



The Ghost Writer

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

The Ghost Writer – December 2024

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

Dear Members,

As the water in the swamp draws down, it is the perfect time to get out into the preserve and take a swamp walk or meander down Janes Scenic Drive to truly enjoy what the Fakahatchee has to offer. This weekend I was able to witness yet again how individuals catch the "Fakahabit."

A private swamp walk was requested by a nice lady that I took out last year. She so fell in love with the swamp that she wanted to share the experience with another seven of her friends. It is always magical watching people fall in love with our magnificent preserve. I hope that everyone that has either thought about it or has already had the opportunity to explore the park takes advantage of this wonderful time of year. There are so many interesting tours available listed on orchidswamp.org.

Saturday marked our annual Members Welcome Back Picnic. It was an especially great event to get together with other members after having to cancel last year's picnic due to inclement weather. Our speaker, Ian Easterling from the Southwest Florida Conservancy, intrigued us with his discussion about the incursion of apex predator pythons and SWFC's eradication programs. Over 36,000 pounds of python have been removed from the Everglades since 2013 by the Conservancy. Special thanks to our Executive Director Francine Stevens for arranging the delicious barbecue and our speaker.

Outreach continues with presentations to public groups and a presence at events. The Friends recently had tables at the Picayune Forest Festival and for the first time at the Fiftieth Anniversary Big Cypress Swamp Festival. My husband and I both worked at the events with the Trotta's, but special thanks go to Tom and Debbie who created a truly fantastic display that draws in many visitors.

Cordially,

Virginia "Ginny" Palmer-Skok

President

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>).



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 are scheduled 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.



For scheduled Moonlit Tram Tours through April 2025. To select a date and purchase tickets visit <https://tinyurl.com/FOF-moonlit-tram>. Photo by Glen Stacell.

Members enjoy another successful Annual Picnic



Left to right: Francine Stevens and Tours volunteers Dick and Edite Hughes, and Ted DeGroot. All photos taken by Phil McGuire.



President Virginia Palmer Skok (right) leads the members to begin at the buffet table.



Rudi Ettrich, far left behind Debra Taylor, front left, were a great help at the picnic.



Long time member Mr. Durland Fish rarely misses a Friends event. He drove all night from Connecticut to make it on time for the Picnic. Welcome Back, Durland!



Youngest FOF member Elias Lilly helped Conservancy Biologist Ian Easterling hold a preserved python skin.



Upcoming season’s projects announced

Volunteer Coordinator Alex Gobel has announced the upcoming season's projects that could use the help of volunteers, from working in the field or at the new boardwalk site and participating in the Bio Blitz survey. Alex made a special request to anyone who has skills in operating heavy machinery for field and road maintenance. *Photo by Phil McGuire.*

Individuals interested in helping Park staff should contact Alex Gobel, Fakahatchee Volunteer Coordinator. Email: alex.gobel@floridadep.gov or Call: (239)-961-1925. 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.)

Bio Blitz Dates
January 15th
February 12th
March 19th
April 16th



Andy and Ginny Skok were joined by retired Park Biologist Mike Owen for the December Bio Blitz. Volunteer Coordinator Alex Gobel is waiting to hear from you for the next Blitz!

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.

Volunteer opportunities for the Friends abound

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.

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.

News from the Strand

Passidomo family enjoys first Swamp Walk



Senator Kathleen Passidomo gets her feet wet on her first Swamp Walk in the Fakahatchee.



Senator Passidomo (in dark blue) and her family enjoyed their first Swamp Walk in the Fakahatchee led by Friends President Virginia Palmer Skok assisted by Andy Skok.

Taking advantage of the Friends *Introduction to Swamp Walk* tour, scheduled to begin in 2025, is a great way to test the water before graduating to the Advanced Swamp Walk Tour!

Return to the Fakahatchee – The sequel

After enjoying her experience on the Advanced Swamp Walk led by President Virginia Palmer Skok last season, FOF member Diane Mayberry Hatt organized another Advanced Swamp Walk with her group of friends. Virginia was delighted to see Diane again – "these self-proclaimed nature nerds have definitely caught the Faka-Habit."



Far left is Virginia Palmer Skok. Far right is Diane Mayberry Hatt. Photo by Andy Skok.

A web without Charlotte



Dew sparkling in this web created a magical image in the Fakahatchee one recent morning. Photo by Charlie Egli.

History – Saving the Fakahatchee

Fourth 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.

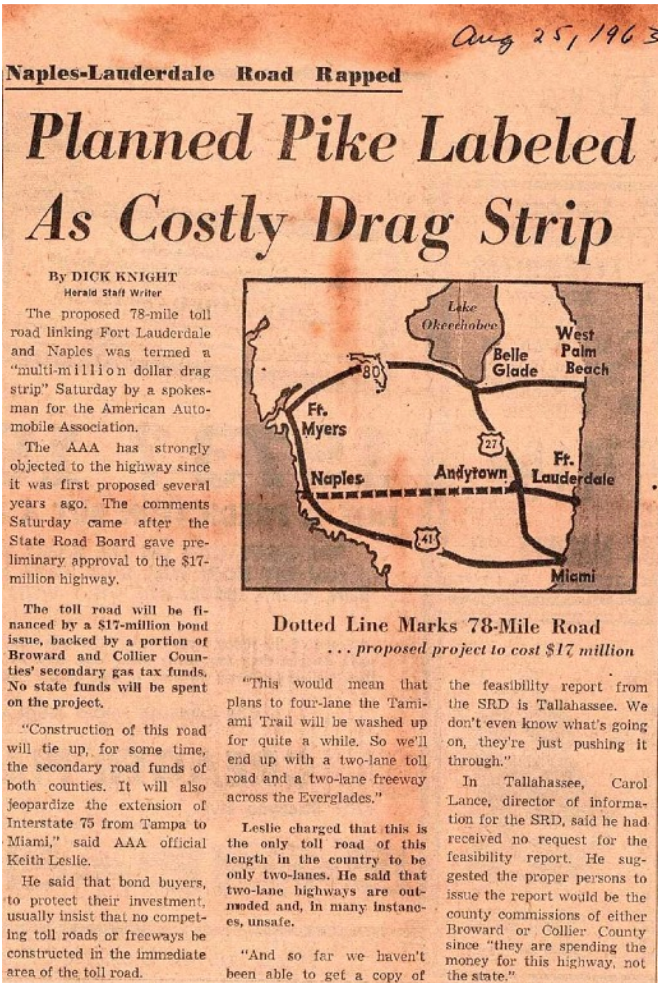
Documents in this installment show that while Mel Finn's efforts to save the Fakahatchee continue, plans are underway to build a 2-lane toll road between Fort Lauderdale and Naples. Land is being acquired for the 17-million-dollar project!

Document 8 August 25, 1963 – "Planned Pike Labeled as Costly Drag Strip" newspaper article

Automobile Association of America (AAA) objects to the new "outmoded" 2-lane toll road, noting it would likely, "jeopardize the extension of Interstate 75 from Tampa to Miami."

Document 9 September 17, 1963 – "A Few Curves in the Spurnpike" newspaper article

A feasibility study for the proposed toll road comes to light, upsetting the State Road Board Chairman.



Document 10

September 19, 1963 – "Approval Is Expected For Glades Tollway"

One Broward County commissioner has issues with the proposed toll road.

September 29, 1963 – "Phillips Blasted again by AAA"

The State Road Board Chair and AAA official exchange arguments.

February 29, 1964 – "1,067-Acre Gift Goes To Tollway"

Lee Tidewater Cypress in one of the real estate firms promising land for the road!

Approval Is Expected *Sept 19, 1963* For Glades Tollway

Action By SRD Set Today

By NIXON SMILEY
Herald Staff Writer

Final approval of the Everglades Expressway, proposed Fort Lauderdale-Naples toll road, is expected to be given Thursday by the State Road Board, despite last-minute efforts to delay action.

The board meets at 11:30 a.m. in the Duval County Commission chambers in Jacksonville.

Chairman John R. Phillips and John H. Monahan, board member from Fort Lauderdale, have been strong backers of the road. The other five members are expected to go along.

Gov. Farris Bryant has been a strong supporter of the toll road since it was proposed in 1962.

J. Herbert Burke, only member of the Broward County commission who has been against the road, said Wednesday that there had been "too much haste in trying to get the road underway."

"The public is not sufficiently aware of the extent of the county's involvement," Burke added. "The county already has pledged 11 million dollars of secondary road tax money for road bonds. I think it's dangerous to pledge more of these funds on a toll road across the Everglades when we need so much done on local roads."

Burke said he was not against building a road across the Everglades to the Gulf Coast, but that he was against the proposed method. He also doubted the wisdom of building a toll road whose economic justification is based on projected growth of

In Tollpike Dispute

Sum Sep 29, 1963

Phillips Blasted Again by AAA

TAMPA — (UPI) — An official of the Florida conference of the American Automobile Association accused State Road Board Chairman John R. Phillips with failing to face up to the public and answer questions concerning the controversial Naples to Fort Lauderdale toll road project.

Phillips had upbraided the AAA in a letter to Ridgely Jones, an AAA executive here, for failing to have a representative present when the road board gave final approval to the toll road project.

"Chairman Phillips well knows that the AAA is on record with the State Road Department opposing this project, at the State Road Department meetings Aug. 22 and Sept. 19," Jones replied Saturday.

Jones said he received the letter from Phillips Saturday and immediately mailed out a reply.

"We wish to call to your attention the fact that we sent a telegram to the State Road Department on the morning of Aug. 22 (the same day on which we learned of your meeting) expressing our opposition to this project," Jones' letter read.

Jones wrote that the AAA had contacted the Florida Development Commission Sept. 6 regarding its meeting Sept. 9 and was told by Roger Stake that there was no place on the agenda for the AAA to be heard in opposition to the project and that "there was no need for our appearing, since the Florida Development Commission was bound to take the recommendation of the State Road Board."

He said that on Sept. 10, the AAA learned of the meeting that afternoon of the State Bond Review Board through a press inquiry and immediately called Jimmie Kynes (Gov. Farris Bryant's administrative assistant) and asked that the meeting be postponed to allow the AAA to appear.

"As you well know, the State Bond Review Board passed the measure the same afternoon," the letter read.

Jones said he had been advised that Secretary of State Tom Adams has again requested answers from Phillips to questions posed by the AAA. Questions were presented Illinois Sept. 17.

1,067-Acre Gift Goes To Tollway

By TOM MORGAN
Naples Bureau Chief

NAPLES — A gift of 1,067 acres for right of way of the Everglades Parkway — "Alligator Alley" — and assurances of much more land were announced Friday.

Gifts from the Collier interests amounted to 45 miles of the 100 lineal miles of proposed road frontage in Collier County. Nine more miles are expected to be given by the Gerry brothers interests of New York and Massachusetts.

Additional mileage in Collier County has been promised by such large real estate firms as Gulf American Land Co. and Lee Tidewater Cypress.

In Broward County, where 56 miles of frontage are needed, almost all lie within the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District.

The Collier gift was made by Barron G. Collier Jr. for the Collier estate and Collier-Reed Corp. to Dewey Polly, County Commission chairman.

At the same time, Dr. G. H. Williams and his wife, of Naples, presented one of the smaller right-of-way parcels, 6.2 acres near East Naples.

The 17-million-dollar toll road, planned and discussed for 30 years, had its bonds approved by the Circuit Court of Leon County.

Membership News

Members make a difference!

Welcome new members: Adrian Alvarez and David Grinnell.
We have 338 members.



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:
#fakahatcheestrland, #friendsoffakahatchee,
#fakahatcheestrlandpreservestatepark



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/>
<https://www.fidelitycharitable.org/>

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

Board of Directors meeting schedule

- January 19, 2025
- February 16, 2025
- March 22, 2025
- April 20, 2025
- May 18, 2025
- June 15, 2025
- July 20, 2025
- August 17, 2025
- September 21, 2025
- October 19, 2025
- November 16, 2025
- December 20, 2025

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](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