



Executive Director's Report

by Francine Stevens

Executive Director, Friends of Fakahatchee

One of my daily habits is to quickly check the Collier County website to track the progress of the Boardwalk Expansion project in respect to construction permits. On April 10th, as I was getting ready to attend a reception at Paul Arsenault's gallery in downtown Naples, I gave one quick check. I sat dumbfounded for a few minutes, wondering if I was reading the most recent post correctly! Collier County had just issued a permit dated April 10, 2019 to George F. Young Inc. (the engineering firm in Gainesville retained by DEP for the project). Finally this meant that the engineer had satisfied the numerous requests "for more information" from Collier County and was now in receipt of permit # PL20170000261.



With exuberance I made a few copies and got myself on the road to the reception, where most of the Board of Directors and Boardwalk Vision committee were gathering at the invitation of Paul Arsenault to discuss his offer to hold a fundraising event in 2020. The timing was perfect to make a memorable announcement surrounded by folks who devoted so much time and money to the Boardwalk Expansion project.



A delighted Tom Maish holds the Collier County permit letter for the Boardwalk Expansion project. FOF leadership was meeting at Paul Arsenault's gallery to discuss the 2020 fundraising event.

When all the chit chat was done I called the attention of the group and asked our Boardwalk Expansion champion Tom Maish to stand by my side. I handed him the Collier County permit letter and asked him to read it to the group. He too was dumbfounded – after all, he reminds everyone whenever he can that he's been promoting this project for ten years, and he would like to see it happen in his lifetime!!

So what's next? Collier County's permit letter states "Permits from other agencies having jurisdiction over this project shall be obtained prior to start of construction" and "A pre-construction meeting is required by code prior to the start of construction." So, more permits are required to start the project.

On April 11 we were told by DEP that the Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) is waiting on comments from the Boardwalk's neighbors, the Miccosukee Tribe. This comment letter is required to issue a USACE permit to DEP Bureau of Design and Construction (BDC). Until this is done BDC cannot bid the project out for construction.

In 2018 there were 75,320 visitors at the Boardwalk. Jan thru April 2019 recorded 44,499 visitors, and we expect this will double when the new parking site is done. Visitors will pay to enter the site, at \$3.00 per car you can do the math of a projected revenue for the Park annually. It's a lot of money long overdue to the Park Service.

News from the Strand

Fakahatchee Strand Visitor Center | Winter, 2018-2019

by Resident Volunteer Dee Leonard (pictured below at far right, wearing her Fak hat)



Volunteer Dee Leonard answers visitors' questions. Thanks to Dee and volunteers Diane Allen, Clare Holden, Ted Locke and Bob Reeves for keeping the Visitor Center door open 7 days a week.

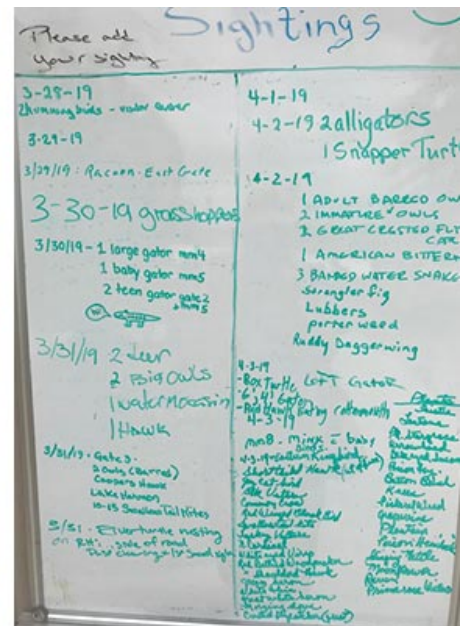
It was a busy season at the Visitor Center (VC). Thanks to volunteers Diane Allen, Clare Holden, Dee Leonard, Ted Locke, and Bob Reeves we kept the door open 7 days a week January through March and greeted 3,532 guests. Most of these were first time visitors.

We always asked guests how they found us. There are those who make the Fakahatchee Strand a destination. They arrive with some knowledge of the park and what they want to do; most often to drive Janes Scenic Drive and/or to hike East Main Tram to the Fakahatchee Hilton. However, a large number arrived saying they found the preserve when they spotted the state park sign along SR 29. They entered the VC with questions such as "What is this place?" and "What can we do and see?". There were also many looking for the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk but were directed to Janes Scenic Drive by Google. Having someone at the VC offered an opportunity to tell them about the entire Preserve, then give them a handout and directions to get them to the Boardwalk.

When guests arrive at the park, they often are confused on what is available to them. We were able to answer their questions, assist with the entrance fee procedure, and offer our new hiking trails map (created and supplied by the FOF). This map cleared up confusion on the large map outside.

By far, the biggest thing we noticed is that guests want to speak with someone and see what is inside the Visitor Center. They enjoyed reading the visitors' sightings on the white board, putting their home city on the world map, and signing the guest book. Seeing Mike Owen's snake exhibit, then looking at exhibits of birds and mammals such as the Bobcat and the Everglades Mink was also of great interest.

They could also see an orchid display and look through photos of orchids taken in the Fakahatchee Strand by Rita Bauer, one of our volunteers. This great addition provided us the opportunity to show them what was in bloom and what they might see on their visit into the Strand. Of course, they could purchase caps, books, and water.



Visitors enjoyed seeing Mike Owen's snake exhibit (left) and reading the visitors' sightings on the white board (right).

Visitor Center report continued...



Visitors from all over the world have placed pins on the world map to show where they call home.

We spoke with visitors from across the United States and throughout the world. Ohio was the state that brought the most visitors and Germany the country with the largest number. This year we had fun talking with guests from countries on most continents. They arrived from throughout Europe, Russia, China, South Africa, Australia, and Columbia.

The most common questions were: "What is a Strand?" "How do we pay?" "How do we get to Janes Scenic Drive?" "What are these crickets?"

The most unusual animal sighted: A Northern Bobwhite running across JSD in the Strand at 5.8 miles.

Wayfinding interpretive signs feature Jane Parks



Park Specialist Mike Duey, Park Manager Steve Houseknecht, and FOF President Glen Stacell proudly display interpretive signs for the new Wayfinding kiosks. It was a team effort well done!

Jane Parks, recipient of the Mel Finn award in Dec 2018, is featured on a new interpretive panel for the Wayfinding kiosks. In the mid-1960s, as Conservation Chair of the Florida's Junior Women's Club and years before our organization existed, Jane teamed up with Mel Finn to preserve the Fakahatchee. She organized an aggressive letter writing campaign and presented a petition to the state on a roll of paper 175 feet long.

Ms. Parks' outstanding efforts to save the Fakahatchee from real estate development earned her a place in history, along with Mel Finn, Franklin Adams and Nathaniel Reed. We are grateful for the great gift of saving the Fakahatchee Preserve for future generations.

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Jane Parks continued...



Jane Parks, her son Randy Parks, Boardwalk Vision chair Tom Maish and President Glen Stacell with the new interpretive panel.

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The photo at right, of Jane Parks getting ready to fly over the Fakahatchee with then-Sheriff Doug Hendry on May 25, 1964, was used on the interpretive panel.



Seen in the Strand

A walk down the Gate 3 Trail – April, 2019

By Andrew Tyler

As those of you who are regular visitors to Fakahatchee will know, a drive up Janes Scenic Drive (JSD), will periodically pass numbered gates. These locations represent places that were the beginning of railroad spurs from the main line that ran up JSD when the Fakahatchee was being logged in the 1940s and 1950s. When logging operations ceased in the mid-1950s the rails were removed and the spurs unattended, so that some are hard to distinguish from the trees and other vegetation that surround them. Other gates provide entrances to hiking trails in the modern Park and are therefore quite obvious when driving. For example, Gate 7 is the terminus of the West Main hiking trail.

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Gate 3 continued...

Tram 3 is on the right-hand side of Jane's Scenic Drive, approximately 2.8 miles from the zero mile marker. There is a small parking area on the right to pull in, and you will know you're in the right place when you see the two green-colored posts adorned with "Gate 3" in white paint.



The trail at Gate 3 is a relatively recent addition to the hiking options in the Park. I would be remiss if I neglected to mention David Pickering, a volunteer who worked diligently for a long time to bring this trail up to its present condition. I was introduced to the trail earlier this season and finding myself in the Park on Easter Saturday, I paid a return solo visit.

This trail is a delightful addition. The trail is level and relatively dry. You could hike to the end and back in fifteen minutes if you are in a hurry. However, I find this

trail to be a delightful opportunity to take a slow stroll and really have a close look at what's going on and growing around you. The usual precautions of wilderness hiking apply here too, despite the relatively well groomed and level environment. Suggestions for preparation may be found on the [Trails and Trams](#) page of our website, and in this case please remember that poison ivy is everywhere, groomed trail or not!

The trail sits atop one of the old trams; trams were originally built as railroad beds. The trams were made by 'borrowing' rock and soil from the areas to the sides of the new railroad bed, thereby raising them above the surrounding waters. Of course, this also leaves depressed areas to the sides of the tram. On Tram 3 rocks were removed from either side. Whether or not you will find water in the depressed areas will depend upon the time of year and rainfall.

This year, many areas too the swamp have not dried down entirely, and to the right of the trail's entrance there was sufficient water to support a population of Bladderworts. There are four distinct Bladderworts found in Florida, all of which have yellow-colored flowers. Bladderworts are the only carnivorous plants found in the Fakahatchee. The 'bladders' which are the parts that act as the plants' 'mouth' are tiny, and they digest nematodes and other extremely small animals that live in the water and mud.

On my hike I walked to the far end of the trail and then explored in more detail on my return. The end of the trail is easily identified by the ruins of an old cabin that was no doubt someone's 'Cabin in the Woods' in the era after logging when such things were quite common. The trail continues to the left of the cabin and runs for a short distance, after which it becomes quite wet and you are advised to re-trace your steps, unless you are prepared for wet walking.



To the right of the trail's entrance the water was sufficient to support a population of bladderworts. All Florida bladderworts have yellow-colored flowers.

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Gate 3 Trail continued...



A male brown anole extends his colorful red and yellow dewlap to attract females or as a warning to other males.

As I passed the cabin ruins, I spotted a brown anole sitting on a twig, exhibiting behaviors that suggest mating season is underway. The colorful red and yellow under the throat of the male is known as a dewlap. Male brown anoles extend their dewlaps to attract females or as a warning to other males.

We are all familiar with some of the 'charismatic' species that live within the Park's boundaries: panthers, black bear, Everglades mink, ghost orchids, and so on. We know that they're here, but the chance of spotting any of these species on any given day is a matter of patience and a not insignificant amount of luck! This makes it easy to overlook some of the more common flora and fauna, much of which is no less attractive in its way than the charismatic species, but sometimes overlooked because of its very commonality.

If you look closely at the tree in the photo. It is not that different from many other trees along the trail, but the sheer diversity of epiphytic species is wonderful. I often tell visitors that "if you stand still for a week in Florida, something will grow on you." This tree amply illustrates the point. Remember,

an epiphyte lives ON the host plant, but is not a parasite. It's using the host for physical support and sometimes to get closer to the daylight, but is not taking nutrients from its host. This tree along the Gate 3 trail holds three air plants and a host of mosses and lichens.

On the outbound journey along the trail, I came across a tree on the left-hand side that had fallen from natural causes, as far as I could tell. There on the fallen tree were two cardinal air plants. It's a little unusual for them to be blooming in mid-to-late April, but they can bloom at any time. While the loss of their host habitat is unfortunate and will likely end in their demise, it does give us the opportunity to view the flowers up close, which on a standing tree would be several feet above the ground. One can see the purple bract and the white-colored flowers at the very core on the close-up



For those who are here only in the winter season, opportunities are limited by the drier weather to see resurrection fern in its full glory. Commonly growing in the swamp, this epiphytic fern has an interesting strategy for survival. In dry times it will wilt, and it is easy to conclude that the plant had died from dehydration. However, stimulated by even just a few water drops, the plant will begin to resurrect itself, and following a full-blown rainfall, perhaps as little as one hour is sufficient for the fern to start a return to its full glory.

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A fallen tree on the north side of the tram houses two cardinal air plants. On the right is a close up of a cardinal air plant (Tillandsia fusciculata) bloom.

Gate 3 Trail continued...



This tree carries a full complement of resurrection fern (Pleopeltis polypodioides), Shown here one day after rain fell.

Spring is what draws many of us north at the end of season. April is spring in Florida too, and the warmer and wetter weather brings a lot of changes to the park. For example, April sees the return of insects that have been absent or dormant for most of the winter. Mosquitoes of course are considered the quintessential Florida insect, as unwelcome as they may be. I was fortunate on this day that we have yet to receive sufficient rain for them to emerge in their full glory, although a few pioneers left me with one or two itches.



Dragonflies are members of a far more well-received insect family. I always enjoy the various dragonfly species that share Florida summers with us. The University of Florida Gardening Solutions web site tells us there are over 100 species of dragonflies found in Florida, and I can believe it. Each species seems to have a distinctive season, and they come in a wide variety of sizes and colors.

Dragonflies spend much of their life in a larval stage in water, where they are voracious predators on many other larval forms, including mosquitoes! On this day a yellow-red colored species had recently hatched, and they were enjoying spreading their wings and getting used to the dry phase of their life cycle. The one shown here was enjoying the sunshine from its perch on a blade of grass.

Vanilla orchids are grown for commercial exploitation elsewhere in the world, particularly in Indonesia and Madagascar. Cultivation is a very intensive activity. Flowers bloom for one day and require hand pollination to ensure a high yield. Cultivated varieties have far more intense flavor profiles compared to wild plant's pods. If you feel the urge to have a go at growing them, the plants are widely available at nurseries and via the internet, but the translation is: Don't bother trying to grow these at home unless you want them for the novelty.

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Gate 3 Trail continued...

This sabal (or cabbage) palm was another showcase for Fakahatchee's epiphytic species. On the left-hand side of the tree we see one species of a large genus of epiphytic ferns (*Vittaria* spp.), known as shoestring fern, while on the right is a vanilla orchid (*Vanilla phaeantha*). Yes, the seed pods from vanilla orchids are the source of that distinctive flavoring.

Many of us are familiar with the life cycle of a strangler fig, also found in the Fakahatchee. Their seed grows in the upper reaches of a tree; the roots descend from above and then grow into the ground. In other words, the strangler fig starts its life as an epiphyte, but ends up as a ground-rooted plant.

Vanillas follow the opposite strategy. A young vanilla plant sends out vines in many directions, some of which will hopefully climb available trees. Once the plant has established itself on a tree, the roots and ground-trailing parts of the plant will wither, and the Vanilla will spend the remainder of its life as an epiphyte.

I hope this gives our readers a sense of the variety of spring plant life on a short trail with easy access, enjoyable to anyone with even very modest hiking skills and enthusiasm. Keep your eyes and ears open; spotters have observed several of the charismatic fauna mentioned on or around this trail. Good luck!

All photos by Andrew Tyler.



Kudos from happy Swamp walkers and Tour takers.



A group of about 30 Friends of Delnor-Wiggins State Park recently enjoyed a Swampwalk and Tram Tour.

"What a delightful and informative trip to the Fakahatchee yesterday by our Friends group of about 30 people [from Delnor-Wiggins State Park. The tram tour, guided expertly by Dee and Don Leonard, and the swamp walk conducted by Patrick Higgins gave such interesting and historical information. We all have a greater appreciation for you Park and its natural resources". Kathy Foster President Friends of Delnor-Wiggins State Park.

From Gary Spragg –

"It was my third swamp walk and the best ever; such a personal touch was provided by Patrick Higgins who introduced a small group of my friends to the swamp. We had a wonderful day with our special guide who we thoroughly enjoyed while experiencing and learning about this special place".

Park Staff and volunteers work on clearing trail



Park staff, Dino Barone, and Howard Lubel are working on clearing the bottom half-mile of South Main Trail. Since Hurricane Irma, we have kept 2.5 miles of South Main open, but the bottom half-mile has not been cleared. The trail leads to a location called the Oil Well Road Parcel, owned by the Park. The first photo shows the thick entanglement of South Main Trail once you get past the cleared 2.5 miles. *First two photos by Dino Barone.*

Following a day working with Park Staff, Dino Howard, and the Polaris continued to forge ahead, as shown in the second photo. With all the downed trees and branches from Irma, along with 18-plus months of growth, they experienced a vigorous workout! Everyone's efforts to clear South Main trail to reach the Parcel is very much appreciated! *Last two photos by Ken Shapiro.*



Everglades mink in the Fakahatchee | Jay Staton

Jay Staton recorded [video footage of playful Everglades minks](#) [6:41] and a variety of wildlife between March 26, 2019, and April 15, 2019, during the seasonal dry down of the swamp. The video was captured in one of the ditches in the Fakahatchee. Jay states, "The Everglades mink is quite possibly the rarest mammal in the world. As you can see in the video, it has to deal with many that would feed on it given the chance." Well done, Jay!

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. Please 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 to do so. 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!

Fabulous natural history walk

Great idea to eavesdrop on the ranger. We were able to spot Florida panther scratch marks on the boardwalk thanks to their info. He had great tales about capturing pythons also. You will get wonderful pictures of impressive trees in a peaceful, accessible walk.



– Kathryn N, Missouri

Members make a difference.

Welcome to new members:

Ted Borduas, Naples FL; Judy Brown, North Fort Myers FL; Marcia Erickson, Naples FL; Ken Gaul, Naples FL; Nancy Jack, Lake Worth FL; Richard Kalin, Plymouth MN; Jim Koopman & Helen Fox, Bokeelia FL; Randy Parks, Alton Illinois; Margaret Roberston, Nashville TN; John Rosenbaum, Naples FL; J. Tom Tankersley, Marco Island FL. We have 345 members.

Thank you to our Lifetime Members.

Lifetime Preservers

Bruce & Janet Bunch

Lifetime Protectors

Kit & La Raw Maran

Lifetime Family Members

John & Pauly Kaiser

Tom & Judy Maish

Noel Nation

Van & Jane Sayler

Glen & Laura Stacell

Lifetime Individual Members

Karen Berkley

Rita Bleasdale

Warner Blow

Elsie Caldwell

John Elting

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

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Stay up to date with what's seen in the Strand on our FOF Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/orchidswamp>

Contact the Friends of Fakahatchee at FOF_90@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, subject line: Ghostwriter.

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

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