



President and Executive Director's Letter

In the last newsletter resident volunteer Dee Leonard wrote about the busy season at the visitor center and how she with other volunteers managed to keep the doors open 7 days a week. What she didn't mention is that she received nearly \$2,400 of donations specifically for the Friends of Fakahatchee. *Thank you Dee!*

Another huge thank you is due to volunteers Dino Barone, Howard Lubel and Paul Joslyn. They worked tirelessly with Park staff Steven Bass and Guy DiGiovanni to finish clearing South Main trail to provide access to the Oil Well Road parcel. *We very much appreciate their efforts and determination!*

The Dept. of Environmental Protection fiscal year ends June 30, 2019. This is also the deadline for the FOF to submit the Annual CSO Report of Accomplishment for preceding fiscal year 2018. When we prepare this report we are reminded of what we are able to accomplish with the generosity of our members' time and donations. Although this was mentioned in the January newsletter it's worth repeating that the reason we are an impressive organization is because each one of our members provides the support we need.

In 2018 we were able to accomplish the following:

- \$97,212.29 of expenditures were recorded out of a budget of \$107,106 allocated for Direct Park Support.
- \$56,578.90 of those expenditures were funded by grants obtained from the Naples Garden Club, Collier County Tourist Development Council and Lee County Electric Cooperative.

The balance of funding the expenditures for Direct Park support was generated by the FOF Interpretive Tour program, your generous donations, and membership dues. Note that expenditures are connected to tasks and projects, and volunteers are constantly working with Park staff to execute them – hence the generosity of time!

Onward to uncharted territory! It was in 2018 that – thanks to then President Patrick Higgins – the FOF bid proposal for a Concessionaire Agreement was accepted by DEP. The Agreement was executed in August 2018, and by November 2018 we had five companies with permits to conduct tour business in the Park – Adventure Paddle Tours, Everglades Day Safari, Ivey House, Naples Bicycle Tours, and Wild Lime Adventures. A sixth company was permitted in January – North Carolina Adventure Tours.

All tour operators have been a pleasure to work with. Through the permit program FOF was able to assist the Park Manager in restoring order in the park. It was estimated over 15 tour companies had been conducting their business on park land and rivers without any usage regulations or remitting Park entrance fees.

And so we end our joint letter by expressing our heartfelt gratitude. Your support continues to put a spring in our step!



Executive Director Francine Stevens and President Glen Stacell

FL DEP/Florida State Parks a finalist for National Gold Medal Award

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection — Florida State Parks is one of four finalists for the 2019 National Gold Medal Award. If they are selected, it will be the Park Service's fourth Gold Medal! US State Parks vie for this award in odd numbered years. Parks must demonstrate excellence in long-range planning, resource management, volunteerism, environmental stewardship, program development, professional development and agency recognition.

[Watch](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKJXacuFzWE) the Video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKJXacuFzWE>



News from the Strand

South Main trail work completed

On Saturday, June 15, Ranger Guy DiGiovanni and Dino Barone ran chainsaws for 3 hours and finally cleared the last 700 feet of trail on South Main that needed to be opened. This project – a labor of love – has spanned months and taken numerous hours of hard, hot work by Park staff and FOF volunteers.



Park Specialist Steven Bass clears brush and vines on South Main trail with his trusty machete.



Fearless Fakahacker Dino Barone displays the chainsaw he uses to cut trees and heavier brush.



Howard Lubel wields loppers to cut smaller branches off larger one facilitate their removal.



Park Ranger Guy DiGiovanni celebrates the completion of the South Main trail clearance project!



Hard work does not deter these guys' sense of humor.

Signs installed on East and Fakahatchee Rivers

On Saturday, July 6, Park Specialist Steven Bass and FOF volunteer Dino Barone took advantage of the Florida State Park boat that was temporarily at Collier-Seminole SP. They took the boat out into Fakahatchee Bay to install signs at the mouths of the East and Fakahatchee Rivers. The “Entrance Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park” signs were placed on each side of both rivers, clearly marking where the park boundary is located. Once again we owe these two our gratitude for a job well done!



Park Specialist Steven Bass and FOF volunteer Dino Barone used this Florida State Park boat (left), to transport themselves so they could install the signs (right), at the mouths of the East and Fakahatchee Rivers.



The signs were placed on each side of both rivers, clearly marking the park boundary.



Many thanks to FOF volunteer Dino Barone (left), and Park Specialist Steven Bass (right), for installing our new signs. Another great job, guys!

You too can volunteer your time and talents!
Visit [orchidswamp.org/http://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/](http://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/)

Seen in the Strand

Ghost Orchids at the Summer Solstice

By Andrew Tyler



Summer time in the Fakahatchee is something missed by many of our members and considered best avoided by some! A season of high rainfall, high temperatures and thriving insect populations are something relished by few. However, co-incidentally the summer is a time for plant and animal life like no other. It's breeding season for some, so many plants flower and reptiles lay eggs at this time of year.

With this in mind, some of our board members were excited to receive an invitation from Fakahatchee Park Biologist Mike Owen to participate in one of his field activities on the summer solstice. As part of his usual very thorough data collection surveys, Mike had previously observed that some of the Ghost Orchids he monitors were coming into bloom. This presented an opportunity for us to wade into the swamp as a part of Mike's team, to participate in his survey work, and to hopefully see one or more Ghost Orchid plants in their full glory.



As many readers know, the Ghost Orchid (*Dendrophylax Lindenii*) is just one plant species that finds a home in the Fakahatchee. Here a unique combination of climate, habitat and limited human intrusion allows numerous varieties of ferns, bromeliads and orchids to live, whereas most other North American habitats do not provide a comparably supportive environment. The Ghost Orchid is by far the best known of all these plants, for several reasons.

Some of you will be familiar with the book; "The Orchid Thief", authored by Susan Orlean and originally published in 1998. A non-fiction tale of human interests and obsessions with orchids in general, *The Orchid Thief* starts with a court case in Naples, involving the removal of endangered orchids, including the Ghost, from the Fakahatchee. (Mike Owen plays a 'cameo role' in these events and rates an honorable mention in the book!)

The Ghost Orchid itself is best-known for its stunning bloom, and once seen, it's hard to forget. Plants require a number of years to reach maturity before they bloom at all, and for many plants blooming doesn't occur every year. For the rest of the year, this leafless orchid (the chlorophyll necessary for photosynthesis is present in its roots) is easily missed, looking like a green spider clinging to the side of its tree. Mike

likes to call it 'A Cinderella Orchid' – belle of the ball for an all-too-brief time, but otherwise an unremarkable presence.

Four of the "Friends" joined Mike and his team, and we hiked into the swamp under his leadership. We were privileged to encounter two Ghost Orchid blooms. The first (above) had started blooming the previous day. Having admired the flower in the company of Mike's team, we followed his lead to the location of the second bloom.

Continued >>

Ghost Orchids continued ...

Along the way, we encountered the remains of a Sabal palm tree (*Sabal palmetto*), which Mike thought had perhaps been pillaged by a bear for the Hearts of Palm found within the actively growing part. It's not just humans who enjoy the Hearts of Palm as a nutritious vegetable! In addition, we acted as 'spotters' for Mike, as he conducted an audit of native Royal Palm trees and other endangered orchids and bromeliads.

After a while we arrived at the location of the second blooming Ghost. It is most interesting how successful plants are oriented relative to their environment, and how the location of the plants on their host tree varies. Mike has performed a lot of basic research during his tenure: the plant distance above the waterline, the type and dimensions of the host tree, and the compass location of the plant on the tree were all diligently recorded to add to his knowledge base.



Left: Remains of a bear's dinner? Mike Owen using his survey pole to measure a cabbage palm tree missing its top. Right: Second flower of the day (to the left of the tree trunk), with the plant being surveyed to ascertain position on its host tree.



Ruddy Daggerwing butterfly enjoying Spanish needle on a summer day.

Leaving the swamp and returning to our starting point, we happened to pass by numerous butterflies, which are another feature of summer in the swamp. We observed a ruddy daggerwing (*Marpesia petreus*) enjoying some quality time in the sun while sitting on a Spanish needle (*Bidens alba*) plant. Not unlike many of the orchids, this butterfly's natural range in the United States is generally limited to southern Florida, although strays do show up once in a while elsewhere. This was an entirely fortuitous spotting and provided a nice conclusion to a most enjoyable morning.

Co-incidentally, the Naples Botanical Garden hosts a number of laboratory-grown ghost orchids along their Boardwalk Trail, and the Garden had announced that one of their plants was in bloom. Fortunately, modern propagation techniques lower the risks of extinction, and hopefully a wider availability reduces the stimulus for poaching in the wild. In this regard much credit is due to the work of academic scientists, and for the ghost orchid, research groups located in Gainesville and Atlanta have played a vital part.

So, the day following the solstice, my spouse Karen and I made the trip to the Garden to enjoy the bloom and other garden treasures. If you're in this area during the summer season and would like to see a ghost orchid in bloom then pay attention to the Botanical Garden's web site. I can testify that the hike to see the flowers there is far less arduous compared to those in the Fakahatchee! In any case, seeing three ghost orchid blooms in two days makes for a memorable solstice!

All photos by Andrew Tyler.

Peek-a-boo, I see you!



Dave Boesche's sister played peek-a-boo with this young buck on Jane Scenic in June.

FOF members give the gift of time



Howard Lubel maintains the Bill Mesce Memorial Picnic Area.

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 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.

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

Members make a difference.

Welcome to new members:

Thomas Hall, Langley WA; Ursula Dubrick, Melbourne FL; and Jack Schooley, Tampa FL.

We now have 358 members.

Thanks to our Lifetime members:

Lifetime Preservers

Bruce & Janet Bunch

Lifetime Protectors

Kit & La Raw Maran

Lifetime Family Members

John and Pauly Kaiser

Tom & Judy Maish

Noel Nation

Van & Jane Saylor

Glen & Laura Stacell

Lifetime Individual Members

Karen J. Berkley

Rita Bleasdale

Warner Blow

Elsie Caldwell

John Elting

Peter Haffenreffer

Don Harmon

Susan Hauze

Patty Huff

James Nici

Wendy Becker Payton

Ken Shapiro

John Spengler

Carol Vartanian

Stunning flora and fauna with an amazing guide

“The Fakahatchee offers an amazing diversity of fauna and flora at every turn. From alligators to white tailed deer and rare orchids to vanilla plants. Patrick Higgins was an endlessly knowledgeable and entertaining guide. This is a must-do on your visit to Florida.”

– Janelle S, Westcliff-on-Sea, United Kingdom





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

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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.

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/>)

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

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