



President and Executive Director's Letter

We are ending 2021 on a few good notes.

On December 10 the Construction Permit was issued for the installation of the pole barn to shelter Park vehicles. The permit application was submitted to Collier County in August 2021. On December 13 the construction permit was approved for the installation of the last Wayfinding Kiosk in front of the Visitor Center. The permit application for this one had been submitted in April 2021. Both permit applications went thru a dozen different hands including Collier County Zoning and Planning! Both projects were already awarded to a Contractor who was waiting for the permits to get started. They will be completed by the end of February.

Our first Members Welcome Back event since Covid was held in the park next to Lake Gloria on Saturday December 18. It was well attended and we thank

everyone who joined us and shared their optimism about the future of the Fakahatchee. Many members took some time to get acquainted with Allen Murray and his staff. A special thanks to Eric and Rita Bauer who donated several copies of their brand new book, *Orchids of the Fakahatchee*, to raise funds. The books sold like hotcakes as this is the first book to our knowledge that represents only the orchids in the Fakahatchee. More books will be reproduced for sale in the near future.

Although the Boardwalk Expansion project completion date is extended from May 2022 to November 2022, we can report good progress with the latest pictures (see below).

We owe a special thank you to Virginia Palmer Skok, Andy Skok, Eric Foht and Gordon Saager for answering our call to conduct a very special swamp walk for a group of 19 scientists with Driscoll Inc. Yes, Driscoll the strawberry company!

Another thank you goes to Dave Boesche who conducted a tram tour for a family of 8 adults and 9 children ages 7 to 17. It was organized by the history teacher of the family who cares to have children learn something while they are having fun. Dave was just the right guide for this group, since he is a retired teacher and a real whiz with children!

Wishing you a healthy, happy New Year!

– Tom Maish and Francine Stevens

Tickets for Tours are on sale now

The new Dark Sky Experience Program generated a tremendous response; we added more dates for January, February, and March.

[Get your Dark Sky tickets here. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fakahatchee-night-sky-experience-tickets-192502729847?](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fakahatchee-night-sky-experience-tickets-192502729847?aff=ebdsoporgprofile)

[aff=ebdsoporgprofile](https://orchidswamp.org/adventures/). Saturday Swamp Walks are also now scheduled through February. Visit our Adventures web page to find out more about all tour adventures. <https://orchidswamp.org/adventures/>

Remember, they make great gifts for many occasions!



New dates have been added for the popular new Dark Sky Experience Program.



Phil McGuire readies this group for their Dark Sky Experience.

News from the Strand

Introducing our new Tour Guides

Eric Foht

Eric Foht is the Director of Natural Resources at Naples Botanical Garden and serves on the FOF Board of Directors. Eric has been exploring Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park for a number of years through his role at the Garden. He has helped with several plant research projects at the Park. He loves the beauty, mystery, wonder and awe he finds in the Fakahatchee's waters.

This is Eric's first year leading swamp walks for the Friends of Fakahatchee. He's excited to share this experience – and the knowledge he has gained from the many teachers he has had over the years – with beginner and veteran swamp walkers alike.



Virginia Palmer-Skok

Virginia Palmer-Skok gained a sense of awe for the Fakahatchee over twenty-five years ago when she had her first visit to the Preserve. She is excited to give swamp walks so she can share the wonder of this beauty with others. After retiring as a Marketing Executive for high tech products in Fortune 100 companies she is now able to do just that.

As a citizen scientist and orchid expert, Ginny has worked extensively for the last three years with Park Biologist Mike Owen on rare and endangered orchid, bromeliad, and Peperomia research (which has led her into sloughs many times). She also supports Mike on an important Ghost Orchid focused project.

Ginny also leads interpretation nature tours on Marco Island and back East in Connecticut. She volunteers working with her favorite subject, orchids, at both the Naples Botanical Gardens and Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo Botanical Gardens.

As a published author of 3 books she loves writing when not in the wonderful world of the Fakahatchee. Her husband Andy Skok frequently assists with swamp walks. Ginny serves on the FOF Board of Directors.

Gordon Saager

Gordon first settled in Southwest Florida in 1977, and immediately knew this was home. He spent considerable time exploring Florida's wild places and historic spots. He retired from a 50-year career as a Clinical Laboratory Scientist in 2016, and has continued his love of science and nature as a full time volunteer.

Gordon is in his second season as a resident volunteer here at the Fakahatchee. He has really fallen in love with this special place and especially enjoys sharing its beauty and natural wonders with visitors to the park.

Most of this time has been spent exploring the park with park biologist Mike Owen or conducting roaming interpretation with guests at the Big Bend Boardwalk. He credits Mike with helping him learn about the Fak and its incredible biodiversity. – *continued next page.*



Gordon Saager, continued.

When not at Fakahatchee, Gordon works as a naturalist/guide/interpreter at the beautiful Okefenokee Swamp. He also monitors sea turtle, shorebird, and seabird nesting at the Talbot Islands State Parks. He is an Advanced Florida Master Naturalist, Georgia Master Naturalist, Certified Interpretive Guide, and Environmental Educator. In addition, he has considerable experience conducting guided boat tours, canoe and kayak tours and nature hikes.



Well done, Dee Leonard

Dee Leonard has announced she is retiring from managing the Friends' Facebook account at the end of 2021. Our heartfelt thanks for a job well done through the years and our best wishes for her new adventures!

Construction progress continues



The Restrooms building now has a roof, and rafters are going up on The Visitor's Pavilion.



The Parking Lot has new concrete dividers. Photos by Jay Staton.

Welcome Back Members Barbecue



December 18th Members Welcome Back event at Lake Gloria. Clockwise: (top left) Park Manager Allen Murray and President Tom Maish. Capt. Franklin Adams speaks to our members. Bruce & Janet Bunch show off their Volunteer Certificate. Our Membership Secretary Marya Repko conducts an auction with President Tom Maish and Secretary Glen Stacell. All photos by Phil McGuire.

Driscoll Swamp Walk

by Raymond Jacob



What a wonderful time our team had with your group of volunteers in the Fakahatchee last week! It was absolutely the highlight of their week in Florida. What a wonderful place! We will remember that day for a long time to come. Virginia, Andy, Eric, and Gordon were all wonderful hosts and guides. We really enjoyed sharing plant knowledge back and forth with them.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO: [Check the State Park Website](#) for hours, closures, and other announcements.

<https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park>



Remember, Don't Feed the Wildlife!

On East Main trail near the historic cabin, alligators demonstrating aggressive behavior had to be removed by a licensed contractor paid by Fish And Wildlife Conservation. Such behavior indicates that they have been fed by visitors. Park staff installed a sign to remind visitors it is illegal to feed wildlife.

Membership News

More Meaningful Memberships

From education to preservation, networking to artworks, donations of time or funding, there are a myriad of ways to support the mission of the Friends of Fakahatchee. To discover all the different ways to support our mission [visit the Support page of our website](https://orchidswamp.org/support/). <https://orchidswamp.org/support/>

Never too late to donate to 2022 funding needs



Friends of Fakahatchee Inc
P.O. Box 35
Everglades City, FL 34139

Dear Friend,

As a Friend of Fakahatchee, you are part of the community that is preserving one of the most biologically rich places in North America.

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park lies centrally within the Florida Panther National Refuge, the Big Cypress Area of Critical State Concern, the Greater Everglades Ecosystem, and the mangrove estuaries of the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge. Your protection of the park safeguards its hydrologically critical wetlands, rivers, lakes, mangroves, swamps, and marshes; and provides critical habitat to 71 imperiled plant species and 44 imperiled wildlife and bird species, including giant air plants, the rare ghost and cigar orchids, panthers, manatees, mangrove fox squirrels, everglades minks, wood storks and roseate spoonbills. Thank you sincerely for your partnership and activism.

This year, in the work of restoring, preserving, and supporting the wildlands and waterways of the Park, the need is great. \$100,000 is needed for our support initiatives. Please take a moment to review the Friends of Fakahatchee funding needs for 2022 and please consider making a large gift this year. Together we are making impressive gains for the preservation of Florida's natural ecosystems. If you have any questions about Friends of Fakahatchee or its projects, please contact me at 239-992-5963 or Francine Stevens, FOF Executive Director at 239-695-1023.

Sincerely,

Tom Maish

President, Friends of Fakahatchee

P.S. I encourage you to explore your options with an attorney, financial advisor, or estate planner for the types of gifts that may have tax benefits for you all while supporting FOF's mission: stock and bond gifts, IRA distribution gifts, donor advised fund gifts, insurance gifts, charitable remainder trust gifts, and legacy gifts.

The Friends of Fakahatchee Inc is a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit Citizen Support Organization that provides financial and volunteer support to preserve the unique ecology and cultural heritage of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and educates the public about its importance. Tax ID: #59-3511352

Donate to the Annual Fund
online at orchidswamp.org
or mail your check to:

FOF

PO Box 35

Everglades City, FL 34139



If you haven't yet opened your free AmazonSmile account, please take a few minutes to do so. Go to <https://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/>

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!

The poster below shows the first page of 2022 priority funding needs for the Friends of Fakahatchee. Help support our efforts to preserve these natural treasures. Download the complete poster (pages 1 and 2) at <https://orchidswamp.org/support/>



Renovation of Janes Scenic Drive Visitor's Center

Renovation of Janes Memorial Scenic Drive Visitor's Center: This Visitor's Center is the first stop for many Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park visitors along the historic Janes Memorial Scenic Drive - an old logging tram road that cuts through the heart of the Fakahatchee strand for approximately 11 miles. The truly wild Florida experience on Janes Memorial Scenic Drive affords its visitors with the chance to encounter some of the imperiled plants and animals that call the park home, as well as enjoy the many recreational activities the park offers. The Visitor's Center provides a critical starting point where guests can meet, learn about the park's wildlife and beauty, and plan for the various adventures possible in the Fakahatchee. Today it remains closed until the Friends can finance the necessary renovation work required to re-open. This work is outside of the State's budget.



Boardwalk Expansion Project

The Friends have been instrumental in working with Florida legislators to secure funds and resources to expand The Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk all the way out to Lake Heron, which will include additional miles of trails and boardwalk, observation points and a new Visitor's Interpretive Educational Pavilion. The Friends are working with local artists to create and fund the educational video, Fakahatchee: Window on the Everglades, which will play in the new Visitor Pavilion. The video will educate visitors about Fakahatchee's importance in the Everglades ecosystem.



Charitable Remainder Trust

On January 1, 2020, the SECURE ACT (Setting Communities Up for Retirement Enhancement) became law. The law had an immediate and direct impact on estate planning for IRA's. The ability for the owner of a traditional IRA to stretch the taxable payments of their IRA over the lives of family members is no longer available. The SECURE ACT mandates that an IRA must be fully distributed by December 31 of the tenth year following the owners death. Attorneys and estate planners have been offering techniques to help their clients deal with this, resulting in the idea of naming a charitable remainder trust (CRT) as the beneficiary of some or all their IRA.

The tax savings of this technique are compelling. As CRTs are considered a qualified charity (just like Friends the Fakahatchee) for tax purposes, any amounts received by a CRT from an IRA are free of tax. This means you can take a tax deferred IRA dollar and have it become a forever tax free dollar and still provide an income to your family. To learn more, it is important to consult your Attorney or CPA to see if this technique makes sense for you.



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 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/>.

Members make a difference.

Welcome new Lifetime Individual Member Greg Hauze, Houston TX – Christmas gift!

Welcome to new members!

Janice East, Clearwater, FL; Rudi Ettrich, Davie FL; Catherine Goode, Albuquerque, NM; Lynn Orr, Marco Island FL.

Membership total is 382.

Continued thanks to our Lifetime Members:

Lifetime Preservers

Bruce & Janet Bunch

Lifetime Protectors

Kit & La Raw Maran

Lifetime Family Members

Jan Bachrach
Richard & Sue Jagels
John and Pauly Kaiser
Tom & Judy Maish
Noel Nation
Jim & Peggy Phillips
Van & Jane Sayler
Glen & Laura Stacell

Lifetime Individual Members

Karen J. Berkley
Rita Bleasdale
Warner Blow
Elsie Caldwell
John Elting
Carolyn Ginther
Peter Haffenreffer
Don Harmon
Greg Hauze
Susan Hauze
Terry Heaps
Patty Huff
James Nici
Randy Parks
Mark Perro
Wendy Becker Payton
Ken Shapiro
John Spengler
Carol Vartanian

Board Members

President – Tom Maish
Vice President – John Kaiser
Treasurer – Phil McGuire
Secretary – Glen Stacell

Tom DesFosses
Eric Foht
Richard Grannis
Zach Lombardo
Virginia Palmer Skok
Mark Perro

BOD meeting schedule

January 16, 2022
February 20, 2022
March 19, 2022
Meetings are scheduled for 10:30 AM

Contact the Friends of Fakahatchee at FOF_90@hotmail.com or call 239-695-1023.

Ex-Officio

Bruce Bunch
John Elting
Dennis Giardina
Glen Stacell
Andrew Tyler

Francine Stevens
(Executive Director)

Our mailing address is:
Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.
PO Box 35, Everglades City, FL 34139