



The Ghost Writer

Newsletter of the Friends of Fakahatchee
Visit our website at www.orchidswamp.org
Email the Friends at Office@FOFinc.org

The Ghost Writer – January 2025

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,

Happy New Year and Best wishes to all Friends for a wonderful year.

Recently I was a participant in the multi-day Bryophyte Workshop at the Fakahatchee. Scientists from all over the country and Canada worked on the development of a plant list of all the mosses and Liverworts that live in the Preserve. I had the opportunity to marvel at just how wonderful and biodiverse our Preserve is! Our biologist Cole Lutrell helped to lead the research team. Everyone was fascinated to learn that not only are we the orchid, bromeliad, Peperomia and native Royal Palm capital of North America, but there are over seven hundred plants on our plants list. The list is expected to only keep growing when new plants are identified.

On recent swamp walks I was happy to hear that there were people that were gifted with the experience of the swamp. We were able to sing Happy Birthday to some delighted participants in the middle of a slough in front of beautiful, endangered orchids. We even had a honeymoon excursion this season!

Remember that one of the Friends tours can be a wonderful present for any special occasion – not just a typical material gift, but an experience that could be remembered and treasured for a lifetime.

Cordially,

Virginia "Ginny" Palmer-Skok, President



Message from Bryophyte Survey leader Tom Phillips

The Crum Bryological Workshop was held at Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve early this January. *Bryology* is the study of mosses, liverworts and hornworts and the Crum was named in honor of Howard Crum, a prominent American bryologist who taught bryology and botany at the University of Michigan.



Bryophyte survey team with Tom Phillips near center in bright blue shirt.

Bryology Continued >

The idea developed from my participation in one of the swamp walks sponsored by the Friends of Fakahatchee about three years ago. I was aware that a sister group, The Tuckerman Workshop, had held a lichen survey in Fakahatchee in 2009 and that survey had added many new species to the biodiversity list for the Preserve. I wondered at the time if a bryological survey had ever been done. A review of the literature revealed that there were random collections from Fakahatchee - mostly historical – but no full surveys had been completed. In fact, there were very few surveys in all south Florida, and those that were done were for fairly limited areas.



Life member Ruth Brooks and President Virginia Palmer Skok examine bryophytes on a tree trunk.

My friend Ruth Brooks helped make contact with folks at the Friends and the Preserve to bring the Crum to Fakahatchee. From January 2nd through January 5th eight bryologists, professors at various colleges, graduate students and a few avid naturalists surveyed a variety of habitats in the preserve from sloughs, swamp forests, to hammocks. Our goal was to collect small samples of as many species as we could find to build a species list for the Preserve. We needed to collect specimens since moss and liverwort identification requires the use of microscopes to examine microscopic details such as leaf cell size and shape, the presence of a midrib (a costa) in the leaf, the presences of small bumps on the leaf cells (papillae), microscopic views of the stem or a cross section of the stem as well as many other features. We were allowed access to laboratory space and microscopes at the FGCU-Naples Botanical Garden Kapnick Center at the Naples Botanical Garden.

Each morning, we were transported to different field sites to survey and collect. We then returned to the lab in the late afternoon and evening to do our microscopic work. Most days we were joined by interested members of the Friends and other botanical folks. Several of the Friends also joined us in

the lab to learn more about what bryophyte identification entails. The group made many more collections than we were able to identify while in Florida, so our work continues at home. Once the all the collections have been identified we will collate the information, a list will be delivered to the preserve, and a journal article will be written – hopefully published in a journal called *Evansia*, a journal of the American Bryological and Lichenological Society.

We would like to say a hearty thank-you to the staff at the Preserve for their help that went above and beyond to make our workshop a success and in particular Park Biologist Cole Luttrell who arranged the field sites and to retired park Biologist Mike Owen who early on helped start the planning process. We also thank Brian Bovard of FGCU who arranged our use of the lab space at the Kapnick Center. Several folks from the Friends group also helped by putting us in contact with the right people and facilitating those connections. A big thanks goes to Rita Bauer for her early work helping us plan. Virginia Palmer Skok, Andy Skok, and Karen Relish invited other interested botanists, participated in the field and joined us in the laboratory. Thank You!

Fakahatchee is a special place, and we will add more species diversity to its already long list.

– Tom Phillips



Survey team members (l to r) Allen Risk, Tom Phillips, Ruth Brooks, and Blair Young knee deep in the Fak.

Rare ferns thrive in the Fakahatchee

by Eric and Rita Bauer

On a recent rare fern exploration, Jennifer Possley, the South Florida Conservation Program Manager and Fern Specialist at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Gardens, gave us a tour of her fern nursery.



Jennifer and potted ferns. Photos by Jennifer Possley.

Jennifer inquired how the rare ferns were doing at the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve where the Park Biologist, Cole Lutrell, had invited her to outplant 20 supplementary specimen of *Campyloneurum costatum* (Wavy strap fern) and *Campyloneurum angustifolium* (Narrow strap fern) in June 2024.

Both fern species are on the state endangered list. *Angustifolium* has been on a steady decline for decades, and can now only be found in a few locations hidden deep in the sloughs. The goal of this project is to see if these spore-grown, nursery-bred ferns could survive in their native environment.

Park Biologist Cole Lutrell and new Fakahatchee Park Ranger Jacqueline Wright found an ideal location deep in the slough, and with the help of visiting Lee County Environmental Specialist William Greene and volunteer Dave Grinnell, All 20 specimens were successfully planted.



Left: David Grinnell, Cole Lutrell, Jacqueline Wright, and William Green planting deep in the slough. Right: Rare fern attached to it's new home in the Fak. Photos by David Grinnell.

[Rare Ferns Continued >](#)

In October 2024, Cole Lutrell and Jacqueline checked on the ferns and found that **all 20 had taken root in their host tree**. Due to the drought and change in season, the ferns appeared dehydrated and in need of help. Since then, Jacqueline has

dedicated her time to monitoring and watering these plants. She comes out to the slough once a week when it does not rain. With this consistent care, the ferns have begun to sprout new fronds and form sori, which are documented on each visit. With these efforts, the staff at Fakahatchee hope to see the comeback of one of our most rare species.



With Eric Bauer, a keen fern enthusiast, I accompanied Jacqueline on one of her “fern monitoring rounds” in the sloughs and saw firsthand how these ferns were thriving because of the dedication and care of our Park Ranger to help save another species from extinction.

*Jacqueline Wright monitoring *Campyloneurum costatum* (Wavy strap fern).
Photo by Rita Bauer.*



*Left: Jackie Wright and healthy outplanted fern. Right: Eric and Jackie slog through the slough to check on the ferns.
Photos by Rita Bauer.*

*Eric and Jackie monitor progress of this
Campyloneurum angustifolium (Narrow strap fern).
Photo by Rita Bauer.*

**Jackie and Cole, you are a testament.
With your TLC the ferns are still alive and will
continue to thrive. Bravo!**



Tickets on sale for 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 through 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, visit <https://tinyurl.com/FOF-moonlit-tram>. Photo by Glen Stacell.

Two New Dates added for Introduction to Swamp Walk with Interpretive Tram Tour

February 24 and March 10 are the dates of two Introduction to Swamp Walk with Interpretive Tram Tours. 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. It is especially tailored for folks who have been procrastinating about going on a swamp walk.

For more information and to purchase tickets please visit <https://tinyurl.com/swampwalkintro>.



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.

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>).



Seen in the Strand

International orchid expert visits the Fakahatchee

by Virginia Palmer Skok.

Worldwide orchid expert and Ecology Professor Dr. Hong Lui from FL International University recently brought students for a swamp walk to teach them about the Fakahatchee's endangered orchids.

Dr. Lui (left) and Virginia Palmer Skok on (right) enjoying their Swamp Walk in the beautiful Fakahatchee Strand. Photo By Andy Skok



Another Sold-out Swamp Walk with Biologist Cole Lutrell



The cool and rainy day did not put a damper on the experience! Photo by Andy Skok.

Return to the Fakahatchee – 20 years later



Dona Syler revisited the Fakahatchee – 20 years after her first Swamp Walk! She brought with her a group of friends, driving all the way from Orlando. Virginia Plamer Skok (left), and Dona Syler (right), stand in front of the adventurous group of friends. Photo By Andy Skok.

Moonlit tour

by Carol Spagnolo

The weather was good, and the sky was clear. The attendees were enjoying themselves taking photos while socializing. Everyone wanted to stay long enough to see Mars. We stayed until the Moon was high enough and the sky was dark enough. Not only did we all get to see Mars, but we also got to see Jupiter and Saturn in the sky. Of course, it was dark when we arrived back at the Visitor Center, so Norma positioned the truck so the headlights lit the way to their vehicles.

At first I thought the alligator we nick named Mr. Grumpy had made his way down to Six Pipe Slough and decided to sun himself on Jane's Scenic. There was a rather large gator sitting right on the road above and close to the culvert pipes. It quickly made a run into the water as Norma slowly and carefully started to drive past it. However, it wasn't Mr. Grumpy. He was still up on the Gate 2 trail preventing us from walking far enough to see very much. However, he did present a good photo op – from a safe distance of course.



Norma Gordon and Carol Spagnolo preparing to conduct the Moonlit Tour.

Volunteer to assist Park Staff

Still time to help – 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.

Park staff also need your help to clear trails, tend the butterfly garden, help with repairs and general maintenance, 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



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!

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

Donation Strategies on hold

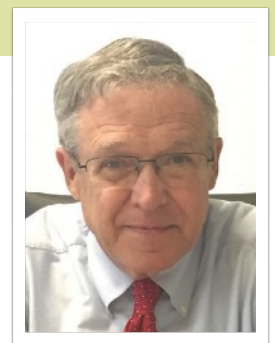
Donation Strategies by Chris Gair is temporarily on hold. We are saddened by the news that Chris' wife Barbara passed away suddenly on Christmas morning. We offer our most sincere condolences to Chris and his family.

Obituary for Barbara Pilling Gair

Mrs. Barbara Pilling Gair of Fort Myers unexpectedly passed away on December 25, 2024 at Lee Memorial Health Park. Barbara was born on June 10, 1944 in Earlestown, England. Her parents were Thomas and Margaret Pilling (nee Isherwood). Barbara is survived by her husband of forty-four years, Chris A. Gair, her son Derek C. Gair, three grandchildren, Sophie, Skyler and Savannah, her brother, Derek Pilling of England and her niece, Mrs. Alison Vials of England.

After schooling in the north of England Barbara moved to London where she began her decades long career in the travel industry. During this time Barbara traveled extensively and ultimately came to America. Barbara was a key travel advisor with Aladin Travel in Cape Coral (that was acquired by Geraci Travel). Barbara and Chris retired in 2022 and they continued to enjoy world travel. Barbara was a bright light of dignity, compassion, and love of life for all who knew her.

A celebration of Barbara's life will be planned and the family asks that in lieu of flowers donations be made to her favorite charity, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.



Membership News

Members make a difference!

Welcome new members: Richard Aroson, Addie Gilkerson, Bernadette Guerra, Elizabeth Kiser, William Little, and Henry Loeser.

We have 306 members.

Many thanks to Ruth Brooks for transitioning to a Life Membership.

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

2025 Election Call for Nominees

Watch your e-mail for a special bulletin to be sent soon to the membership announcing the **2025 Call for Nominees** to serve on the Friends of Fakahatchee Board.



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:
[#fakahatcheestrans](#), [#friendsoffakahatchee](#),
[#fakahatcheestransandpreservestatepark](#)



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 or write to us at Office@FOFinc.org.



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/>

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

- February 16, 2025
- March 29, 2025*
- April 27, 2025*
- May 18, 2025
- June 15, 2025
- July 2025, no meeting
- August 17, 2025
- September 21, 2025
- October 19, 2025
- November 16, 2025
- December 20, 2025
- *Date change

Meetings are scheduled for 10:30 AM

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