



For updates on the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, please visit the [website](https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park) at <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park>

President and Executive Director's Letter



This is one of the most important letters we have ever had to write to our members. We know each one of you is doing your best to avoid getting trapped in this disturbing pandemic health crisis that is affecting the entire population of the planet.

We begin by encouraging each one of you to celebrate your precious life by taking the position of being overly cautious and putting all best preventive practices forward. Hurricanes Wilma and Irma and the Deep Water Horizon oil spill were events that impacted the FOF's capacity to generate the revenue essential to support the Park.

These pale in comparison to the Coronavirus.

More than ever it is the time to express the Board's most sincere message of gratitude to all our donors, our members, and our volunteers. Volunteers work in the field to make the FOF tours program possible, greet and interact with visitors at the Boardwalk, and keep the Visitor Center office open. You are all individually and collectively responsible for our continued success to accomplish our mission.

All Florida State Parks are closed until further notice at a time when we long to take a quiet walk in the park. We understand and appreciate the decision for the good of the population and - just as important - for protecting the health of Park staff. The Fakahatchee Preserve is now more peaceful than ever with no vehicle and foot traffic. We take comfort knowing the Preserve's wildlife and flora continue to flourish without us. It will be there for us to protect and enjoy again in the near future.

We missed seeing all our members and volunteers at the picnic and therefore could not announce to our members the installation of the Directors on the Board, and so for the first time we submit the Board meeting minutes in this newsletter. Read the minutes at <https://tinyurl.com/minutes2020>.

– Glen Stacell and Francine Stevens

“Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.”

– John Muir

News from the Strand

Views from the Boardwalk

By Dave Boesche

Dateline Thursday 3/13/20 - Last trip before shut down

Hi all, I just wanted to share my last boardwalk fun day before we were closed by virus concerns. I sincerely hope you all are doing well and keeping up the drill.

I arrived around 1:30 PM, as I had a Tram Tour in the morning with Tom. That was a good trip with 20 guests, seeing 3 female deer in a fresh burn area, lots of birds, and several 'teen-age' gators.

I had packed my lunch and planned to stop at the boardwalk chikee for some shade and a break. Never happened! As I drove up a van swerved and got my attention on Tamiami Trail. A large, chicken turtle was crossing the road. The van missed, I missed, and then I stopped. I ran back (as best a 73 year old can), waving my arms to warn traffic. Before I could pick it up, it cleared the road and headed toward the borrow pit. No pick up this time. NOTE: friendly reminder, if you pick them up put them down facing their direction of travel.



Eastern Chicken Turtle

So I parked and starting unpacking when I saw a group of young adults looking at something. WOW, another turtle, same type, a little smaller, same mossy carapace, headed to the same water. The young adults were quite interested and appeared to be in a group with two adults. They were a Field Biology group from Niagara University, NY, and this was their first stop from Southwest Florida International Airport. We talked a while in the sun, while I walked into the shade, another vacation sign for sure. When I asked if they would like to walk along with me, well you might have thought I was offering \$10.00 bills. YES!

We were off and quickly I found they were pretty well versed on this area, but had never been here before. Both instructors had brought groups to The Fak before to see 'the real Florida'. They all did know our State Tree, the sable palm, also the saw palmetto. But they didn't know about the palm frond having an 'arrow' pointing up on the leaf, while the palmetto leaf was rounded on the end of the stem.

As we arrived at the two oak trees, I was surprised to find several didn't realize some trees don't drop leaves in the Fall. Guess they are used to NY all dropping, then everyone raking. (*I don't miss that!*)

As several rushed toward an opening to the water, I suggested a slower walk. BINGO, on cue was our famous mom gator in the water - much to their surprise! I explained about this young mom closing the boardwalk last summer for nesting season. Of course that lead to questions about the eggs, where a gator gets her calcium for the shells, the sex neutral eggs, the 2 degree split to be M/F on hatching, and of course my favorite - how are the eggs incubated - yes, the decomposing pile of plant matter takes care of that.

We still hadn't made it to the boardwalk, when we found another gator right before the start. The students enjoyed the cypress bark that was removed when hurricane Irma decided to become a pressure washer with 150+ MPH wind and rain. We got to the eagle nest area, but they were all were on siesta mode. The Panther scrapings there were a show and tell moment. Pictures galore.

Views from the Boardwalk continued ...

Next the twin sister cypress trees, shown here after Hurricane Irma. I discussed the age (500-700 yrs), why size might not matter, male and female parts, reproduce in wet season/growing in dry, and why their tops were gone. We also talked about how the cypress had adapted to hurricane weather: 1) tops break off, 2) drop their leaves before storm, 3) how they tie their roots together witnessed by the knees for strength in numbers.



As we got deeper we started seeing air plants, bromeliads, how/why it uses more than 'air' to survive. They laughed at the Freddy Fungus got together with Alice Algae and they took a LICHEN to each other story. (NOTE: a couple of the students groaned, I get that often).

Up ahead we saw a group of guests stopped in the boardwalk. We got there and not 5 ft away from the boardwalk rail, there is an adult barred owl, just posing for pictures (but no autographs). Guess he doesn't give a hoot. (OK to groan here).

We are starting to approach the gator pond. I always look for critters and snakes in the water as we approach. NADA/ZIP/ZILCHO - keep this thought until the next paragraph. So there is the loving gator couple, resting, just enjoying spring and thinking of the birds and bees (get the picture).

We also found the young black crowned night heron (along with the parent), a preening aninga, a great white egret picking up a little 'sushi' for a snack, and of course our resident great blue heron just standing. A guest says, "What is that?" (How often do we hear that one?) After some clues I found a little green heron (right), a beautiful animal.

I guess these college kids learn fast! I hear several, "Look at this!" and a couple "See what I found?" then the BIGGIE, "Is this a rattlesnake?" THAT got my attention! I've never found one on the boardwalk. But sure enough, not 5 feet from the railing, just about waist high, taking a rest was a for-sure *Crotalus adamanteus*, Eastern Diamondback! No, I didn't pick it up for a positive I.D. (NOTE: had my wife or girl kid been there, well...)

Just before we headed back, right there was a raccoon! I have been on this boardwalk for over 5 years, and this was the first raccoon I have seen here. Be smart my little friend and keep away from the pythons! So we scattered and headed back. These students have their swamp legs and eagle eyes now. They found a banded water snake trying to breed with a much larger female. The owl was gone, but they found another snake - I couldn't keep up!

When I got back to my car, there was a wonderful Thank You note. THIS is why we do what we do. Truth be told, I want to thank THEM for energizing me.



Dave B.

You too can volunteer! See how.
Visit <https://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/>

P.S. Private wish, to the Tooth Fairy who handed out the gator teeth. You have that gift, I hope to read about your adventures in nature somewhere sometime.

Seen in the Strand

The *Sunshiners* get lucky in the swamp

A group of intrepid outdoors-folks, the Sunshiners, hiked the East Main Train to the Fakahatchee Hilton in early March. They were extremely fortunate to see a mink! They also saw a nesting Florida snapping turtle, juvenile red shouldered hawk, and a rather large alligator, and some lovely orchids.

Jan Bachrach was along and took these excellent photos. Minks are so fast and hard to photograph, she had to select stills from video she was able to shoot.



The Sunshiners: Jack Berninger, Gary Chirlin, Grant Hicks, Kristi Chirlin, Maz Zeglin, Jan Watson.



The Everglades mink is endemic to the shallow freshwater marshes and swamps of the Fakahatchee Strand, Big Cypress Swamp, and southern portions of the Everglades. It is state designated as Threatened.



Mink are wary and active primarily at night, foraging for food in the water and along the banks. Check out those feet!



A Florida snapping turtle digging her nest to lay her eggs. After digging the hole, she will deposit 20-40 eggs, possibly more.



Snapping turtles may make a hissing sound if they feel threatened, but they prefer to avoid interaction with people. A good camera lens helps you keep your distance.

The *Sunshiners* get lucky continued ...



(L) Fakahatchee beaked orchid (*Sacoila paludicola*). (R) Dingy orchid (*Epidendrum amphistomum*).



Look up, look down, look all around next time you visit The Fak. (L) Juvenile red-shouldered hawk. (R) Ominous gator.



And for those of you missing your outings to the Park, here's a shot of the Fakahatchee Hilton.

Milky Way over Fakahatchee

by Philip McGuire



A long exposure of cars coming and going on I-75, where Everglades Blvd crosses over. looking toward Ft. Lauderdale.

One Saturday morning in mid-March I escaped from isolation and went out to catch the Milky Way. I went to the spot where Everglades Blvd crosses I-75. The Milky Way was in the southeast sky, right over the Fakahatchee. I included some long exposures of cars passing on I-75 looking toward Ft. Lauderdale. I returned and escaped without any human interaction, so I maintained social distancing.



The Milky way in the southeast sky, right over the Fakahatchee.

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.



If you haven’t yet opened your free AmazonSmile account, please take a few minutes to do so. Go to smile.amazon.com, then choose the Friends of Fakahatchee as your charity to receive the donations from your purchases. 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!



You can now donate to FOF via your Fidelity Investment account with a Charitable program called the Fidelity Giving Marketplace, the following link will provide you with more information.

https://www.fidelitycharitable.org/?immid=EML_427_1

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



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](https://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/>.
Our mailing address is:
Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc. PO Box 35
Everglades City, FL 34139

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

Members make a difference.

Welcome to new members:

Charles Dhyse, Key West FL; Zachariah Goff, Naples FL; Mark Slack, Naples FL; Nathaniel Webster, Miami FL. Membership now totals 357.

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 Sayler

Glen & Laura Stacell

Lifetime Individual Members

Karen J. Berkley

Rita Bleasdale

Warner Blow

Elsie Caldwell

John Elting

Peter Haffenreffer

Don Harmon

Susan Hauze

Terry Heap

Patty Huff

James Nici

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