



# The Ghost Writer

Newsletter of the Friends of Fakahatchee  
Visit our website at [www.orchidswamp.org](http://www.orchidswamp.org)

The Ghost Writer – November 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

On Saturday November 16th, the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation launched their Strand to Slough Expedition at the Fakahatchee ([visit https://floridawildlifecorridor.org/x24/](https://floridawildlifecorridor.org/x24/)). The program started with a kickoff earlier in the morning at the Big Cypress Preserve. But it was in the "Fak" that the three "trekkers" started the days long journey – including Laura Foht, the spouse of our very own board member Eric Foht. The trek includes hiking, biking and paddling through private and public lands vital to conserving corridor connectivity. Since 2012, the Wildlife Corridor Foundation has held treks to showcase the 18 million acres that are vulnerable and irreplaceable.



In addition to past Presidents Tom Maish and Glen Stacell and myself, our Park Manager Joe Berger and Biologist Cole Luttrell helped to host notables that support the program. Present were Senator Kathleen Passidomo, the Florida Agriculture Commissioner Wilton Simpson, Director of Division of Recreation and Parks Chuck Hatcher, and the CEO of the Foundation, Mallory Dimmitts. A newly designed Wildlife Corridor sign was unveiled and placed at the beginning of Jane's Scenic Drive.

Our outreach program is continuing with presentations about the Fakahatchee and the Friends Groups. Recently I was pleased to talk to many people at the Marco Island Men's Club at their request. They, like many others, truly enjoyed the video that the Friends paid for by the local photographer Jay Staton. If you have not had the opportunity, please make sure to check out some of his beautiful photographs that adorn the Interpretative Pavilion at the new Boardwalk.

This season of Tours has started with Swamp Walks, Night Sky events and an upcoming Tram Tour. Let your friends and families know that many of these great programs fill up quickly so be sure to purchase tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/FOFtours>. I think that many people would enjoy the holiday gift of being able to have the chance to explore our slice of heaven with a knowledgeable naturalist guide.

Now you are able to sign up for tickets to our Members Welcome Back event on December 14th at <https://tinyurl.com/welcome-back-FOF>. As a reminder, in addition to all of us getting to see many of our friends, we will have a great program including Ian Easterling's presentation about Burmese Pythons, and delicious barbecue food.

I look forward to seeing you all on the fourteenth!

*Cordially,  
Virginia "Ginny" Palmer Skok  
President*

## Strand to Slough Expedition launches at the Fakahatchee

All Photos by Andy Skok.

After starting in the Fak the trekkers will hike, bike, or paddle through Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, the Okaloacoochee Slough, ending near the Caloosahatchee River. We're pleased to support their efforts to preserve more of Florida's natural areas.



(L to R) Park Biologist Cole Luttrell, Park Manager Joe Berger, FOF President Virginia Palmer Skok, and Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation CEO Mallory Dimmitt.



(L to R) Former President Tom Maish, Judy Maish, Senator Kathleen Passidomo, and Virginia Palmer Skok.



(L to R) Agricultural Commissioner Wilton Simpson, Judy Maish, Tom Maish, Virginia Palmer Skok and former FOF President Glen Stacell.



(L to R) Mallory Dimmitt and Joe Berger.



(L to R) Park Biologist Cole Luttrell, FL Parks Director Chuck Hatcher, and Joe Berger.



(On bikes, near to far) Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation's Strand to Slough Expedition trekkers: Laura Foht, Em Kless, and Kenton Beal.

**Save the date – Tickets now on sale!**

Visit our Event-brite page to purchase your tickets now! <https://tinyurl.com/welcome-back-FOF>



**Welcome back luncheon for members at the park pole barn**

**Saturday Dec. 14  
12:30 to 3:30 pm**

**Guest speaker Ian Easterling will discuss 10 years of Burmese Python research and removal by the Conservancy of Southwest Florida**



**Chicken & spare rib lunch with side dishes catered by the Texas Roadhouse**

**Tickets \$35 at [orchidwamp.org](http://orchidwamp.org)**  
Questions? Call 239-695-1023

## 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 Night Sky sessions offer limited access to the Fakahatchee after park hours to observe interesting formation of planets and stars. Night Sky sessions are offered monthly through April 2025. 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 is now conducting Swamp Walks for the Friends through March 2025. To see dates and purchase tickets visit <https://tinyurl.com/biologist-swamp-walk>. Photo by Rita Bauer.



The first Moonlit Tram Tour is scheduled for December 15, followed by monthly tours through April 2025. To select a date and purchase tickets visit <https://tinyurl.com/FOF-moonlit-tram>. Photo by Glen Stacell.

## 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>).



## Many ways to 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.)



*The elusive Everglades mink, photo by Ross Merrigan.*

#### Bio Blitz Dates

December 11th  
January 15th  
February 12th  
March 19th  
April 16th

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.

## Lots of opportunities to volunteer 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](mailto:Office@FOFinc.org).

### Guides for the Friends Tour Program

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

### 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 presence at the new Boardwalk site. The Friends presence will help 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 can be 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.

**For more information regarding the Friends volunteer opportunities, please contact Francine Stevens at 239-695-1023 or e-mail at [Office@FOFinc.org](mailto:Office@FOFinc.org).**

## News from the Strand

### All Park Staff caught – same time, same place

All current Fakahatchee staff were in the office on Friday, November 1, together for the first time in some time, so someone grabbed a camera and herded them all outside for this fine group photo.



Left to right: Administrative Assistant Gregg Roberts, Park Manager Joe Berger, Park Services Specialist Steven Bass, Park Services Specialist Alex Gobel, Biological Scientist II Cole Luttrell, Park Ranger Jackie Wright, and Park Ranger Ray Boniface.

### FOF represented at Picayune Strand Festival in the Forest



FOF Vice President Tom Trotta and his wife Debbie represented the FOF at the Picayune Strand Festival in the Forest. Many thanks for your time spreading the word about the Park and the Friends! Photo by Ginny Skok.

## Seen in the Strand

### Successful First Biologist Swamp Walk



*These Swamp Walkers got their feet wet on the first Swamp Walk of the season. The November 9 Biologist Swamp Walk was deemed a success by all in attendance. Photo by Andy Skok.*



*Biologist Cole Luttrell explained many swamp plants. Photo by Ginny Skok*

## Night Sky Experience features Comet ATLAS

The spectacular night sky over the Fakahatchee was in top form on Saturday, November 2 for the second Night Sky Experience, with Comet ATLAS making a cameo appearance amid constellations and the Milky Way. Be sure to get your tickets for one of the remaining events here – and remember tickets make memorable gifts.

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/FOF-nightsky>



*The Comet ATLAS is at the top near the right corner. Photo by Phil McGuire.*



*The Comet is much lower in the sky on the right side of this photo (also by Phil McGuire), where the Milky Way steals the show.*

## Donation Strategies by Chris Gair

### Florida is not a community property state – or is it??

Before we deal with this, IRS just announced important numbers for 2025 as follows:

The federal gift tax annual exclusion increases to \$19,000 from \$18,000 and the federal estate tax exemption increases to \$13,990,000 up from \$13,610,000. Certainly, good news but it is anyone's guess as to estate taxes that are set to change at the end of next year.

So, to the subject at hand, Florida now allows married couples the ability to treat property as Community Property by taking certain steps with their attorney even though Florida is not a community property state. (Here's the nine that are: Arizona, California, Idaho, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.)

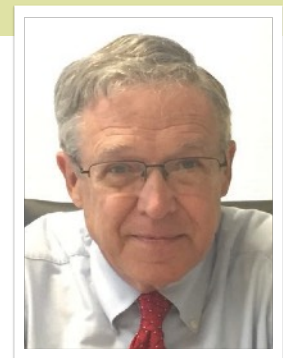
Basically, community property says "what's mine is ours" but for Floridians, why the choice? Well, it's primarily tax oriented with designated property receiving a FULL step-up in tax cost basis in the estate of the first to pass. For many folks that can be very important, but it takes planning, running the numbers, and rearranging your current estate plan. If you have a highly appreciated property and call Florida your domicile, check with your attorney to see if it makes sense for you.

But even with this good news on the tax front, your Traditional IRA is 100% subject to income tax for the amounts you receive. The best answer I know here is to simply designate FRIENDS as a contingent beneficiary of your IRA and to take a portion of your annual required distribution for the good work we are doing.

Estate planning is an ongoing process that deals with an ever-changing set of state and federal laws.

*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/>

# History – Saving the Fakahatchee

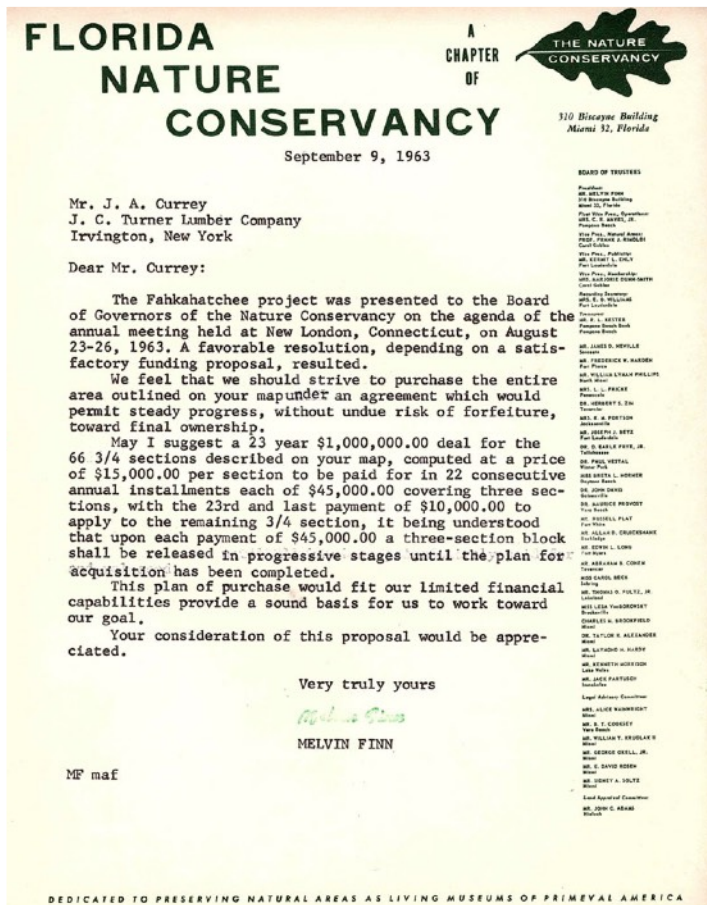
## Third Installment

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.

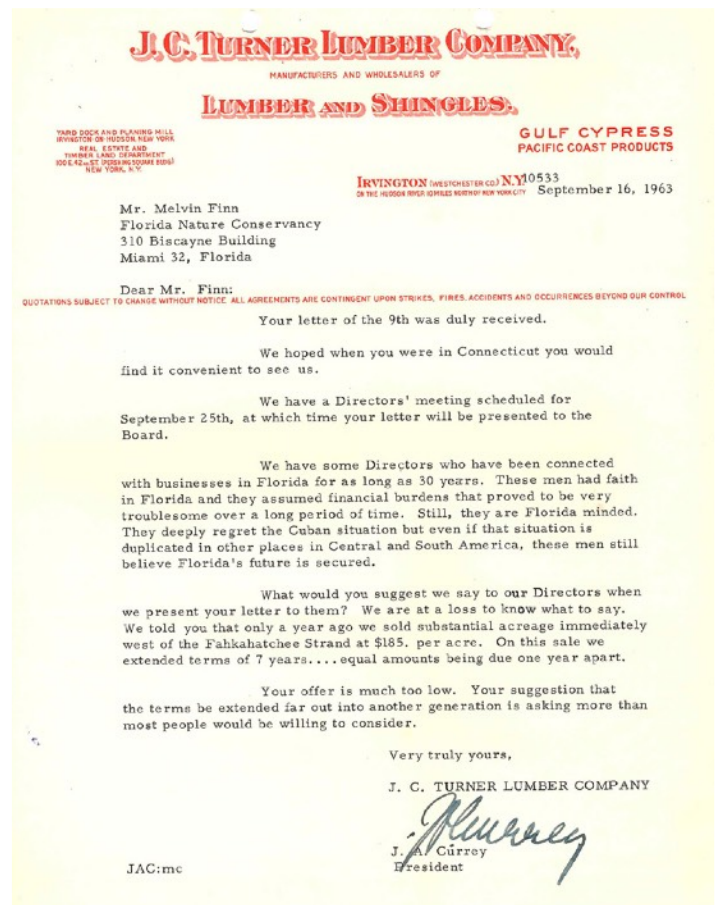
Over 800 documents were scanned by Andrew Tyler and myself. These are now saved in the Friends' "Cloud" archives for safe keeping. This is the second installment of sharing the most interesting documents recording their efforts, set backs, and progress.

### Document 5 September 9, 1963 – Mel Finn letter to Mr. Currey



Mel Finn, representing the FL Nature Conservancy (FNC), increases the amount of the Fakahatchee property with a price of \$1,000,000, to be paid in installments over 23 years.

### Document 6 September 16, 1963 – Mr. Currey replies Mel Finn



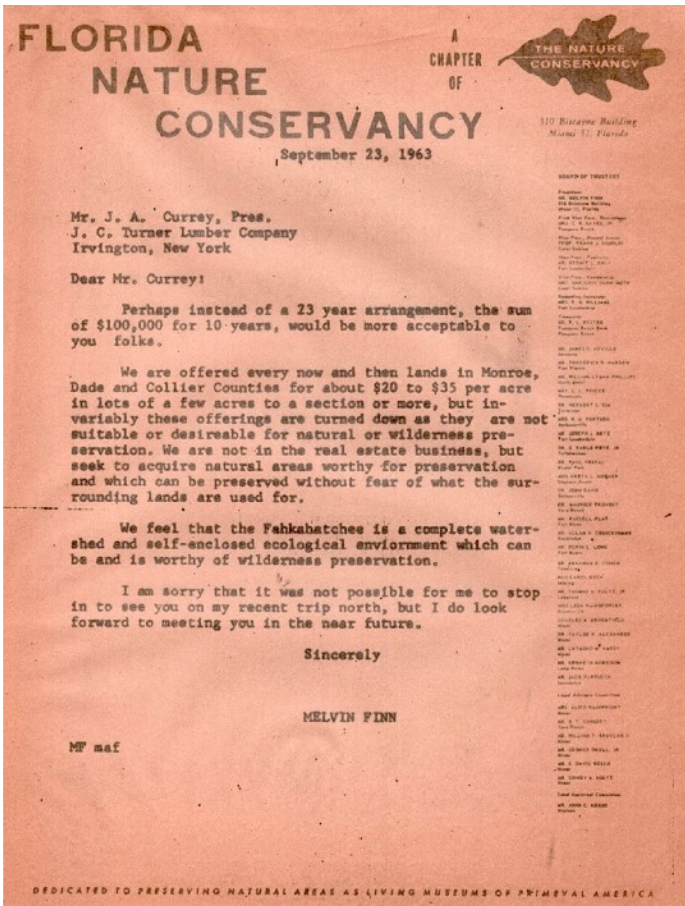
Mr. Currey (noting "the Cuba situation") rejects the offer from Mel Finn and the FNC as too low price for the amount of land and taking too long to pay.



Third Installment continued.

Document 7

September 23, 1963 – Mel Finn's counter proposal to Mr. Currey



Mel Finn maintains the million dollars price for the same larger property, but offers payment within 10 years.

# Membership News

Welcome new members: Charles Dhyse and Barbara Findlay

**Congratulations to Golda Rae Gillaspie for transitioning to a Life Membership.**

We have 331 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](mailto:connect@orchidswamp.org)

Add hashtags to show up in existing collections:

#fakahatcheestrans, #friendsoffakahatchee,

#fakahatcheestranspreservestatepark



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.

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