knight anole, as shown on right (photo of Knight Anole climbing by Patrick Higgins).

Since then they've been regular visitors and are clearly breeding as I see a variety of sizes. They seem to establish a territory and do a regular circuit scouring all the trees in the area for tree frogs, bird nests and other anoles. They are completely arboreal and never appear on the ground except to dash from one trunk to another. Fortunately, their range is very temperature dependent – if it falls to around 40° F they go comatose and drop to the ground. But beware; if you warm and wake them, they can be quite ferocious, hissing and biting!



In escaping the predation of the knight anole, greens may have a slight advantage over the browns as they are more agile in treetops and better able to utilize slick leaf surfaces. There has been some interesting work in evolutionary biology by Harvard's Dr Jonathan Losos on this subject, utilizing anoles on isolated scrubby Bahamian islets that had either been swept bare of lizards by hurricanes or had them artificially removed. They first introduced brown anoles after painstakingly recorded their limb dimensions, and then ground-dwelling curly-tail lizards that would predate upon them. The curly-tails forced the browns to move up in the bushes and clumsily use narrower vegetation to which they weren't well adapted. Using other islets with no curly-tails as a control, Dr Losos and his colleagues were able to determine that within just a few generations the browns had evolved shorter limbs in an amazing example of rapid evolutionary change.

And yes, they can shed their tails to distract predators and regenerate them, but it's not without cost. There's the energy required to do so and then the tail does perform a function. It provides rotational stability when jumping and aids in balance.

The green anole on the goldenrod stalk decided I was watching him too intently and suddenly justified the expression 'leaping lizards' to disappear towards a nearby hardwood hammock, but it created an opportunity for a bit of instant interpretation and perhaps the inspiration for one of our group to create a bit of vertical structure and plant a tree in their backyard.

Membership News

Perseverance Pays Off!

Dave Boesche, Certified Florida Master Naturalist

After two years of trying, in early 2016 I finally found an opening for the first of three core modules, Coastal Systems of Florida. Classroom instruction was at Ft Myers Beach, with field trips and research all over Southwest Florida. There were 19 fellow students, several already practicing naturalists, a county parks police officer, a golf course manager, and several amateur photographers.

I had already been schooled by the Conservancy of Southwest Florida on coastal systems, but the Master Naturalist module offered a whole lot more in substance and detail. The field trips and experiences during Jan and Feb 2016 were tailored to match the classroom topics. To quote Dr. Seuss - "Oh the places you will go!" Just for something different, I had a serious back surgery right in the middle of this and a fellow student from Naples had to drive me for several weeks.

I completed the next class, Freshwater Systems of Florida, in March and April 2017. We convened at the Wa-Ke Hatchee Park in Ft Myers; the twenty students included 2 firemen, a few individuals from the previous class, and a water craft instructor for Kayak/ Canoe for the State.

The first time I hiked into a Cypress Dome – surprise! As I know now, it's not a hill, it is a swimming pool. With at least one gator in each! ... I counted.

October and November of this year I completed Upland Systems at the U.F. Randell Research Center, Calusa Heritage Trail classroom, in Pineland, Florida. The travel was a stretch, 75 miles each way, door to door, usually 1.5 hours. (I couldn't help but notice that I drove to work in the dark throughout my work life, and now I was doing it again in retirement. Huh.) The very first day of class I noticed a road sign about a block away that read 'CAUTION - Road prone to flooding.' And this was an Uplands Class?

There are many agencies involved in the Florida Master Naturalist Program: Florida Sea Grant, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Marine Research Institute, HUBBS - Sea World Research Institute, and the University of Florida IFAS, Southwest Florida Research and Education Center to name a few. Learn more at <http://www.masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Well, I learned so much that I can't possibly repeat it here. Actually, I sometimes don't know where I placed my glasses or cell phone. But I did get to spend 120 class hours, and 360 field trip hours with some great, bright people. Like me, they all care about Mother Earth, and hope to help her stay well.



Farewell Saul Friess, Friend of the Fakahatchee

Saul Friess, our friend and longtime FOF member, passed away the 18th November. Saul was a former FOF board member, professional photographer, reptile expert and much more. He spent every free moment in the swamp and his beautiful photographs were frequently used at FOF events. He achieved one of the highest recognitions that a nature photographer can attain, publication in National Geographic. One of his most memorable moments was photographing Mike and Dona's wedding, knee deep in the swamp, wearing a tux.

Saul never met a person, animal or flower he didn't like. He aggravated the hell out of those he hiked with by picking up every water moccasin he came across, even well into his 80's. Saul and his wife Iris were devoted to each other and were fixtures at FOF events. Saul is also survived by his daughter Lorraine.

Cards of condolence can be sent to:

Iris Friess and Family
9015 SW 62 Terrace
Miami, Florida 33173-1669

Labors of love

The Friends of Fakahatchee work throughout the year to help people learn about and enjoy the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. Their efforts have resulted in more friendship for the Fakahatchee throughout the state and beyond!



Howard Lubel spruces up the Bill Mesce Memorial picnic site for the season....Photo by Dino Barone, Oct 27



Patti and Dave Boesche represented the FOF at the Everglades City "Arts in the Glades" on the 17 November. he Friends are very grateful for the Dave and Patti's time. Look for them again at upcoming "Art in the Glades" at McLeod Park Dec. 8, Jan. 19 , Feb. 23 , and March 23.

Click to learn how you can volunteer at the Fakahatchee!

<http://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/>

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.

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

Annual Fund appeal to build the Pole Barn continues

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 2018 ANNUAL FUND APPEAL FOR POLE BARN form at <http://orchidswamp.org/support/>. Either way, many thanks for your ongoing support of the Park!



If you haven't yet opened your free AmazonSmile account, please take a few minutes before you get caught in the hectic holiday season. Visit smile.amazon.com, then choose the Friends of Fakahatchee as your charity to receive the donations from your purchases. To get there quicker, go to <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/59-3511352> which is our direct link. This works for your shopping all year round, and when more FOF members join in the donation parade, we'll see more money for our Park. Thank you!



Ruggedly beautiful place to bike or hike

The website says that, "the emphasis at Fakahatchee is on the preservation of its natural character" and they've done a fantastic job of that. This is wild Florida at its finest and it's amazing.

– Cabopc, Ft. Myers, Florida

Members make a difference.

Welcome to our new member Michael Brown!
We now have 340 members!
You are all individually contributing to the mission of the Friends of Fakahatchee. Bravo!

Lifetime Preservers

Bruce & Janet Bunch

Lifetime Protectors

Kit & LaRaw Maran

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 Saylor
Glen & Laura Stacell

Business Patrons

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

Business Benefactor

Everglades Day Safari

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call 239-695-1023.

Miss an issue of the Ghostwriter? Visit the archives at
<http://orchidswamp.org/about-fof/the-ghost-writer-archives/>

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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