



**The old boardwalk is closed.**

**Questions before visiting the park?**

**Call the park office at 239-961-1925 and check the Park's website.**

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

## President and Executive Director Letter

As we were approaching Saturday the 16th December Members Welcome Back Lunch to celebrate the FOF 25th Anniversary we became concerned with the forecasted storm. Being on the fence about disappointing everyone with a cancellation was weighed against a storm creating havoc on the event.

It was not a pleasant feeling to announce the cancellation but given the news about how the storm impacted everyone, near or far from the park, we made the right decision.

Despite the storm, the Board held its scheduled meeting on the morning of the December 16th, but did so via Zoom. On the Agenda was how to deal with the unprecedented cancellation of our Members Welcome Back event and this one to celebrate the FOF 25th Anniversary.

**The Board voted in favor to move the celebration of our 25th Anniversary with the Volunteer Appreciation picnic scheduled for Saturday the 23rd March.**

**What about the 25th Anniversary merchandise we had set aside for our members on the 16th December?**

**We are inviting you to purchase your 25th Anniversary merchandise at the renovated visitor center from Noon to 4:30 on Sunday the 21 January.** You can come see the renovated visitor center and purchase your 25th Anniversary T-Shirts and hats, and of course *The Orchids of the Fakahatchee* book.

*With best wishes for the Holidays,  
Glen Stacell and Francine Stevens*



## Save the Date – Sunday, January 21, Noon to 4:30 PM

See the renovated Visitor Center and purchase your 25th Anniversary limited edition merchandise.

These are a small sample of available merchandise.



## News from the Strand

### Introduction to Swamp Walk begins in January

**Introduction to Swamp Walk** begins with an interpretive ride on the Friends' Ghost Rider Tram to the site of the swamp walk. From there the guide leads you on a swamp walk lasting approximately 90 minutes. Following the swamp walk, participants board the tram for the return trip.

Executive Director Francine Stevens says, "This offering combines elements of the rolling lecture of our tram tour with an introductory swamp walk to give participants a taste of the real Fakahatchee. The Introduction to Swamp Walk is specially tailored for folks who have been uncertain about going on a swamp walk."

Offered on Mondays: January 22, February 12 and March 11. Departure at 9:30 AM. For more information and to purchase tickets please visit the Introduction to Swamp Walk FOF Eventbrite page at <http://tinyurl.com/swampintro>.



### Tickets still on sale for most Tours

Thanks to our fabulous Volunteers, the Friends Tours program is scheduled. To view the complete schedule of all tours October through mid-April 2024 – and to purchase tickets – please visit this link to reach the FOF Eventbrite page: <https://tinyurl.com/FOFtours>. You can also go directly to the FOF Eventbrite page for each tour by using the links below.

**Remember! Tickets make terrific gifts!**

**Did you know we can organize a group tram tour for you?** For a group of 12 or more please call the Friends office at 239-695-1023.



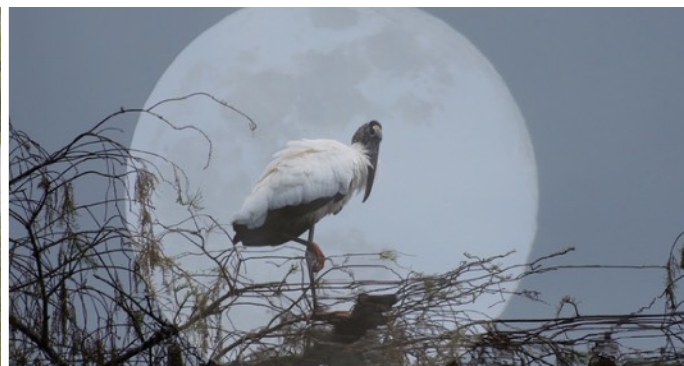
Night Sky Experience is relaxing fun – <https://tinyurl.com/night-sky-tour>. Photo by Elizabeth Williams.



Advance Swamp Walk Saturday Tours start January 20 – <https://tinyurl.com/swamp-walk>. Photo by Andy Skok.



Friday Morning Tram Tours tickets are going fast– <https://tinyurl.com/tram-tour> Photo by Francine Stevens.



**Moonlit Tours are SOLD OUT!** Photo by Glen Stacell.



## Plein Air Painting in the Fakahatchee Preserve



A very special Plein Air Painting Session is being offered by local Everglades artist Jo-Ann Sanborn on January 18, 10 am – 12:30 pm.

Ms. Sanborn will start off with some helpful hints for painting outdoors, guide you if you need suggestions, and lead a discussion of the experience at the conclusion of the session.

For complete details and to purchase tickets please use the link below to visit the Plein Air Painting FOF Eventbrite page at <http://tinyurl.com/plein-air-fak>

## Seen in the Strand

### Friends of Six Miles Cypress Slough Group Tour

FOF Vice President Virginia Palmer Skok, assisted by Andy Skok, conducted an *Introduction to Swamp Walk* for the Friends of Six Miles Cypress Slough. Photographer(s) unknown at time of publication.



*In the center wearing a gray shirt is Sabine Vanderhende, President of Friends of Six Miles Cypress Slough.*



*On the right, wearing blue shirts and hats, are Guide Virginia Palmer Skok & Andy Skok.*

## Volunteers needed for new Visitor Center



We are seeking dedicated volunteers to provide services at the newly renovated Visitor Center off Janes Scenic Drive. Volunteers will be responsible for informing visitors on how to best enjoy their experience in the Park. They will also manage selling merchandise for the Friends of Fakahatchee, raising funds to support the Park, keeping track of the inventory and completing daily paperwork.

Please note that **each volunteer is not required to do all the above**; we can accomplish all this by teaming up volunteers.

Volunteers will be trained (by the Friends) on how to operate the point-of-sale device for credit card sales of the merchandise. *They will also have the opportunity to attend regular outings in the park to gain helpful knowledge to inform visitors.*

*Our new Visitor Center offers a professional yet relaxing atmosphere, and having fun while volunteering is expected!*

Interested individuals can contact Volunteer Manager Alex Gobel at: [Alex.Gobel@FloridaDEP.gov](mailto:Alex.Gobel@FloridaDEP.gov), Office Phone: (239) 359-4927.

## Calling all Volunteers!



Alex Gobel welcomes your call or e-mail regarding volunteer opportunities for many kinds of help!

Projects such as clearing trails, wildlife and plant surveys, equipment maintenance and more are always in need of volunteers. Park Staff will provide you with the training to conduct surveys and/or operate equipment safely to work in the field.

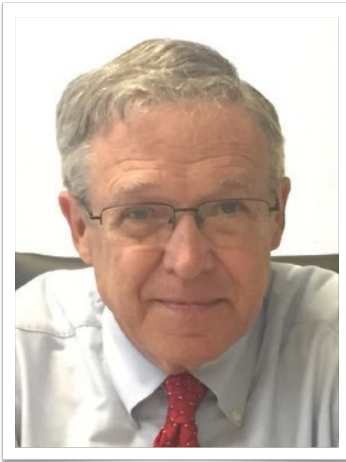
Work such as greeting and orienting visitors – and in the near future volunteering at the new Boardwalk site – are needed and can be enjoyed by anyone who prefers less strenuous tasks.



You can contact Alex by e-mail at [Alex.gobel@floridadep.gov](mailto:Alex.gobel@floridadep.gov) or you can phone him at 239-359-4927.

## Donation Strategies by Chris Gair

### A world of acronyms.



All too often, communication is judged by speed at the expense of accuracy, resulting in confusion. It is hard to go through a day without encountering acronyms to describe everything from stocks to allergies. But there are two in the world of IRAs (see what I mean), that are important.

The first is RMD or Required Minimum Distribution. If you have had enough birthdays, current tax law requires that you take an amount annually from your IRA all of which is taxable unless we use the second which is QCD which means Qualified Charitable Distribution.

For RMD amounts up to \$100,000 annually, you can direct transfers to the Friends as a qualified charity. The beauty of this is that QCD's DO NOT APPEAR ON YOUR TAX RETURN. So even if you do itemize your tax deductions (less than ten percent of us can), you are saving tax dollars and helping the dedicated folks committed to the treasure we call the Fakahatchee. It is simple to do. Just contact your IRA custodian and direct the amount of your gift to the Friends and they will send your check ready to deliver.

And keep in mind the later in the year you make your QCD the more you benefit from compounding throughout the year; time is in fact money.

I hope this helps and thank you for your time. My very best to you and yours for a joyous holiday and a prosperous 2024. No acronyms needed here thank you.

*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 financial matters, 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!



**FIDELITY** Charitable<sup>SM</sup>

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](http://www.Orchidswamp.org)**



## Membership News

### Members make a difference!

Welcome new members: Beth Agin, Kevin Cuniff, Shari Fairchild, Richard Gaytionery, Robert Mays, Karen McNeil, Connie Nagele, JoAnn Rahl, and Sabine Vanderhende.

We have 373 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](mailto: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

January 21, 2024  
February 18, 2024  
March 23, 2024

Meetings are scheduled  
for 10:30 AM

Contact the Friends of  
Fakahatchee at [office@fofinc.org](mailto:office@fofinc.org)  
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 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](mailto: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