

Letter from the President

Spring is here and the mosquitoes and deer flies are back in business. However, this does not discourage southwestern Floridians from venturing into the swamplands — there is so much beauty in the Spring with the cypress trees fresh and green and full of bromeliads. Last weekend my husband and I biked from our home in Everglades City up along Janes Scenic Drive to Gate 7. It was a beautiful and quiet Sunday morning and the area was lush with new growth. The Boardwalk at Big Cypress Bend is also wonderful in the Spring so come celebrate the season in the Fakahatchee and bring your bug spray.

On Saturday, April 26, your Board of Directors met in Everglades City. We approved of the four projects that our Park Manager Greg Toppin will be submitting to the State this year. They are (in order of priority):

- 1) On site biologist's office and meeting room for the Friends of the Fakahatchee
- 2) Research and exploration of cultural and archeological sites within the Fakahatchee Preserve
- 3) Establishment of an environmental facility at SR 29 and I-75 (see information on page 2 of Newsletter)
- 4) Expansion of the Swamp Walk Guided Tours and Exotic Removal Program

We also discussed the need to communicate with you, our members, on a more regular basis. We would like to hear from you on how we can serve you better. Enclosed is a questionnaire that we would like for you to complete and return so we can find out what is important to you as a member. Feel free to add any comments on any subject that is not covered. Also, please feel free to email me at any time with any questions or suggestions you may have. My email address is snookcity@hotmail.com.

Looking forward to hearing from you, Patty Huff

New Membership Chair

One of our new members this year, Marya Repko, has agreed to become our new membership chairperson and will take over the duties that Kerrie Chobot and Patty Huff have been doing for the past year. Marya is a resident of Everglades City and also chairs the Membership Committee for the Friends of the Museum of the Everglades. In 2001 she published a book entitled "A Brief History of the Everglades City Area" and this year has worked diligently with the Friends of the Museum to bring to press "Historic Buildings around Everglades City". Marya has very good organizational skills and is very effective in getting the work done.

This summer we plan to send out Membership Cards to all members. These can be used for discounts on swamp walks and canoe trips.

In the fall we hope to have the Newsletters sent via email so please send us your email address and any changes in your address or telephone number. You may mail to the office or email Marya at mrepko@peganet.com.

Welcome, and thanks, Marya.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Saturday, May 10 at 9:00 am

Introducing a new trail in the Fakahatchee - Hike the Pinelands Trail for 5 to 8 miles, starting at Gate 19. Meet at Preserve Office. Call office at (239) 695-4593 for more information.

CELEBRATE

Florida State Parks the Month of May
Visit any Florida State Park on
May 17th, 2003

FREE ADMISSION
For more information:
FloridaStateParks.org

Friday, June 6, 5:30 pm, Everglades City
Community Church Annex on the Circle

Membership Meeting
Agenda - Florida Panther Refuge
Partnership

Mark Your Calendars for Future Trips

Swamp Walks - 10 am

October 7 and 28; November 4, 15, and 25; December 2, 20 and 30 (reservations required)

Explore a unique swamp forest with John Elting or a park ranger. Since there is no path, you will wade through cypress forest and pond-apple sloughs. See beautiful, rare tropical plants. Share the swamp with Black bear, otter, mink and Florida panther. Long pants and secure footwear a must. Bring food, water and insect repellent. **Limited to groups of 15. Fee: \$15 per person; \$10 for Friends of Fakahatchee members**

Guided Canoe Trip - 9 am

November 1, November 22, December 6 and December 27 (reservations required)

Paddle the mangrove tunnels of the East River. Observe ospreys, eagles, and many of the areas wading birds. Search for crocodiles and manatee. Novice and beginner paddlers welcome. Sun protection, snacks, water and insect repellent recommended. **Equipment provided. Limited to groups of 12. Fee: \$25 per person; \$20 for FOF members**

Call Preserve Office (239) 695-4593

BOARDWALK NEWS

Jerry Winters and Signe Backus have been diligently working at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk all season. They will soon be leaving for the northern parts for the summer and help will be needed in the fall to expand the days that volunteers are available. Each weekend they have been greeting hundreds of visitors from all over the world, especially the European countries of The Netherlands, England, France and Germany. The Europeans are great hikers and have come to love and appreciate our forests and swamp-lands. If you like to meet people and enjoy the great outdoors (even in the hot summer months here), consider volunteering at the Boardwalk. There could be no nicer office in a lush environment with lots of birds singing. Jerry and Signe have lots of stories to tell of their encounters with both the human and the animal species. Take a day off and enjoy it in the park. For more information, contact Jerry and Signe at email jer-sig@jrec.com.

Private Organizations and Tour Groups Guided Swamp Walks

With sufficient notice, private group walks can be arranged by contacting the Preserve Office at (239) 695-4593

I-75 Visitor's Center Update

For several years the Fakahatchee Preserve has been looking at the opportunity of opening a Visitor's Center at Miles City on Highway 29 just off Interstate 75. The center would provide educational information and attract visitors to our area. Greg Toppin invited Environmental Specialist Ken Alvarez to be the keynote speaker at our April 12 Membership Dinner. Ken introduced a proposed plan for the project which was designed by George Fogg, a landscape architect. In attendance were representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the Florida Panther Refuge who would like to explore the possibility of becoming a partner with the Fakahatchee Preserve in developing this Visitor's Center. Attend the meeting on Saturday, June 6, to learn more about this project.

Report on Port of the Islands Swamp Walks

Twenty-five Port of the Islands residents enjoyed two separate swamp walks through Gate 12 to the Ballard Camp and up through "*Jurassic Park*", returning to the camp to enjoy a nice box lunch. They continued with a wet-walk through the swamp with rave reviews and plans to return next year.

News and Updates

Florida Trails

Greg Toppin and Jack Horner recently backpacked all the way across the Jones Logging Trail from East to West, and then down the Pinelands Trail to Gate 19 at Janes Scenic Drive. During the 15-mile hike they saw snakes, deer a bear and of course alligators. Also, Jack spent a day hiking with Jim and Niki Woodard on various trails throughout the Fakahatchee. Jim and Niki have been hiking this area for over 30 years and have become very knowledgeable about it. Jack is looking for volunteers for overnight backpacking (probably 3 or 4 trips of one or two nights out). This will be done after the wet season unless someone is willing to work during the high bug season. Jack says his calendar is open for the next several weeks so call him if you're interested at (239) 267-8692 or email at jack-horner@msn.com.

Update on the K-2 Boardwalk

Greg Toppin reports that Dr. Wells still favors the FOF constructing a boardwalk which will run through a portion of his property. The Board will vote at the June meeting to reaffirm its approval. Greg will then forward his building plans to the District Office for final approval before construction begins.

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: (239) 695-4593 Fax: (239) 695-4947 Visit our Website at: friendsoffakahatchee.org

Who We Are

Officers: President, Patty Huff, Everglades City; Treasurer, Jack Horner, Fort Myers; Secretary, Kerrie Chobot, Everglades City;
Board of Directors: Franklin Adams, Everglades City; Jan Brock, Ochopee; Nancy Fessenden, Naples; Betty Foster, Bonita Springs; Bill Mesce, Copeland; Russ Reay, Everglades City; Greg Toppin, Copeland.