



The Ghost Writer

Newsletter of the Friends of Fakahatchee
Visit our website at www.orchidswamp.org

The Ghost Writer – July/August 2024

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's Message

by Virginia "Ginny" Palmer Skok

It always amazes me how every time you visit the Fakahatchee, even on subsequent days, there are so many new and interesting things to see. This time of year, the magnificent sloughs are deeper and the Swallow Tail Kites are getting ready to migrate. When the "season" starts in November the water levels will typically start falling and the cycle starts again. At every point of the year, we are lucky to be witness to all the beauty and biodiversity that our Preserve offers.

We need to start planning for this upcoming season. As we all know, the goal of The Friends of Fakahatchee is a dedication to 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. I am asking for help with this mission with volunteer support in several areas.

I am excited that our new Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk is attracting approximately 4,000 people a month in the off season. In season these numbers will grow exponentially. We are looking for volunteers to represent the Friends of Fakahatchee as docents on the new boardwalk. No experience is needed as there will be training sessions. Those interested in volunteering need to contact Francine Stevens at Office@FOFinc.org.

Our outreach program continues with a series of presentations promoting the wonders of the Fakahatchee to different communities and clubs in the area. Last year we were lucky to have our great retired biologist Mike Owen present to a full crowd at the Marco Island Historical Society as part of this outreach. A calendar is being developed for this season with some spots already secured.

Part of the outreach program includes communicating small updates for community flyers as well as local papers such as the famous Mullet Rapper. If you are a writer and interested in taking on this important volunteer job, please contact Francine Stevens at Office@FOFinc.org.

I look forward to seeing all of you in season at the Fak.

Cordially,
Virginia "Ginny" Palmer Skok
President



News from the Strand

Friends fund helicopter survey of Fakahatchee



Park Biologist Cole Luttrell and Park Specialist Steven Bass take to the air. Photo By Park Manager Joe Berger

The Friends funded a helicopter survey over the Fakahatchee to map out areas in need of exotic removal only visible from the sky. Of additional importance, it was park biologist Cole Luttrell's very first aerial survey over the Fakahatchee to assess the full scope of managing the Preserve.

Funding this survey was made possible by the generosity of our members in supporting the park. Our heartfelt thanks to those members who donate above and beyond annual membership fees!

Volunteer Opportunities

The renovated Visitor Center off Janes Scenic Drive needs volunteers to be responsible for welcoming and providing visitors information to better experience their visit in the park. Volunteers will also manage the sale of FoF merchandise to raise funds to support the park. Training will be provided by the Friends on how to operate the credit card point of sales device.



Park staff always need help with clearing trails, keeping up with miscellaneous repairs, and equipment maintenance. Park Staff will train volunteers on how to operate equipment safely to perform various assignments.

For more details e-mail the Park Volunteer Coordinator Alex Gobel at: Alex.Gobel@FloridaDEP.gov or call the park office at 239-961-1925.

Seen in the Strand

Summer sky in Fakahatchee



Photographer Phil McGuire captures the beauty and the feeling of Summer in the Fak.

Documentary showcases the Fakahatchee and Friends



This documentary, funded by the Friends and created by photographer Jay Staton, explores the history of the Fakahatchee and showcases the accomplishments of the Friends of Fakahatchee including the new boardwalk site. (View video on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/Rz32inxYb6Q>).

Fakahatchee fauna and flora sightings

Photographer Olga Ettrich generously shared some recent Fakahatchee fauna and flora sightings she caught on camera. We surely do thank her!



The Vanilla orchid (*Vanilla planifolia*) is epiphytic and is native to moist hammocks and swamps like those of the Fakahatchee. (Please note: Florida State Parks prohibit the collection of plants and other natural objects.)

All photos by Olga Ettrich



The Butterfly orchid (*Encyclia tampensis*) has a honey-like fragrance that attracts a variety of bees, which are the plant's primary pollinators.



The Ghost orchid (*Dendrophylax lindenii*). Learn about a lawsuit filed to protect the Ghost Orchid at <https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/lawsuit-filed-to-protect-imperiled-ghost-orchid-2023-09-13/>

Donation Strategies by Chris Gair

To protect and preserve

It is official. The population of Florida is now 23,000,000 – and climbing. This represents a fifteen-fold increase from WW II. And if that’s not enough, recently published numbers tell us that Florida receives over 130,000,000 visitors annually! Together, those numbers total about one-half of our nation’s population. Is it any wonder Florida’s environment is a critical concern?

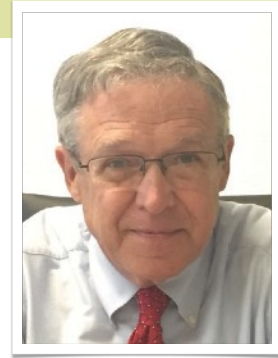
We can be truly thankful that the Friends are at the forefront of protecting Florida’s largest state preserve.

With thousands of Baby Boomers retiring *daily* and reaching age 73 when mandatory IRA distributions must be made, it’s good to know another number that thankfully is going in the right direction. For 2024, an IRA owner can contribute a maximum of \$105,000 directly from their IRA as part of the amount they must take (It’s called the Required Minimum Distribution or RMD). As less than ten percent of us actually itemize our tax deductions, an IRA becomes a very tax efficient source for your annual gift.

And with the stock market at all time highs (40,000 on the Dow!), it is a perfect time to consult with your tax advisor as to what works best for you to help protect and preserve your portfolio and our great cause.

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.



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/>

Donate to the FOF via the website. Visit www.orchidswamp.org

Membership News

Members make a difference!

Welcome new members: Laura O’Riorden, John Stuart, and Geo Tomczyk. Congratulations to Dave Rodgers for transitioning to a Life Membership!

We have 353 members.

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

Visit the Fakahatchee via FACEBOOK and INSTAGRAM

<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: #fakahatcheestrand, #friendsoffakahatchee, #fakahatcheestrandpreservestatepark



Board Members

President – Virginia Palmer Skok
Vice President – Tom Trotta
Secretary – Wally Baldwin
Treasurer – Phil McGuire
Kevin Cunniff
Rudi Ettrich
Eric Foht
John Kaiser
Glen Stacell
Debra Taylor
Bruce Bunch Ex-Officio
Tom Maish Ex-Officio
Executive Director
Francine Stevens

Board of Directors meeting schedule

September 15, 2024
October 20, 2024
November 17, 2024
December 14, 2024
Meetings are scheduled for 10:30 AM

Contact the Friends of Fakahatchee at office@fofinc.org or call 239-695-1023.

History – Saving the Fakahatchee

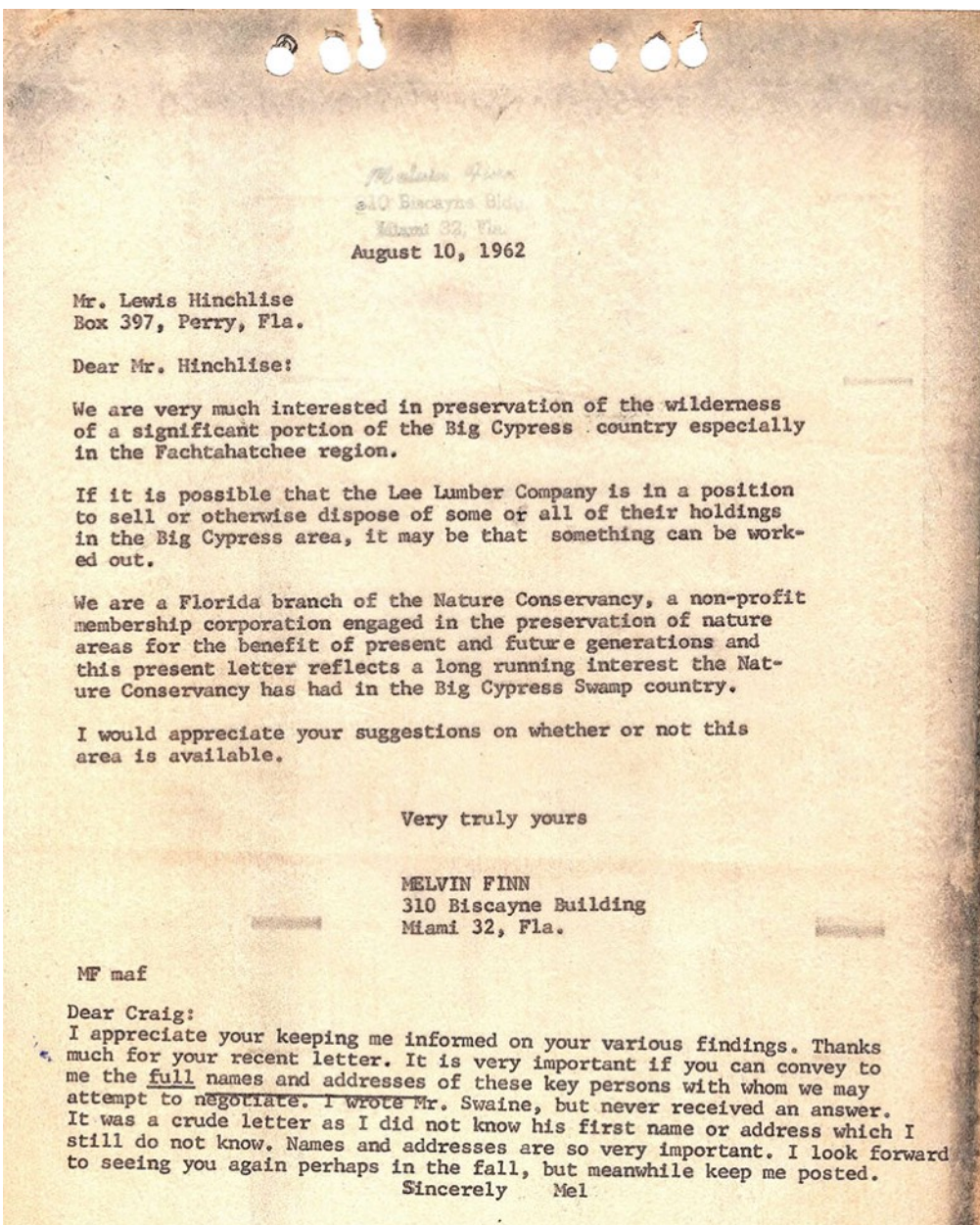
By Francine Stevens, Executive Director, Friends of Fakahatchee

In the summer of 2023 Franklin Adams gave me two boxes of fragile historical documents, his documents and Mel Finn's documents. Newspapers and magazine articles and correspondence letters dating back to 1959, in their pursuit to save the Fakahatchee from real estate development. Jane Parks also turned over documents she had kept since the 1960's when she too was involved in saving the Fakahatchee.

Over 800 documents were scanned by Andrew Tyler and myself. These are now saved in the Friends' "Cloud" archives for safe keeping. We plan to share the most interesting documents recording their efforts, set backs, and progress. This is the first installment – below are the first 2 documents in this series.

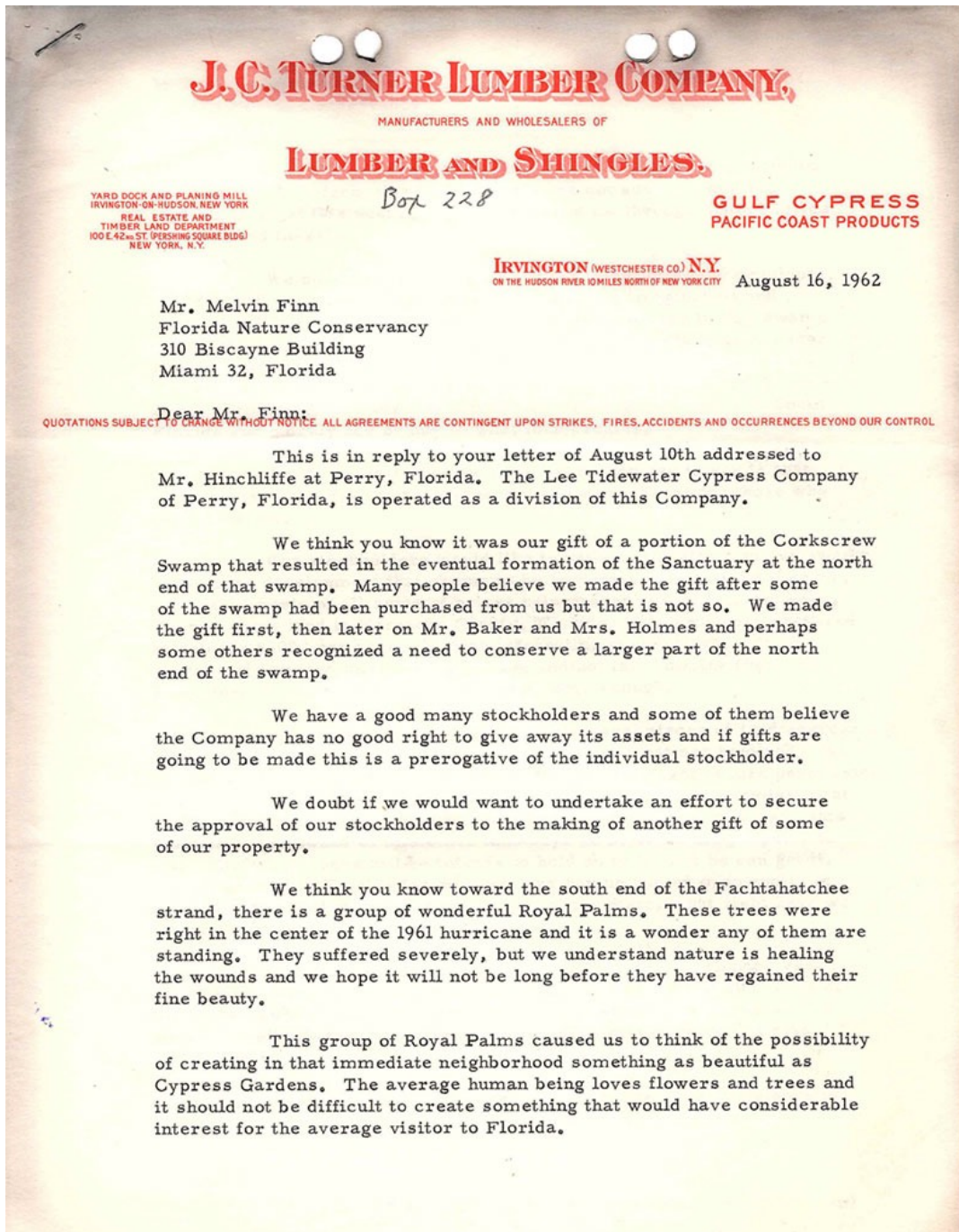
Document 1:

August 10, 1962 – Mel Finn Inquires about Acquisitions in Big Cypress



Mel Finn approaches Lee Lumber Company about the sale or "otherwise" disposal of lands of the "Fakahatchee" for the purpose of "preservation of the wilderness."

Document 2:
August 16, 1962 – J.C Turner Lumber Company Responds to Inquiry



Page 1 of 3 of Document 2:
J. A. Currey, President of Turner Lumber, replies to Mel Finn that he doubts that the stockholders would want to make a "gift of some of our property," and that a "group of Royal Palms caused us to think of creating" something like the "Cypress Gardens" attraction.

Mr. Melvin Finn
Florida Nature Conservancy

August 16, 1962

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You also probably know that most of the Paurotis Wrightii in Florida comes from this section. We are not sure yet how the terrible fires of this past Spring that reached all through South Florida have treated these lovely palms.

We do not have the spirit and the talent of a land developer. The day will come, we think, when someone with imagination and courage will succeed in creating an area of great beauty in this swamp area. We must not forget that Miami Beach was once largely a mangrove swamp. We saw a mangrove area south of Miami which was transformed into a lovely habitable section in not more than three years time. This is not surprising, for flowers, shrubs and trees grow rapidly in South Florida and quickly add beauty to what man creates.

At the present time we think all we can say to you is that some parts of the Big Cypress area should be preserved for those who come after us.

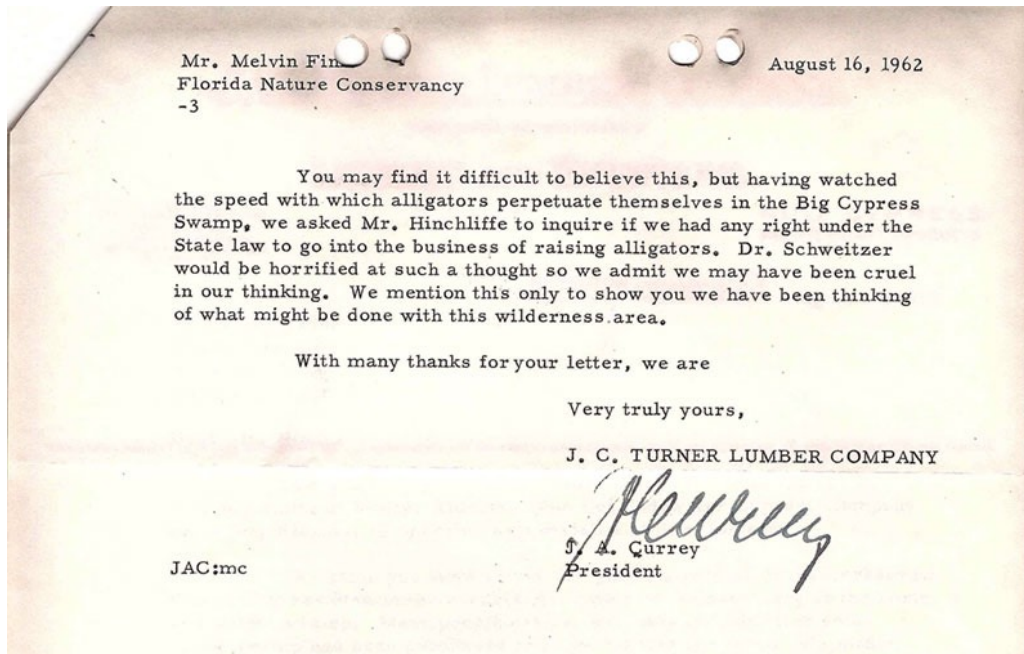
Our stockholders would like to witness the affect on our swamp area of the development that seems to be beginning in Southwest Florida. We hear reports of all sorts of prices being asked for land in that area. We own some land in Hernando County, Florida, which we were prepared to sell for \$500. per acre. It is an interesting piece of property... a mixture of low land and fairly high land and not far from the Gulf. Our \$500. idea of value we thought was plenty high enough.

Adjoining us on two sides were several pieces of land aggregating about 2,000 acres that would have improved somewhat our holdings. We did not wish to buy this property but we thought we might secure permission to offer this other land for sale with ours. We can get the permission at \$1,000. an acre. This seems like a ridiculously high price to us at this moment. The owner of this other land says he believes his property is worth \$1,000. an acre and he intends to hold on to it until he can get it. Having worked in Florida for 50 years and having had an opportunity of watching the development and the growth of the State, what right have we to say that our neighbor is wrong?

You will remember west central Florida experienced very heavy rains three or perhaps four years ago. About 150 or 200 acres of this other land was under water from 1 to 2' deep for over a year. The owner is well aware of this and yet he believes his property is worth \$1,000. an acre.

Sometime in the future we may be able to be of assistance in creating something of interest in the Big Cypress country.

Page 2 of 3 of Document 2: Mr. Currey states that "some parts of the Big Cypress area should be preserved," but that "Our stockholders would like to witness the affect (sic) of development" in Southwest Florida on land prices.



Page 3 of 3 of Document 2: Mr. Currey concludes that they "have been thinking of what might be done with this wilderness area," including "raising alligators."



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.

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