



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

At the January Board of Directors meeting, reflecting on how financial support is essential for the survival of a not-for-profit, Treasurer Phil McGuire summarized a successful 2023 with respect to the Friends' mission to support the Park. A total of \$78,246.00 was allocated for Park support. The Friends' capacity to raise funds is achievable thanks to the dedication of our Volunteers and our members' generosity.

What is a QCD? Members who donate to the Annual Appeal are taking advantage of the QCD. For that reason, we are repeating Chris Gair's article about QDC on this newsletter.

On the last week of January, our members will receive the annual "Call for nominees" to serve on the Board. The voting ballot with nominees' biographies will be published on March the 4th.

We had a decent turn out at the Visitor Center on the 21st January. Members purchased their 25th Anniversary hats and T-shirts, the *Fakahatchee Orchids* book, and other merchandise. Also, for the first time, many saw how we put our members' donations to good use for a complete renovation of the Visitor Center. Without our members' generous support, the Visitor Center would have been torn down!

Cordially,

Glen Stacell and Francine Stevens



Save the Date Annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic and Members' Meeting

Scheduled for Saturday, March 23, 2024, this event will take place under the Park's pole barn. A special e-mail invitation to register for this event will be sent to the membership last week of February.

This is a free event but registration is required.

News from the Strand

Fakahatchee Strand Wildlife Blitz 2024



Come out to the beautiful Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and help gather vital data on wildlife trends. The dates for data collection are February 7th, March 13th, April 10th, and May 8th.

This is a great opportunity to meet like-minded individuals and to learn more about the abundant wildlife that calls Fakahatchee Strand home. The data you collect are important to ongoing research and conservation efforts.

Volunteers at each site will document the following: Date, Time, Animal observed, Direction of animal's travel, and Observer comments – Life stage, size, health, male/female etc. We recommend you bring a chair, compass, binoculars, and a camera. Volunteers will be at their station for 2 hours, so bring plenty of water and snacks.

Volunteers will meet at the Park office (past the gate beside the Visitor Center) by 7:45 am. Data collection starts at 8:30 am. Sites are indicated by distance in miles north of Gate 1 (water treatment facility).

Interested individuals should contact Fakahatchee Strand Volunteer Coordinator Alex Gobel via e-mail alex.gobel@floridadep.gov or phone 239-359-4927. **Contacting Alex allows him to plan for how many are expected to participate.**

Introduction to Swamp Walk continues in February

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 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>.



Fakahatchee bryophyte survey proposed

Ruth Brooks just added another swamp walk to her list of numerous swamp walks in the Fakahatchee. She's been out many times with former Park Biologist Mike Owen, our Swamp Walk expert guides Gordon Saager, Eric Foth, Virginia Palmer Skok, and this second time around with Rita Bauer.

Ruth, a Native Plant Conservation advocate, was especially grateful to meet Park Biologist Cole Luttrell, who responded to her request to assist Tom Phillips with a permit application for a Crum Bryophyte Workshop in the Fakahatchee.

Tom Phillips commented, "A sister group, the Tuckerman Workshop, had completed a lichen survey in Fakahatchee in 2011 and the Crum participants felt a bryophyte survey would add to the biodiversity knowledge of Fakahatchee. There are few publications on the bryophytes in South Florida and none can be found focused on Fakahatchee." Those interested in the results of the 2011 Fakahatchee Lichen Survey can find the survey document at <http://tinyurl.com/lichens-survey>

Tickets still on sale for most Tours

We scheduled two more swamp walks this season. They will be conducted by Florida Master Naturalist Gordon Saager on Saturday, February 17 and Saturday, March 9. Tickets for these two Saturday Swamp Walks are available at <http://tinyurl.com/extra-swamp-walks>.

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.

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.



We were able to add a few more seats for the Moonlit tram tour – <http://tinyurl.com/moon-lit-tour> Photo by Glen Stacell.

Seen in the Strand

Park Biologist Cole Luttrell gets his feet wet

Don't be surprised if you bump into Fakahatchee Park Biologist Cole Luttrell while exploring the Fak. Cole was Park Biologist at Oscar Scherer State Park, then worked for Fish and Wildlife. He jumped on the opportunity to work in the Fakahatchee. *Photo by Rita Bauer.*



Broward Sierra Club Tram Tour, *rain or shine!*

"The group's enthusiasm was remarkable," said Executive Director Francine Stevens. One hour into the tram tour it started to rain and rained for over an hour. The group came prepared and was determined to have a good time! Photo by Adriene Barmann, Broward Sierra Club Vice Chair. *A special thank you to Gordon Saager for guiding the tour.*



Clouds clear for Night Sky Event

Twenty-seven people attended the last Night Sky Experience for 2023 on December 30. Once again the late afternoon sky was clouded over, but the sky cleared up just in time to make it a pleasant Experience. Photos by Phil McGuire.



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, Office Phone: (239) 359-4927.

Calling all Volunteers!



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

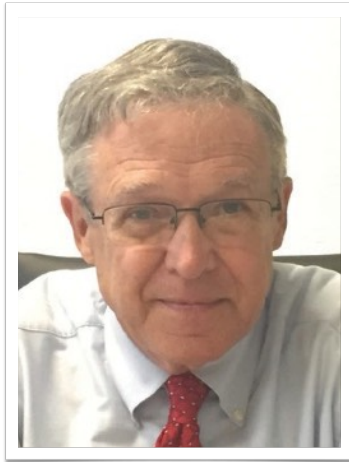
Projects such as clearing trails, wildlife and plant surveys, equipment maintenance and more are always in need of volunteers. Park Staff will provide you with the training to conduct surveys and/or operate equipment safely to work in the field.

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** or you can phone him at 239-359-4927.

Donation Strategies by Chris Gair



What is a QCD that does not appear on your tax return?

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.

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 CharitableSM

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**



Watch-Owl guards the Fakahatchee

This owl was keeping a watchful eye on folks on a recent Tram Tour! *Photo by Carol Spagnolo.*

Membership News

Members make a difference!

Welcome new members: Sean Hunt and Bill & Sharon Jinright.
Maxine Long transitioned to a Life Membership. *Thank you!*

We have 349 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

February 18, 2024
March 23, 2024

Meetings are scheduled
for 10:30 AM

Contact the Friends of
Fakahatchee at 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, 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