



# The Ghost Writer

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

The Ghost Writer – May-June 2025

## President and Exec Director Message

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to our volunteers for their invaluable contributions which raised \$29,379 during the tour season to support the park. From November 2024 through April 2025, our volunteers conducted 39 tours, educating and entertaining over 500 visitors who otherwise might not have visited the Fakahatchee Preserve.

Phil McGuire kicked off the season in October 2024 with the first of his monthly Night Sky sessions and ended the season with a last session on the 26th of April.

Park Biologist Cole Luttrell guided the Saturday Advanced Swamp Walks assisted by Virginia Palmer Skok and Andy Skok.

Virginia Palmer Skok guided an Advanced Swamp Walk, assisted by Andy Skok, for a group from Orlando.

Carol Spagnolo guided Morning Tram tours and Moonlit tours, assisted by Norma Gordon. This is a noteworthy accomplishment, considering it was Carol's first season as a tour guide.

Gordon Saager guided Morning Tram tours, assisted by Dick and Edite Hugues, as well as Charlie Egli. Gordon also guided an Introduction to Swamp Walk for the Naples Woman Club, assisted by Ted Lock.

Dick Brewer guided Morning Tram tours, assisted by Dick and Edite Hughes and Charlie Egli. Dick also guided a Tram tour for the Bonita Bay Garden club.

Ted DeGroot guided the Moonlit tours, assisted by Ted Lock and Charlie Egli.

Elizabeth Lilly guided the Introduction to Swamp Walk tours, assisted by Jason Brooks.

Our tours have been operating successfully for over ten years, supported by dedicated volunteers. Please contact us if you are interested in becoming a valuable member of our exceptional tour teams by calling 239-695-1023 or e-mailing us:

[office@FOFinc.org](mailto:office@FOFinc.org)

*Cordially,*

*Glen Stacell and Francine Stevens*

## Important Membership announcement

**Membership Secretary Marya Repko has officially retired.** Carol Spagnolo and Francine Stevens have assumed responsibility for membership duties. They are currently undertaking a significant project to migrate the data into a professional membership platform known as *Donor Snap*. Donor Snap is online management software that is user-friendly, thereby facilitating easier task management by the membership committee.

**To assist Carol and Francine, please e-mail any changes to your physical address, e-mail address, or phone number to:** [office@fofinc.org](mailto:office@fofinc.org) – Francine will respond to your email promptly.

As the project progresses, some of our members will be contacted either via email or postal mail to verify that their information in the database is accurate and that their membership remains in good standing. Members who were due to renew in the last quarter of 2024 have already been mailed a reminder letter indicating that it is not too late to renew. Additionally, members who were due to renew in the first quarter of 2025 have also been sent a letter.

Members who are due to renew in the second quarter of 2025 will be included with the new Donor Snap software, which is expected to be operational by the end of June. The transition will be seamless, and we will issue a special bulletin to our members upon the full implementation of Donor Snap.

***We extend our sincere congratulations to Marya for her remarkable 23 years of dedicated service to the Friends membership – a truly impressive achievement!***



**Important! The Friends postal address has changed to:  
PO Box 54, Bonita Springs FL 34133**

## News from the Strand

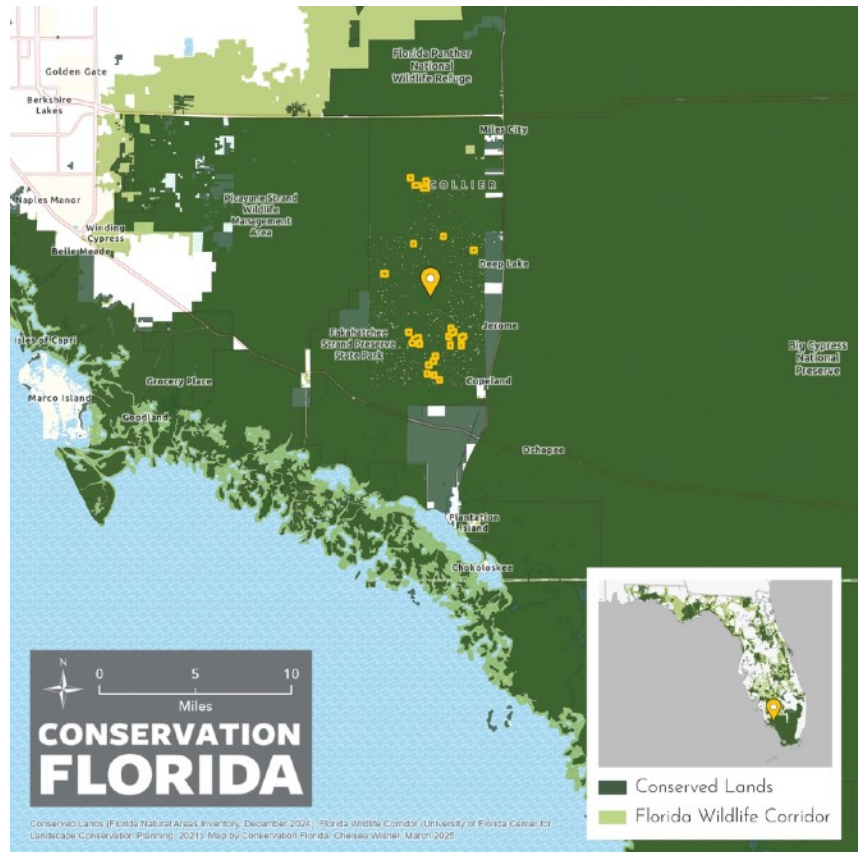
### Fakahatchee Park size increases by 60+ acres

It was all over the local newspapers recently that Avatar Properties (a descendant of Gulf American Land Corporation), sold 60.7 acres of properties they owned in the Fakahatchee.

“More than 60 acres spread over 17 land parcels have been added to Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park.

Conservation Florida purchased the 17 environmentally sensitive land parcels from Avatar Properties. Once acquired, Conservation Florida partnered with the FDEP’s Division of State Lands to facilitate the transfer and acquisition of the properties to the state park system. The state of Florida now owns and manages the 60.27 acres that have been incorporated into the public preserve”.

Visit <https://www.wgcu.org/top-story/2025-03-13/acreage-added-to-fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park-provides-more-panther-habitat> to read the full story, which includes video and photos of The Fak.



### Krispyn donation helps fund panther sculpture purchase

We extend our sincere gratitude to Mrs. Jeanette Atkinson for her generous donation in honor of her late husband, Egbert “Bert” Krispyn. Initially, when Mrs. Atkinson reached out to former President Tom Maish, she intended to fund park benches with her contribution.

Upon learning about our plans to acquire a panther sculpture for the Boardwalk Interpretive Pavilion, she graciously agreed that her donation towards this project was appropriate. The photo of Mrs. Atkinson with the panther was a gesture particularly meaningful since Mr. Krispyn’s favorite place during his later years was resting at the pond at the end of the old Boardwalk, which is currently undergoing reconstruction.

To read more about Mr. Krispyn, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/bertkrispyn>.



### Open-air transport for next season's new tours

Next season, the Friends will offer open-air transportation for interpretive field excursions, photography excursions, and swamp walks. These tours will accommodate smaller groups of five or six people, providing a more intimate experience with the guide – and with the Fak.



Getting the new truck ready for the next tour season – Charlie Egli and Tom Maish install a foldable ladder for safe access to the benches in the back of the truck. The newly installed foldable ladder will make the new benches in the back of the truck more easily accessible.



Debra Taylor, Glen Stacell, Charlie Egli, and Richard Birkhold enjoy the open-air ride on the truck benches as they discuss plans for the new FOF Tour. Photo by Francine Stevens.



Our intrepid planners develop itinerary and information for open-air field excursion, new for next season. Photo by Francine Stevens.

**Seen in the Strand**

**Phil McGuire shares his photos of glorious Fakahatchee**



*Spectacular view of the Boardwalk and the Interpretive Center.*



*Swallow Tailed Kites return to glide over the Fakahatchee in early summer from wintering in South America.*



*This Skimmer Dragonfly rests from feasting upon mosquitos.*



*Mistflower (Conoclinium) is a larval host plant for several butterfly and moth species.*



*Six Pipe Slough is almost unrecognizable during the dry season.*



*The bright red and orange patches on the male Red Wing Blackbirds' shoulders can be puffed when defending territory or calling females. They can also hide them under plain black feathers when in another's domain.*

## Volunteer to assist Park Staff

### Park Specialist Steven Bass new Volunteer Coordinator



Park Specialist Steven Bass has become the new Volunteer Coordinator for the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve. Projects managed by the Volunteer Coordinator present various volunteer opportunities, such as clearing trails, tending the butterfly garden, helping with repairs and general maintenance, and much more.

Steven will offer training to ensure safe operation of park equipment for trail clearing and maintenance projects. Additionally, lighter work is available on the Boardwalk to maintain its condition for our visitors.

If you are interested in volunteering to help the Park Staff, you can e-mail Steven at:

steven.bass@floridadep.gov or call him at (239) 253 6374.

*New Volunteer Coordinator Steven Bass is also a "Burn Boss." He is a certified professional who plans, organizes and oversees prescribed burns.*

### Volunteering for Friends takes many forms

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).**

## Donation Strategies by Chris Gair

### Tax advantages of charitable giving remain unchanged

First, on behalf of my family let me express my heartfelt appreciation for the support of so many FRIENDS during this most difficult period.\* *I am truly grateful.*

From a planning perspective it is one of the most difficult times in recent history to chart a course for financial planning. Uncertainty is the rule of the day and that has markets in turmoil. Investors can take good news and bad news, but no news and an absence of the way forward in large part explains the loss in market values so far in 2025.

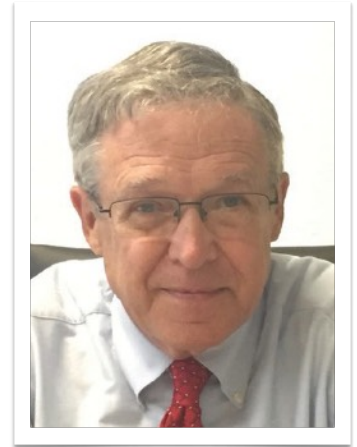
But take heart – there is good news. In all that is being suggested or proposed, there is nothing to even hint at a change in the tax advantages of charitable gifting from IRA's or other sources. So, the message here is not to let the confusion of the day change any plans to help the FRIENDS.

By now, those of us that must take a distribution from your IRA know what that number is. And yes, that number was in most cases determined from market values substantially higher than those current. That suggests waiting for a time this year to make your Qualified Charitable Distribution allowing income to compound and hopefully recover some of what the market has taken. And too, we have been here before and recovered. I believe we will again.

(\*Barbara Gair passed away suddenly on the 25th of December 2024)

*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.*



# History Corner: Seventh 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. Newspaper and magazine articles along with correspondence dating back to 1959 detail 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 seventh installment of sharir most interesting documents recording their efforts, set bac and progress.

1964 was a very active year in the efforts to save to save the Fakahatchee. News of the Fakahatchee as a "Wilderness Imperiled" was even reported to the nation in the Sunday edition of The New York Times.

**Document 15 – May 26 1964** – Jane Parks soared over the Fakahatchee in an hour-long flight piloted by Sheriff Doug Hendry.

**Document 16 – Sept 27, 1964** – News of the Fakahatchee as a "Wilderness Imperiled" reported to the nation by this informative Sunday New York Times article.



## What Does the Future Hold for This Vast Wilderness? ... Junior Woman's Clubs hope to provide the answer

# Women Unite to Save Fakahatchee Strand

—Herald Photos by TOM MORGAN

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1964.

# FLORIDA WILDERNESS AREA IMPERILED

**By JOHN BYRAM**  
**N**APLES, Fla. — Near and mostly north of the Tamiami Trail, as it winds its way across Collier County, lies the Fakahatchee Strand, a 57,000-acre wilderness of cypress and palm trees, of prairies and hammocks, of lettuce lakes and of hidden pools of clear water. It is a hospitable and fertile retreat for countless species of animals, birds and plants; according to conservationists and scientists, it is South Florida's last available primeval watershed and true swamp area that functions as a self-sustaining ecological unit.

But Collier County, which for years has prided itself on being Florida's last frontier, is experiencing what can accurately be called a boom in the way of building construction, large-scale community development and agricultural expansion.

As a result, it looks as if the existence of this subtropical wilderness may be threatened by progress—by the drainage of its water through newly constructed canals, by new roads, by bulldozers clearing land and by other manifestations of civilization. One of these threats is the possible intrusion of salt water into the area from the bays and arms of the Gulf of Mexico.

**Preservation Urged**  
Realizing what the loss of the Fakahatchee Strand would mean to the county and the state, several groups are making a determined effort to save it. The land is owned by the Lee Tidewater Cypress Company, a subsidiary of the J. C. Turner Lumber Company of



Perry, Fla., which aided the National Audubon Society in establishing the nearby Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

The Florida Nature Conservancy, with headquarters at 19 West Flagler Street, Miami, is spearheading a drive to have the state or Federal government, operating singly or in conjunction, acquire the Fakahatchee for park purposes at an estimated cost of \$4 million. It has the full cooperation of its parent organization, the Nature Conservancy of Washington.

Situated roughly 25 miles east of Naples, the Fakahatchee comprises a region about 20 miles long and five or six miles wide. On the south, the strand touches the border of Everglades National Park. The projected Fort Lauderdale-

Naples toll highway, referred to by its detractors as "Alligator Alley," will cut through the extreme northern segment of the strand. Further north lies the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

**Housing Project**  
On the west, the Fakahatchee Strand borders land held by the Gulf American Land Corporation, which is in the process of preparing a large residential development. It has had to construct drainage canals, including one that eventually will be 32 miles long.

Nimrods from such metropolitan centers as Miami and Tampa say the Fakahatchee is the last unspoiled game area, one where the elusive panther can be found, as well as deer, black bears, bobcats, raccoons, otters and alligators. Rare birds also make their homes in the strand.

From the botanist's point of view, the area, in addition to its cypress trees, contains 5,000 native royal palms, many of which are 150 feet and maybe tall. Here also are more than 100 species of orchids, unusual ferns and a remarkable mixture of trees indigenous both to temperate and sub-tropical climates.

"Being a complete watershed and self-sustaining ecological environment, the Fakahatchee could remain an oasis of emerald wilderness, an island of nature's own creation and natural beauty—quiet and serene—even when surrounded by a noisy, hostile world of roads, motor cars, bulldozers, pollution, drainage and despoilment," says the appeal prepared by the Florida Nature Conservancy.

**View From the Road**  
Visitors to Naples and Collier County can get a good view of the Fakahatchee Strand by taking the Winford James Memorial Drive. The drive is reachable from the Tamiami Trail by turning north on State Route 29 at a point about 33 miles east of Naples.

Woodsmen and hunters, however, say that parts of the dense interior can be penetrated only by crawling through the growth or hacking one's way through with a machete. They claim there are places where the vegetation is so abundant that not even the Seminole Indians, old hands at Florida exploration, have been able to view all of the Fakahatchee's secrets.

*Fakahatchee* is the heart of the Big Cypress Swamp country, available for about \$100 per acre, about \$1/2 million dollars, a land bargain in South Florida. Possibilities exist for the world's first wild orchid sanctuary and wildlife preserve, wilderness canoe trips, wilderness camping, hiking, picnicing, nature study, etc. Preservation of the wilderness environment with complete protection of endangered species of flora and fauna, paramount.

For more information write to  
**FAKAHATCHEE STRAND COMMITTEE**  
310 Biscayne Building  
Miami, Florida

Document 17 - October 5, 1964 - Letter from Mel Finn to Jane Parks expresses appreciation for her efforts and optimism for the project.

FLORIDA NATURE CONSERVANCY  
310 BISCAYNE BLDG., MIAMI 32, FLA.

October 5, 1964

Mrs. Ben Parks  
865 Fifth Avenue South  
Naples, Florida

Dear Jane:

This is in reply to your last three letters with the many enclosures. Thanks very much for the copies of the news releases and the other documents.

I read with interest your "CONSERVATION IN FLORIDA" pamphlet. It is indeed an excellent compilation of conservation material. You have done a fine job on what was a tough assignment.

The New York Times news release really excited me. I received a card from a M. L. Sandy, Route 206, Princeton, New Jersey, about saving the Fahkahatchee, and wondered how he knew about it. Probably got it from the New York Times. I would indeed like to have a copy of the Times release to have reprinted for distribution.

Jane, I am devoting all my spare time and often a lot of my clients time to the Fahkahatchee. I feel tremendously encouraged, especially when someone like you matches, if not surpasses, my own devotion to this project. I do believe it is catching on, to say the least.

Nixon Smiley will call me when he is ready to start on the Fahkahatchee publicity in the Herald. I will let you know if I will go with him to visit the Fahkahatchee.

My correspondence is steadily mounting. Those letters and materials that I think will be of some information to you, I will send to you. Also copies of news releases.

It is my conviction that we will be successful in the Fahkahatchee undertaking. It is just a question of time and unrelenting effort on everybody's part.

Sincerely

MELVIN FINN

## Membership News

### Members make a difference!

Welcome new members: Paul Eason, Susan Mathews, Jack Messaros, and Terrance Trottier.  
We have 345 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,  
#fakahatcheestranspreservestepark



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/>

#### Officers

Glen Stacell, President  
Debra Taylor, Vice President  
Carol Spagnolo, Secretary  
Phil McGuire, Treasurer

#### Directors

Kevin Cunniff  
Rudi Etrich  
Deborah Jansen  
Maria Sentmanat  
Tom Trotta  
Bruce Bunch, Ex-Officio  
Tom Maish, Ex-Officio  
Francine Stevens, Executive Director

#### Board of Directors meeting schedule

June 15, 2025  
No meeting in July  
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](mailto: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](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/>.

Please note our new mailing address at: Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc., PO Box 54, Bonita Springs FL 34133 or write to us at [Office@FOFinc.org](mailto:Office@FOFinc.org).