

## Summer Project

Some people like to relax and take it easy during the off-season, but not the Russells! If you remember, the swamp buggy that was acquired last spring was in need of some modifications so that groups could safely go out on work projects, such as trail trimming and exotic removals.

Well, to tackle a job like this, most of us would send the vehicle somewhere and tell them to call when it's done, and then cringe when you ask, "How much?" As you can see, our buggy has been transformed, and this is the story, in Marilyn's words:



Before



New and Improved

"Briefly, here is what was done to our new swamp buggy, all due to the efforts of our president, Lee Russell, and our son-in-law, Rich King.

"First the top level where the driver sits had to be removed. This was done by taking out the seat, brake and gas pedal, transmission, shifter, steering column with

wiring, and hydraulic hoses. A hack saw was used to finally remove the flying bridge, and then all the mechanical stuff had to be reinstalled. This cleared the way for the welding, which was done by Rich, who put in a new, safe handrail all around the buggy, padded and taped. A new engine hood was built, along with two aluminum boxes to support the new side seats. Both boxes were cleaned and painted, drilled and bolted, and welded with reinforcing braces.

"Next the mounting brackets were built for the new seat mounts, the gas tank was lowered and covered with a new plastic box. A bracket was welded on the back for the new collapsible steps - it was either that or climb up the tires to reach the seats! And a container was built to hold the steps while the buggy is in use.

"A perforated steel grate was cut, painted, and installed all around the sides to prevent anything from accidentally rolling off. It also prevents decapitation of workers, A BIG PLUS!"

Well, that's the saga. All this was done well under budget, thanks again to the ingenuity and talent of the Russell family. I guarantee a body shop would have charged a bundle. Lee worked hard all summer — and we all know how hot it was — to get the buggy ready for the winter season, and practically before the paint dried it was put to work clearing trails. Our unique buggy is now a working work of art.

## Swamp Walks

In October, FOF member John Elting from Sanibel led 20 guests from the Florida Humanities Council on a swamp walk. Then in November Mike Owen took another 15 FHC members back for another tour just north of Gate 12. It was a good time to see orchids, and the deep swamp was refreshing on the hot autumn days.

Take note that Mike's regular walks will take place the third Saturday of each month from November through February. Also, John Elting will lead groups the second Tuesday of each month through the season. Call for reservations (239) 695-2886. Thank

## "ADAPTATION"

This movie starring Nicholas Cage and Meryl Streep, loosely based on Susan Orlean's book, *The Orchid Thief*, and representing the Fakahatchee Strand, will open in L.A. and NY on Dec. 6. It should be showing

**M** You are about to enter  
**O** The MO Zone .. news  
**Z** from our biologist,  
**O** Mike Owen.

**N** MO has been out of  
**E** the zone for two weeks,  
working on a project of  
special concern to  
"Fakanatics." Duty called him to go to the tropics in Veracruz, Mexico, to assist Dr. Howard Frank with the collection of *Metamasius callizona* larvae, from which parasitoids may be found that ultimately will control the invasion of the Mexican bromeliad weevil, a/k/a "the Evil Weevil."



Let us be clear from the start that the weevil is not inherently evil, it is only doing what comes naturally, but it is not a welcome guest to Fakahatchee Strand, or to any other Florida state park. Uncontrolled, this weevil kills off native bromeliads, particularly *Tillandsia*, *Catopsis*, and *Guzmania*; and we know that Fakahatchee Strand is loaded with 14 native bromeliads, 10 of which are endangered, threatened, or commercially exploited.

It is believed that the weevil arrived in shipments of Mexican bromeliads — it was intercepted 14 times from 1973 to 1987 — and first appeared in Broward County in 1989. It now has been found in 17 Florida counties. Myakka has been "hit hard," and Highlands Hammock is so decimated it "looked like storm damage." Then in March of 2002, Olan Ray Creel found the weevil on a giant bromeliad in Fakahatchee, only to be confirmed in April when he and MO found one adult and two larvae in a *Guzmania*, just north of Gate 12. The search is on for a bio-control agent to limit the spread of this dreaded weevil.

In Mexico, of the few hundred bromeliads collected, only seven weevil larvae were found, so the bromeliad populations there are generally healthy, despite the presence of the weevil. The hypothesis is that there is a fly maggot, a parasitoid, that feeds on the weevil larvae, thus limiting its spread. Such a fly was discovered that controls a closely-related weevil in Honduras. If the larvae collected produce flies, this could lead to the eventual release of this bio-control agent, thus reducing the exotic weevil to minimal numbers which would pose little threat to Fakahatchee's total native bromeliad population.

The trick is to ensure that this potential agent is host specific so as not to harm native weevils, a process that could take years. It is believed that if harm is imposed on the native weevil, it would not be so great as to eradicate them, so the decision may be whether or not to risk them or the eight species of *Tillandsia*, three species of *Catopsis*, or the estimated one million *Guzmania*. Based on how fast larvae develop, Fakahatchee could have significant damage in a few years.

Bromeliads are important to a variety of subtropical animals for their habitat, as well as a source of water that pools in the leaves. It is important to protect the integrity of the ecosystems.

Note: Pineapples are bromeliads, too, which one would think would lead to funding for this research, but farmers are not as concerned because they can spray insecticides. Dr. Frank's research is based at the



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**Nov 30-Dec 1 (Sat-Sun) 10a-4p**  
**Goodland Bazaar - FOF Booth**

**Dec. 2 (Monday) 5 pm - Board & Membership Meeting**

Everglades Comm. Church Annex  
**\*\*\*EVERYONE WELCOME\*\*\***

**Dec. 4 (Wed) 8:30 am - Swamp Buggy Driver's Ed**

Meet at the Preserve Shop (behind office). Any member who wishes to drive the buggy must have this one-day training. Lunch will be provided, so RSVP is necessary. Drivers are needed. If interested, call Lee Russell at 239-393-2467.

**Dec. 10 (Tues) 8:30 am - Exotic Removal Day**

Join us for our first exotic removal workday using the new buggy. Meet at the Preserve shop (behind office). Bring a lunch and plenty of water. Safety equipment, saws and chemicals provided. Subsequent workdays scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month until May.

**Dec. 10 (Tues) 10am - Swamp Walk (and the second Tues. of each month for the season)**

Swamp Walk Committee Chairman Bill Mesce has arranged a series of swamp walks to be guided by FOF member John Elting. See rare plants and perhaps rare wildlife. Wear long pants, lace-up shoes or boots, and bring snacks and water. RSVP to Lee at 239-393-2467.

**Jan. 14 (Tuesday) 8:30 a.m.**

**Exotic Removal & Swamp Walk**  
 -- see Dec. 10 --

**Jan. 25 (Saturday) 11 a.m.**

**Semi-Annual Membership Picnic**  
 at Gate K-2, Janes Scenic Drive, 6.5 miles N. of Preserve office

Membership years are now Feb 1-Jan 31, so the annual picnics will be held the last Saturday of each January. Election of board and officers will be postponed until January 2004, per our revised by-laws. Bring a side dish to pass. Swamp walks and buggy rides.

**Feb. 1-2 (Sat-Sun) 10a-4p**

**Seafood Festival Booth**

Volunteers needed for 2-hr shifts to pass out information and sell raffle tickets, T-shirts, books, etc.

**March 14-16 (Fri-Sun)**

**Orchid Show Booth - Edison Comm. College - Volunteers needed**

**Trail Clearing Every Sun. & Mon. through December - 8:30 am**

Meet with FOF Jack Horner, Florida Trails Alligator Amblers, and a Park Ranger to clear trails. RSVP to Jack 239-267-8692 by Thursday prior to the scheduled workday.

### Boardwalk Vandals

Thirteen of our interpretive signs were either destroyed or stolen last summer. Lee Russell will be replacing six of these signs, mounted on aluminum frames to discourage further vandalism.

Also, several reflector posts on Janes Drive that the FOF worked on so hard to straighten or install last spring have been damaged by county road crews when they graded the road.

## News and Updates

**Florida Trails** - Volunteers have been working diligently to clear and mark new trails. The goal is to develop and blaze a minimum of 60 miles of trails, and so far the trail from Jones Grade to the Preserve's west border past Pennington Post has been trimmed, and progress has been made down East Main from the north end. The Florida Trail is marked with orange paint, and side trails are blue or white. Scouting will begin soon in the East Prairie to somehow connect the trail with Big Cypress Preserve. Primitive campsites are being considered. Volunteers needed - see Calendar of Events for details.

**4th of July Parade** - Marilyn and Lee Russell represented the FOF in the Everglades City parade this summer. They drove our swamp buggy, proudly displaying our banner and the American flag, and were joined by their granddaughters, Kaleigh and Christy.

**Park Staff** - Ranger Joseph "Buddy" Griner, former employee of Hendry Correctional, joined the Park Service last April. He and his family reside in Immokalee. Ranger Steven Houseknecht, a college student from Coral Springs, came on board in June. He lives on the Preserve in State-provided housing. Manager Greg Toppin reports there is no OPS funding for an office secretary this year.

### What We Are

The Friends of Fakahatchee is a Citizen Support Organization of the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, an entity of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The Preserve comprises over 80,000 acres of land of the Big Cypress Swamp and is about 15 miles long and five miles wide, bordering US 41, I-75 and SR 29. The Fakahatchee Strand is the largest cypress strand in the world and its slough is the deepest in the greater Everglades.

Our address is: Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc., P.O. Box 548, Copeland, FL 34137

Phone: (941) 695-4593 Fax: (941) 695-4947 Visit our Website at: [friendsoffakahatchee.org](http://friendsoffakahatchee.org)

### Who We Are

**Officers:** President, Lee Russell, Port of the Islands; Vice-President, Patty Huff, Everglades City; Treasurer, Marilyn Russell, Port of the Islands; Secretary, Kerrie Chobot, Everglades City; **Board of Directors:** Franklin Adams, Everglades City; Howard Branch, Palmetto; Jan Brock, Ochopee; Nancy Fessenden, Naples; Betty Foster, Bonita Springs; Jack Horner, Fort Myers; Bill Mesce, Copeland; Vicky Nagle, Everglades City; Judi Pritchard, Bonita Springs; Russ Reay, Everglades City; Greg Toppin, Copeland