



President and Executive Director's Letter

Save the Date! On Saturday, March 19 we will hold the **FOF Annual Membership Meeting** in the park and **Volunteer Appreciation Picnic**. A special bulletin with registration instructions will be sent to the Membership on the last week of February.

Good progress continues with the Boardwalk Expansion – in the first quarter of 2022 the restrooms should be completed, and the parking area should be paved by the third quarter of 2022. We share below an impressive series of aerial pictures of the Boardwalk site. They were taken by Ralph Arwood from an elevation of 3,000 feet.

In December the Fakahatchee was featured in the Naples Daily News twice – first as 'One of Ten Unique State Parks' and later as 'One of Seven Great Wild Spots to Explore'. Shortly after the news articles appeared, ticket sales for the FOF tours increased significantly, providing the funds for the FOF to support the park while we educate the public about the important role of the Fakahatchee Preserve in the Everglades ecosystem.

A member asked "Over a year's time, how many attendees do you think show up for events?" In the pre-Covid world, A member asked "Over a year's time, how many attendees do you think show up for events?" In the pre-Covid world when maximum participants on tours was not limited by social distancing we educated approximately 650 visitors seasonally from mid-October to mid-April. Raising funds while educating the public would not be possible without the dedication of our Tours Volunteers. We greatly appreciate all who have been part of the Tours program since 2015 along with everyone who recently joined the program.

– Tom Maish and Francine Stevens

Join the Tours Team of Volunteers

WE NEED DRIVERS for the following Morning Tram Tours:

Feb 18
March 4 and 18
April 8 and 15

Have you ever been interested in guiding tours? This time of the season is a good time to join a tour to observe the Guides and determine if this is something you would like to start.

If you are interested or have questions, call Francine at 239-695-1023.



Gift while the gifting is good...

by Chris Gair

While volatility is a concern for every investor, many people currently find themselves in the enviable situation of owning highly appreciated securities. If your 2022 New Year's Resolution includes a gift to FOF, let us first say *thank you* and offer our assurance that it will be put to the best of use. And from there, consider making your gift in the form of appreciated common stock. This form of gifting during market peaks has proven to be an excellent way to "capture" the value of your shares while receiving a tax advantage as well. It's truly a win-win. If you have appreciated securities that you'd like to donate to "Friends" please call the Executive Director at 239-695-1023 and we will make it easy for you to help one Florida's true treasures.

As with all matters financial, please consult your CPA or tax advisor to see if gifting appreciated securities makes sense for you. A word of caution here: If units of a mutual fund (or ETF) are being considered, please provide us with all the details as some funds are not transferrable.

Mr. Chris Gair of Fort Myers, now retired after 48 years as a Trust Officer in Southwest Florida, is providing the FOF with thoughts and ideas in the ever-changing world of charitable gifting.

News from the Strand

Tour tickets on sale



Sign up now for the [Introduction to the Swamp Walk](https://tinyurl.com/introtoswamp) (<https://tinyurl.com/introtoswamp>). This morning tour combines elements of our tram tours with a swamp walk to give participants a wonderful introduction to the Fakahatchee.

The tour begins with an interpretive ride on the Friend's Ghost Rider tram to the site of the swamp walk. After about 90 minutes of wading through the swamp, participants board the tram for the return trip. Experienced guides leading the group share their insights about the Fakahatchee's flora and fauna on both wet and dry portions of the adventure.

Remember, tickets make great gifts!

Volunteers clear the way



During the Volunteer Workday January 23, a group of volunteers cleared a full mile of trail at Gate 2 off Janes Scenic Drive. Volunteers are essential to maintaining trails to the interior and controlling invasive pest plant species. **Thanks to all who helped!**



Front row, left to right: Fred Townsend, Alyce Townsend, Laura Adams, Rebecca Thornhill

Back row, left to right: Ben Clement, Ernie Peterson, Bob Reeves, Michael Brown, Ted Lock.

Night Time is the Right Time in the Strand

Nighttime events are always popular, selling out early. This season was no exception, as all *Moonlit Tram Tours* and *Night Sky Experiences* are sold out. Be prepared to register early next year!



FOF member Elizabeth Williams captures Fakahatchee Night Sky Experience participants experiencing the wealth of stars.



FOF member Charlie Byrne captured a beautiful picture of the moonrise at the January Moonlit Fakahatchee Tram tour.

Construction progress continues

To the east of the current parking on Highway 41 and past the lake, the new lot and interpretative pavilion are taking shape. They will provide a perfect port of entry to the boardwalk and ecosystems of the Fakahatchee Strand. Photos from 3000 feet by Ralph Atwood.



Scene in the Strand



Views from the Boardwalk

by Dave Boesche

Here are some experiences from November 12 through January 7, mostly at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, plus a few from Janes Scenic, but none made up.

I try to be in attendance at the Boardwalk at least every Friday, with the occasional Monday thrown in for fun. Until recently I was counting 50 guests per day on average, and often 2 of every 10 were from outside the USA. That didn't happen much last season. While the construction isn't real noisy the critter count seems down some. I could certainly understand. We all will like the finished product but getting there is NOT half the fun!

Well, let's get on to what I have seen so far this season. We have a Florida Black Racer that has excited several guests. Nice sized creature. When it is standing still (should that be slithering still?), it hangs over both ends of the boardwalk. FYI, the boardwalk is 6 ft wide. His favorite trick is to act fierce by raising his front 1/3, head cocked, and his neck flattened out - like a cobra. Now what zoo book did this snake read to imitate a cobra? I guess he could have gone on a school field trip to the library. Anyway, when he does that I chuckle but many a guest draws in a sharp breath.

So far I have only seen one Florida Banded Water Snake, likely a male. I presume the rest are still playing in their big back yard. I'm starting to see more fish in the Strand, along the rock trail area. Earlier there were very few, but now the numbers are way up. Funny how the numbers go up as the water goes down. Sounds like my water utility up north!

Here it makes sense, because the fish can go all kinds of fun places when it's the wet season. Just like us, they like to sample new foods, see new areas, but return home before it dries up. So you don't have to ask, YES. I have seen some fry Talapia. Remember, you can now legally harvest these African natives. But since they are vegetarians, better try a net or bow/arrow.

I did work (actually more like play) at the boardwalk on 12/24/21. Yup, Christmas Eve day, and you won't believe this. Santa came to the Boardwalk! Honest! He wore a dark green uniform, nicely pressed, a badge, and a red, elf-type hat on his head. He carried a sack, and another elf was with him dressed the same but without the hat. They were jolly but very fit, not plump as the books say. They were smiling and saying Merry Christmas.

OK, turns out they were local Firemen spreading joy and candy canes. I was too far in to see their red sleigh (oops - Firetruck), but they gave me a big handful of candy canes to pass out to other guests. Very nice men, tell them thanks when you see one. It might not be the correct one but they all deserve a thanks! I counted 58 guests that short, 4-hour day.

Well on Sunday, December 26, the Naples Daily News ran a nice article about 5 nature places to visit while here for the holidays. Yes, the Boardwalk was pictured and a nice write up. I contacted Francine, as a heads up, but as always she had already seen the paper. We both agreed that I might mosey down to the boardwalk on Monday, the 27th. *Holy Moly!* I had to run away after 6 hours and 96 guests, with more arriving as I pulled out.

Continued >>



Black racers often hold their heads aloft to look for prey.

Photo by Dave Sedore.

View from the Boardwalk, continued.

The 96 and I got a Christmas Present from the gator couple in the gator hole at the boardwalk end. A full-on, gator BELLOW! If you have ever been to one you know it will leave a big mark in your long term memory! I saw the lovely Mrs. raise her head, drew in enough air to fill the pouch under her lower jaw, and let 'er RIP. Think of visiting a zoo when the lions are roaring, and the gator has no vocal cords! Like a bullfrog, the air sack makes the noise. Boy does it work well. Within 60 seconds an even lower bellow answered back.

We never viewed Mr. Gator but he wasn't far off. After five minutes, those gators sounded off again. I still haven't seen the male this year. The female is likely 6 to 7ft long while the male is usually twice the female's size – 12 to 13 ft. A very large bull.

Let me explain what I have learned over the years. It will likely be another 2+ months before they mate, and they will let each other know that it's starting to get interesting here in the swamp. The pitch of their sound is such that the water around the gator actually vibrates like it's raining! Approaching the mating season, every other gator within 1/2 mile will also get the same idea.

Well, I ran too long again. I still need to tell you about a LOT of turtle nesting, Mr & Mrs Bald Eagle and their sweet conversations, the Black Crowned Night Herons, our resident Anhinga making multiple dives, our resident Great Blue posing for pictures and dealing with 2 different gators on January 7 – no animals or humans were injured but some guests and this guide got splashed.

Please stay safe, happy and healthy.

– Dave



When an alligator bellows, the vibrations cause shallow water over its back to dance. The sound is almost too low pitched for human ears to hear. Photo by Mike Godwin.

Bravo to John Kaiser

John Kaiser has conducted over 25 Moonlit Fakahatchee Tram tours since their inception. Congratulations and our heartfelt thanks!



Become a Friend of the Fakahatchee!
<https://orchidswamp.org/support/memberships/>

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 preserves these natural treasures. Download the complete poster (pages 1 and 2) at <https://orchidswamp.org/support/>



Friends of Fakahatchee 2022 Funding Needs
www.orchidswamp.org

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.




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.

FOF Board approves 2022 (CSO) Citizen Support Goals.

Park Manager Allen Murray stressed the importance of meaningful Goals to assist the Park, a past example is the Friends 2006 Goal to advocate for our Boardwalk Vision Facilities at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. Currently, there is only a small gravel parking lot, "potties" for restrooms, and little Interpretation along the boardwalk. Yet the boardwalk draws some 80,000 Visitors yearly.

The new facilities of a paved parking area, real restrooms and a Visitors Interpretive Pavilion with "state of the art" interpretative kiosks and graphics will become a major Eco-Tourism destination in Collier County when completed in late 2022.

To fulfill our Goals we need Champions to adopt a Goal, then develop the means and personnel to accomplish the Goal. Is there a specific Goal that interests you? Will you consider taking "ownership" in accomplishing the Goal? Call Francine at 239-695-1023.

CSO GOALS

- Increase Membership by 10%
- Develop Community Outreach Program
- Speakers Bureau for communities and service organization
- Develop more Tours programs for public engagement
- Recruit Volunteers to augment Park staff at new Interpretive Pavilion
- Program to identify in-holders in park with property for sale to connect with State Land Acquisition
- Program to acquire equipment needed in Park
- Plan to reforest barren land at Jones Grade
- FDOT directional Signs to Boardwalk

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 to new members!

George Baldwin, West Palm Beach, FL; Karen Burkhardt, Inverness, FL; Gayle Lipsig, Naples, FL; Christopher Lunding, Miami, FL; Bill Tayler, San Diego, CA; and Tammy Watcher, Tarpon Springs, FL.

Membership total is 389.

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

BOD meeting schedule

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

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

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

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

Francine Stevens
(Executive Director)