



The Ghost Writer

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

The Ghost Writer – September/October 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

I am pleased to announce some exciting member news. Starting in November, members will be able to purchase Fakahatchee merchandise at a ten percent discount, including the UPF sun shirts that quickly sold-out last year, as well as the ever-popular hats and more. Other offerings include beautiful orchid books and artwork. All profit from the sales of these nice looking items goes to help support our beloved Preserve.

Please be sure to mark your calendars for the Friends of Fakahatchee Welcome Back event on December 14. In addition to the opportunity to meet up with our fellow members, our Executive Director has secured yet another fascinating speaker – Ian Easterling. I, like many of you, will be excited to hear Mr. Easterling teach us more about the pythons that are a scourge to the Everglades. Having personally seen a python on a swamp walk I was giving, I am extremely hopeful to hear about the valiant efforts Ian and his team are making to eradicate these threats. In addition to the tasty food and fun we will have we will also be holding another of our popular auctions. One painting being auctioned off is by the famous well-known local artist Joann Sanborn.

Check out the many tours the Friends of Fakahatchee are giving listed in this edition of the Ghost Rider. Even though I personally give tours and do lots of vascular plant research in the Preserve, I have had the opportunity to enjoy several types of tours. If you are interested, be sure to sign up soon as many sell out quickly.

I want to reiterate what I wrote about in last month's letter. 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. You will see more details in this newsletter.

Looking forward to seeing all of you in the coming months in the Paradise they call the Fakahatchee.

*Cordially,
Virginia "Ginny" Palmer Skok*



Save the date

Mark your calendar for Saturday, December 14th for attending the Annual Welcome Back Luncheon Picnic. Ian Easterling, Conservancy of Southwest Florida Biologist, will speak about the Conservancy's research tracking the Burmese Python. Members will receive a special bulletin in November with more details to register for the event that will take place in the Park under the pole barn.

Tickets on sale for 2024-2025 Friends Tour Program

Thanks to the commitment of our tour volunteers, tickets are now for sale on Eventbrite. To view the complete schedule of tours from November 2024 to April 2025 and to purchase tickets, please visit the Friends' Eventbrite page at <https://tinyurl.com/FOFtours>. To read a full description of each tour visit the Friends' Official FOF Tours and Events webpage at <https://orchidswamp.org/adventures/>.



The first Night Sky season on Saturday, Oct. 26 will celebrate the passage of Comet Tsuchinshan. Use this link <https://tinyurl.com/FOF-nightsky> to see dates and purchase tickets. *Photo by Elizabeth William.*



Interpretive Tram Tours begin on Friday, December 6 and continue weekly each Friday morning through April. Visit this link <https://tinyurl.com/FOF-interpretive-tram> to purchase tickets. *Photo by Francine Stevens.*



We are pleased to announce that Park Biologist Cole Luttrell will start conducting Swamp Walks beginning Saturday, November 9. Swamp Walks will continue through March. To see dates and purchase tickets visit <https://tinyurl.com/biologist-swamp-walk>. *Photo by Rita Bauer.*



Moonlit Tram Tours are scheduled for the nights of the full moon on January 13 and March 12. To select a date and purchase tickets visit <https://tinyurl.com/FOF-moonlit-tram>. *Photo by Glen Stacell.*

Volunteer opportunities for the Friends

Do you love the Fakahatchee? Do you enjoy talking with people? Whether you prefer mornings, afternoons, or evenings, there are many ways to help. Even a few hours each week can benefit the Friends (and benefit you, too). For more information regarding the Friends volunteer opportunities, please contact Francine Stevens at 239-695-1023 or e-mail at Office@FOFinc.org.

Volunteer to be a Guide for the FOF Tour Program

Joining guides on their tours is the best way to determine if guiding is for you. Once you decide you would like to get involved with the Friends Tours program, training will be available.

We need guides for four Moonlit Tram Tours. Unfortunately, after a decade, John Kaiser can no longer guide our Moonlit Tours. Note that the Moonlit Tours start two and a half hours before the moonrise.

We need Swamp Walk guides to accommodate the demand we receive for Swamp Walks. Swamp Walks require guides with specific skills and knowledge.

Volunteer at the renovated Visitor Center off Janes Scenic Drive

Volunteer to process the sale of Friends merchandise to raise funds to support the park. The Friends will train volunteers on how to operate the credit card point sales device. Additionally, volunteers will welcome and provide visitors with information to better experience their visit to the park.

Friends of Fakahatchee Representatives at the Boardwalk

For this volunteer opportunity our main objective is to have a Friends of Fakahatchee representative at the new Boardwalk site. The Friends presence will promote membership, donations, and volunteerism. Without our presence what the Friends organization does for the park is a secret. The Friends will provide training.

- Volunteers stationed at a table to welcome visitors.
- Volunteer to guide tours on the Boardwalk.
- Volunteer to roam the Boardwalk, answer questions, point out interesting things to visitors.

Volunteer to assist Park staff

Park staff need your to help clear trails, tend the butterfly garden, help with repairs and general maintenance, participate in the Bio Blitz, and much more. Individuals interested in helping Park staff should contact Alex Gobel, Fakahatchee Volunteer Coordinator. Email: alex.gobel@floridadep.gov or Call: (239)-961-1925

2024/2025 Fakahatchee Strand Bio Blitz

Come out to the beautiful Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and help gather vital data on wildlife trends. This year the Bio Blitz will be held on Wednesdays from November, 2024 through May, 2025.

Volunteers will meet Alex Gobel at the Park office (past the gate beside the visitor center) by 7:45am. Data collection starts at 8:30am. Observation sites will be indicated by distance in miles north of Gate 1 (water treatment facility). Each site will document the following:

- Date
- Time
- Animal observed
- Direction of animal's travel
- Observer comments about the wildlife (life stage, size, health, male/female etc.)

We recommend you bring a chair, compass, binoculars, and a camera. You will be at your station for 2 hours, so bring plenty of water and snacks. This is a great opportunity to meet like-minded individuals and learn more about the abundant wildlife that calls Fakahatchee Strand home. The data you collect is important to ongoing research and conservation efforts.

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>).



Bio Blitz Dates

- November 13th
- December 11th
- January 15th
- February 12th
- March 19th
- April 16th

News from the Strand

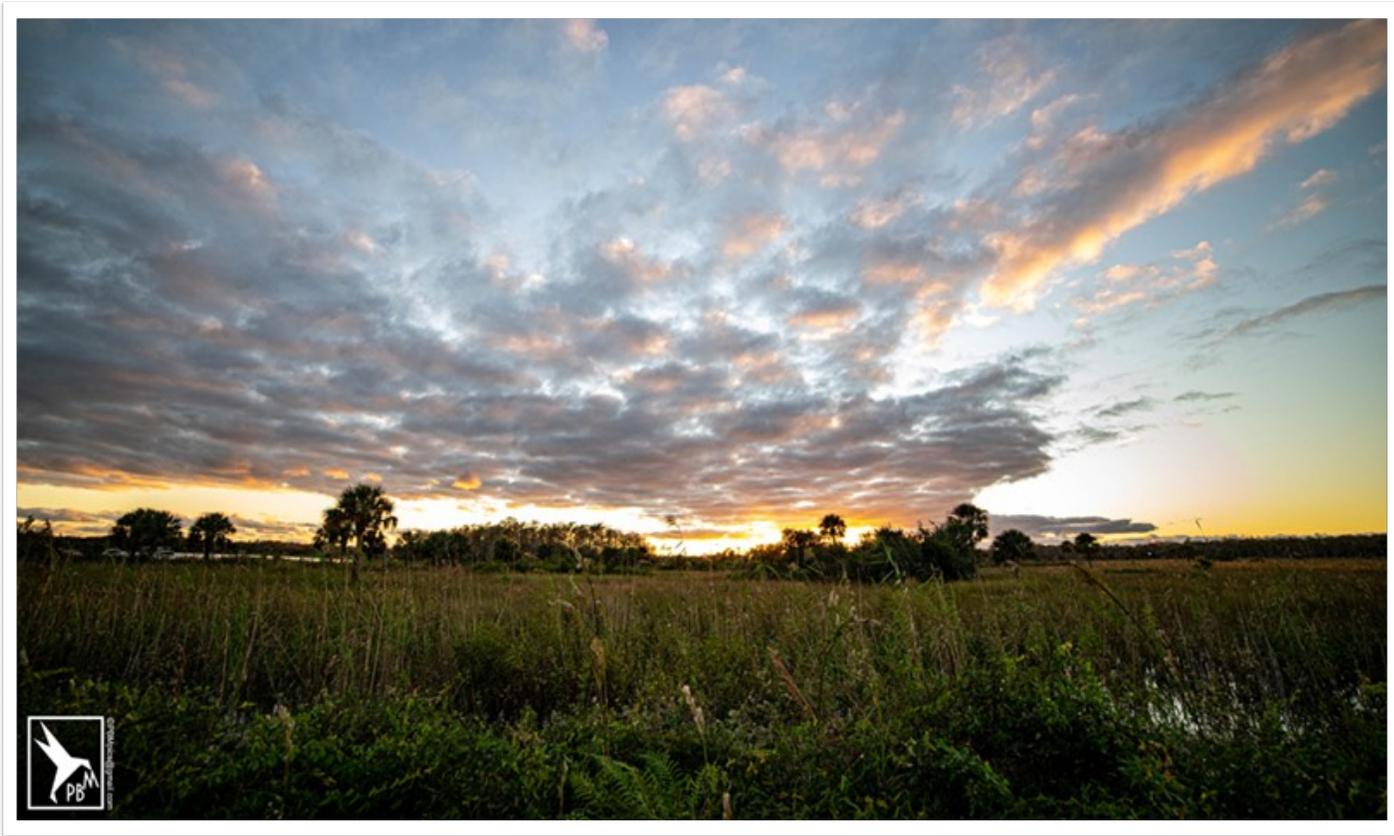
Friends docent program in development

In September Master Naturalist Gordon Saager spent a day at the boardwalk. He is starting to develop a docent program for the Friends volunteers. When complete, Boardwalk guides and other volunteers will be able to be trained.



Seen in the Strand

Fakahatchee sunset



Once again Phil McGuire has captured the Fak's majestic spaciousness. Only by visiting can you fully comprehend what a treasure our Preserve is. Visit soon!

Donation Strategies by Chris Gair

Residency vs. Domicile

A close friend who lives in Fort Myers worked for the famous auction house Christie's in New York when Liberace passed away. My friend was assigned the job of appraising the entertainer's personal belongings which were housed among his five homes. What a job that must have been! The resulting auction was under scrutiny by the IRS for federal estate tax purposes and also California for state inheritance tax purposes.

The terms residency and domicile are all too often confused. We can have all the residences we want, but we have only one domicile, that being the one we call home. Important? For sure, since state laws govern our property rights and states can assess their own income and estate taxes.

The benefits of Florida domicile are many; homestead rights, a generally lower cost of living, and no state income nor inheritance tax among them. To establish Florida domicile, you need to consult with your estate planning attorney for the many steps required. It is simply not enough to say Florida is my domicile. You must take steps to say your former state is not. It is a process of exclusion that includes filing of your final state income tax return if your prior domicile state has one.

OK, but what does all this have to do with charitable giving to Friends? Time your gifts for the best tax result. Work with your tax advisor to ensure, if possible, that your gift is recognized for the best result for both state and federal tax reporting. And that of course includes gifts from your IRA Required Minimum Distributions.

Relocating to Florida has many advantages, and it is well worth the effort to make sure it is done correctly.

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

History – Saving the Fakahatchee

Second Installment

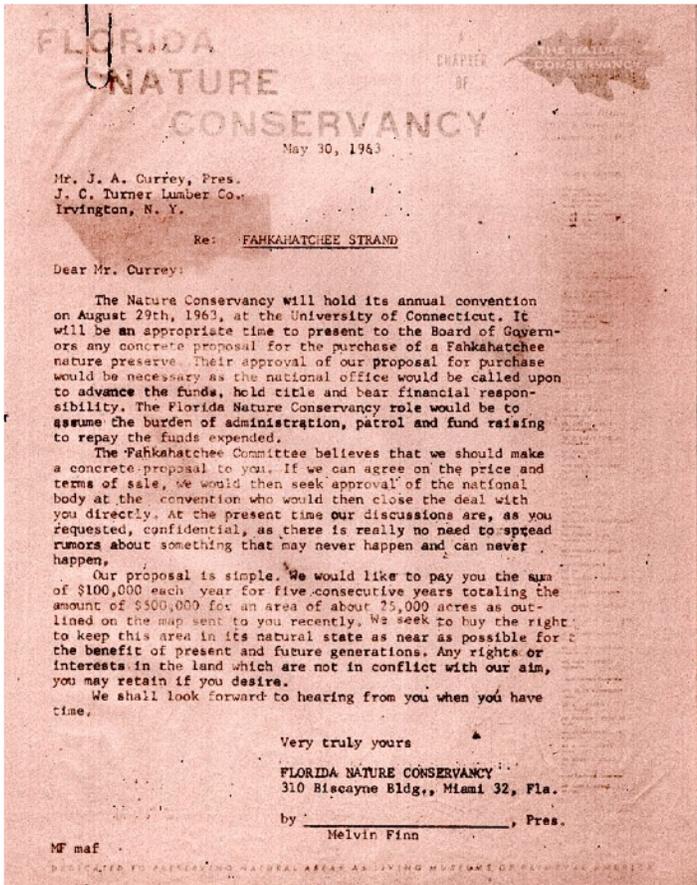
By Francine Stevens, Executive Director, Friends of Fakahatchee

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.

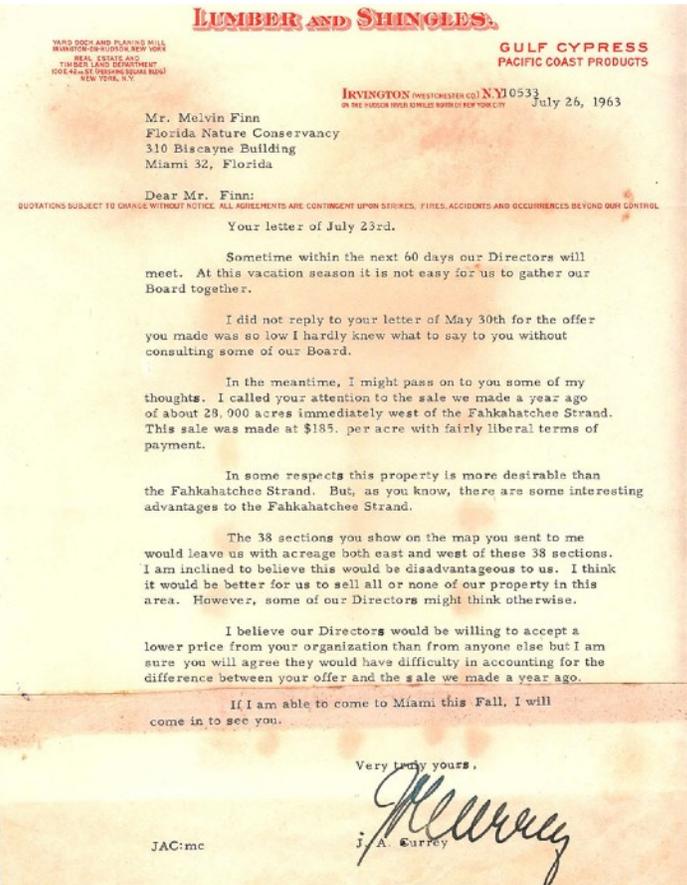
Over 800 documents were scanned by Andrew Tyler and myself. These are now saved in the Friends' "Cloud" archives for safe keeping. This is the second installment of sharing the most interesting documents recording their efforts, set backs, and progress.

Document 3: May 10, 1963 – Mel Finn letter to Mr. Currey at Turner Lumber

Document 4: July 26, 1963 – Mr. Currey's response to Mel Finn regarding offer.



Mel Finn, representing the Florida Nature Conservancy, offers \$500,000 for "about 25,000 acres"



Mr. Currey rejects the offer, but leaves the possibility of a sale open to further discussion.

Membership News

Members make a difference!

Welcome new member: *Judith Morgan*.
Congratulations to *Susan Beittel* for transitioning to a Life Membership.
We have 334 members.

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
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.

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: #fakahatcheestrands, #friendsoffakahatchee, #fakahatcheestrandspreserve



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](http://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