



Old Boardwalk is Closed!

Know before you go. Visit the State Park's website.

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

Have a question before you visit the park?

The Park Office has a new phone number: 239-961-1925

Message from the Executive Director 25th Anniversary Success Summary

May 1998 is the official month the Friends were certified as a Florida not-for-profit organization and a duly authorized Citizen Support Organization under contract to provide support for the Division of Recreation and Parks. Back then we were "Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve." The name was simplified to "Friends of Fakahatchee" in May 2010.

In 1998 the founding members of the Board of Directors consisted of President Roger Dykstra, VP Greg Toppin, Secretary Barbara Lewinski, Treasurer Allen Caldwell, and Brian Donohue, Elsa Caldwell and Cindy Hackney. Greg Toppin was the Park Manager.

Records show that in the first year the Friends of Fakahatchee (FOF) had 31 members and managed to raise \$2,540. The Board busied itself establishing the By-Laws, sponsoring a clean-up on Janes Scenic Drive, and the removal of 50,000 invasive Melaleucas. Volunteers were clearing hiking trails, assisting with exotic removal, conducting swamp walks and canoe trips.

The Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk was already the main attraction of the Fakahatchee, and FOF was funding supplies to repair the old Boardwalk, rallying skilled volunteers to do the repairs, and assembling docent volunteers to welcome visitors. The Friends efforts at the Boardwalk continued for 24 years until the closing of the old Boardwalk in September 2022 after Hurricane Ian.

Fast forward 25 years: the Friends of Fakahatchee have achieved more than the founding Board of Directors could have possibly imagined. Subsequent Board leadership studied the feasibility of increasing revenue to support the park. Here are four major accomplishments.

1. Tours program revenue increased by 75% – to date \$329,553.

Initially the tours program consisted of swamp walks, canoeing, and Fakahatchee Island cruises. In 2013, thanks to the persistence of then Board member and current President Glen Stacell, the Board approved Glen's ambitious proposal to add Interpretive Tram Tours. The initial investment of \$39,000 for a truck and tram was paired with an impressive commitment by the tours volunteers. With this, the FOF increased its capacity to educate the public about the importance of the Fakahatchee within the Everglades ecosystem.

2. First Annual Fund Appeal launched in 2012. To date \$127,198 has been raised.

3. \$100,000 in grants awarded for the following:

- 2010 – Hire a CPA to align QuickBooks for best financial practice for a non-profit.
- 2015 – Create a new website.
- 2016 – Hire a consultant to advise the Board on fundraising.
- 2017-2023 – Purchase supplies for the Visitor Center.
- 2017 – Build a Chickee hut at the old Boardwalk.
- 2018 – Purchase and install five Wayfinding Kiosks in the park.



Continued next page >>

4. Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk Expansion

- Board meeting minutes record that in February 2012 Tom Maish agreed to chair a Boardwalk Facility Development Committee, later called the Boardwalk Vision Committee. Several years of working with park Managers and District personnel produced a consensus to include in the project an Interpretive Pavilion on the other side of the canal with a bridge leading to it. With a plan in hand Tom led his committee to promote the project to anyone who could help fund it. Doors opened and eventually the committee was granted a session with then Senator Kathleen Passidomo who took interest. In May 2017, within Senate Bill 2500, Kathleen Passidomo with Rep. Bob Rommel sponsored \$1,331,500.00 for the restrooms and an Interpretive Pavilion with exhibits.
- By 2017 the FOF had already funded approximately \$175,000 toward the project. This paid for the conceptual design for the Interpretive Pavilion by David Corban Architects, wetlands and topographic surveys by George F. Young Engineering, and the development of the Interpretive Prospectus and Exhibit Master Plan by the Acorn Group. The State would be working with all these documents for the project. Fast forward to 2023, the approximate cost of the project has so far reached 7 million dollars.

Add to the above four major accomplishments over \$420,000 raised since 1998 to support the Park. Countless vehicle repairs, four all-terrain vehicles, helicopter rentals for prescribed burns, old boardwalk repair supplies, the Orchid Restoration Project, a long list of park supplies, a pole barn, and the current renovation of the Visitor Center.

Congratulations to the Board of Directors, our members, donors and volunteers for their dedication to the Friends' Mission. The 25th Anniversary success summary is the result of collaborative efforts essential to the Friends' continued success.

*Francine Stevens
Executive Director*

First FOF Board meeting, 1998



The first FOF Board meeting with founding members was held in 1998. Left to Right: Cindy Kackney, First President Roger Drykstra, Park Manager Greg Toppin, Elsa Caldwell, JoAnn Toppin, Unknown, Treasurer Allen Caldwell.

Annual members meeting, April, 2000



Front row, left to right: Franklin Adams, Kathy Adams, JoAnn Toppin, Barbara Lewinski, Katrina Boler, Elsa Caldwell, Russ Reay, Park Manager Greg Toppin.

Back row, left to right: Allen Caldwell, Pam Mesce, Cindy Hackney, Bill Mesce, Ray Evans, Marian Klein, Kerrie Chobot, Dennis Marlin.

Memorable Fakahatchee Island Cruises

Photos by Francine Stevens



Patrick Higgins speaks to the participants of the December 2013 Cruise.



Glen Stacell (center) informs Cruise participants, February 2014.

Fakahatchee Tram Tours

Photos by Francine Stevens



Glen Stacell, who created the Tram Tours, stands to speak to participants.



Volunteer John Kaiser's enthusiasm for his subject is unmistakable.

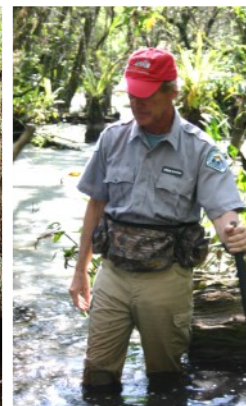
The ever popular Swamp Walks



Virginia Palmer Skok leading a Swamp Walk, 2022.



*(Left) Patrick Higgins leads enthralled Swamp Walkers, 2018.
(Right) John Elting leads swamp walk, Jan 2007.*



Ambitious Boardwalk and observation platform repair

The following is an excerpt from the January 2012 Ghost Writer. There is a link at the end if you care to read 'the rest of the story' and see more photos of this heroic endeavor. Photos by Dick Hughes

In late November [2011] was determined that the observation platform was no longer safe. Ranger Jeff Kneisley met with District 4 Construction Manager Hank Woodmancy and me to make that determination and to start the planning process. Mr. Woodmancy provided drawings for the new structure, including stronger beams and additional pilings. Ranger Jeff worked on a materials list and estimated the costs of the project.



Both Park rangers and volunteers were involved in tearing down the old structure – which was done in two days. Only six pilings remained usable and three had to be entirely replaced. Over the next few days five new pilings were installed using old-fashioned posthole diggers. This involved working in water about 3 feet deep and then digging holes about 4 to 5 feet into the muck. Ranger Steven Bass did the important, but unthinkable, work of diving under the water (in an alligator hole!) to cut large roots which kept the pilings from going down far enough.

Ranger Steve Houseknecht did a lot of the post-hole digging. Both Rangers were invaluable in the process of putting in new pilings, including transporting many loads of crushed rock the entire length of the boardwalk. Volunteer Steve Koreny assisted in the carrying of materials, as did volunteer Glen Stacell and Ranger Jeff Kneisley.

Three volunteers were present each day of the three week project. The team, which has been maintaining the boardwalk since Hurricane Wilma in 2005, consists of Dick Hughes, Bud Scott and myself [Nelson A. Tilden]. Dick was the leader of the project and made sure everything was "square and level." We called him the "Precision man." It was fun and challenging for us to be involved in an ambitious project of this magnitude.

For the rest of this impressive story – and more photos – visit the Ghostwriter Archives, <https://orchidswamp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/8January-2012-Newsletter-Boardwalk-repair-pages-3-4.pdf>

Early Docent Volunteers at the Boardwalk



The earliest photo we have on file of Docent Volunteers at the Boardwalk. Left to Right: Signe Backus, unknown, Jerry Winters.

Volunteers 'rumble' with many Park tasks

The following is an excerpt from an article by Dino Barone in the Nov-Dec 2017 Ghost Writer. You know you'll want to read the rest of this adventure to find out what happened next to our brave volunteers. Visit the GhostWriter archives at <https://orchidswamp.org/about-fof/the-ghost-writer-archives/> Click on November-December 2017.



Saturday, October 21, 2017 – 6 weeks after Hurricane Irma stormed through SW Florida.

Our mission this Saturday was to finish clearing approximately 2 miles of Mud Tram. Sandpine Alliance had cleared half a mile the day before. Anyone who has spent any time on Mud Tram understands the walking challenges of rocks and cypress knees, along with the undulation of the tram. The plant community (consisting of native Hog plum trees, the thorny Smilax, and the extremely invasive Brazilian peppers, along with some poison ivy, just to spice things up a bit), also wants to leave a memorable impression.

As if this was not enough fun, during high water season Mud Tram is literally underwater, anywhere from ankle deep to mid-thigh deep in a couple of areas. Now mix in broken branches with some fallen trees, thanks to Landscaping by Hurricane Irma, and we have a party! Sooooooooooooo, Ring Announcer Michael Buffer, please bellow out your famous catchphrase..."LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE!"

Memorable prescribed burn in the Fakahatchee

The largest prescribed burn in Florida Park Service history took place within the boundaries of the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park on January 14-15, 2019.

To read the short article and see many more photos. Visit the GhostWriter archives at <https://orchidswamp.org/about-fof/the-ghost-writer-archives/> and click on the link for the January 2019 issue.



Historic Boardwalk Expansion – A dream realized



Massive amounts of 'behind the scenes' work was accomplished to build the restrooms, parking area, and access to the Interpretive Pavilion. Photo by Jay Staton, October, 2021.



An Interpretive Pavilion on the other side of the canal with a bridge leading to the Boardwalk was an exciting addition to the original plans for the Boardwalk Expansion Project. Photo by Park Staff, September, 2022.

News from the Strand



Alex Gobel is new Volunteer Coordinator

The Volunteer Coordinator position has been filled by Alex Gobel.

You can direct your volunteer related inquiries to Alex by e-mail at Alex.gobel@floridadep.gov or you can phone him at 239-359-4927.

Welcome, Alex!



It's always a good time to join the FOF Tours Team. Are you interested in guiding or assisting FOF Tours, but wonder what's involved?

To learn, you can join our tours as a guest and shadow a Guide or Assistant until you feel comfortable taking the lead.

For more information call Francine at 239-695-1023, or visit our Volunteer page at <https://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/>.

Seen in the Strand

Last Night Sky for 2023 a success



Phil McGuire welcomed everyone to the last Night Sky of the season on April 22. It was a great success with 23 people attending. Phil remarked that most were not interested in astro-photography, they just wanted to spend a quiet evening under the stars of the dark skies of the Fakahatchee. Photo by Virginia Palmer Skok.

Twenty-five years and counting by Chris Gair

In January, 1998 the Dow Jones Industrial Average was 14,840 and the mean average American home value was \$121,000. Major league baseball held its ninety-fourth World Series with the Yankees beating San Diego in four games straight. Florida's population was 14,908,000. Today the Dow has more than doubled, the average home value is \$386,000 and our population will soon total 23,000,000 and counting.

Also in 1998, an idea was born. A dedicated group of concerned people saw a need to protect what can never be replaced – The Fakahatchee Strand Preserve. Friends of the Fakahatchee started in 1998 as a tax-exempt charitable foundation with the singular mission of partnering with the State of Florida to protect this most unique of nature's gifts against the onslaught of development that continues to threaten our fragile ecosystems.

The Friends worked as planned – then and now – and all thanks to you and your ongoing support. The twenty-fifth anniversary is a celebration of a proven success story. It is also a challenge for all of us to keep the Friends going to ensure that our children and theirs can share this treasured place.

I believe strongly that we are grounded in basic values that do not change. Keeping the mission of the Friends as viable as possible certainly reflects that belief.

*Mr. Chris Gair of Fort Myers is providing the FOF with thoughts and ideas in the ever-changing world of charitable giving. Mr. Gair is retired after 48 years as a Trust Officer in Southwest Florida and is a member of the FOF Fundraising Committee. **As with all matters financial, always consult with your attorney or tax advisor.***

“Matching Gift” programs

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!



You can now donate to FOF via your Fidelity Investment account with a Charitable program called the Fidelity Giving Marketplace. Follow this link for more information: <https://www.fidelitycharitable.org/>

**To Donate via the Friend's website,
visit www.Orchidswamp.org**

Membership News

Members make a difference!

Welcome new members: Lori Gaspar, Teresita Garcia, Dawn Marceau, and Robert Maxmen

We have 345 members.

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



Visit the Fakahatchee via
FACEBOOK and INSTAGRAM

Follow us!

<https://www.facebook.com/orchidswamp>
<https://www.instagram.com/friendsoffakahatchee/>

*Share your pictures and stories about your
visit to the Fakahatchee.*

E-mail your shots to connect@orchidswamp.org

*Add hashtags to show up in existing collections:
#fakahatcheestrland, #friendsoffakahatchee,
#fakahatcheestrlandpreservestatepark*

Board Members

President – Glen Stacell
Vice Pres. – Virginia Palmer Skok
Secretary – Tom Trotta
Treasurer – Phil McGuire

Wally Baldwin
Rudi Ettrich
Eric Foht
John Kaiser
Debra Tayler

Ex-Officio

Bruce Bunch
Dennis Giardina
Tom Maish

Executive Director

Francine Stevens

Board of Directors meeting schedule

June 18, 2023
July 16, 2023
Sept 17, 2023
Oct 15, 2023
Nov 19, 2023
Dec 16, 2023

Meetings are scheduled
for 10:30 AM

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



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/>.

Our mailing address is:

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