



# 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 – November – 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 and Exec Director Message

This month, we're thrilled to announce some exciting updates to our members.

You will recall at our last March Annual Member's meeting and Volunteer Appreciation picnic we announced that a trail would be named in honor of Franklin Adams who was instrumental in saving the Fakahatchee from real estate development in the late 1960's by the Gulf American Corporation (GAC) who owned the land and was selling acres of land to folks planning to build their retirement home in Florida.

Fortunately, with the help of our newly arrived park manager Jeremy Sweeney in July, we were able to expedite this project. On Sunday the 16th of November we held an official naming of the trail at gate 2 with the installation of the Reed & Adams trail sign. It was an intimate ceremony for Franklin in the company of his family and close friends.



*Above: Park Manager Jeremy Sweeney officiated the Reed and Adams Trail dedication with Franklin and Kathy Adams in attendance.*

*Right: Executive Director Francine Stevens reviewed a document written by Nathaniel Reed with the group which confirms that Franklin's 1970 phone call to Nathaniel Reed was instrumental in saving the Fakahatchee. This phone call was a pivotal moment that significantly contributed to the naming of the Reed & Adams Trail.*

*Cordially,  
Glen Stacell and Francine Stevens*

The reason for naming the trail the Reed and Adams Trail comes out from the 800 documents that Franklin provided to the Friends to scan for safekeeping. Out of those documents are letters attesting to the fact of years of letters and phone calls by Mel Finn, Franklin Adams and Jane Parks to anyone they could think of. However, it was a personal phone call from Franklin Adams to Nathaniel Reed in the spring of 1970 that convinced Nathaniel to come see for himself why the Fakahatchee was worth saving.

On the first of May 1970, Nathaniel, inspired by his firsthand experience in the Fakahatchee, developed a strong dedication to its preservation—just like Mel, Franklin and Jane had. After Finn passed away in 1971, Franklin became Reed's primary collaborator in advancing their conservation efforts. The Fakahatchee was saved as a State Park in 1974, and a lasting relationship between the two gentlemen ensued.



## Dedication of the Reed and Adams Trail November 16, 2025



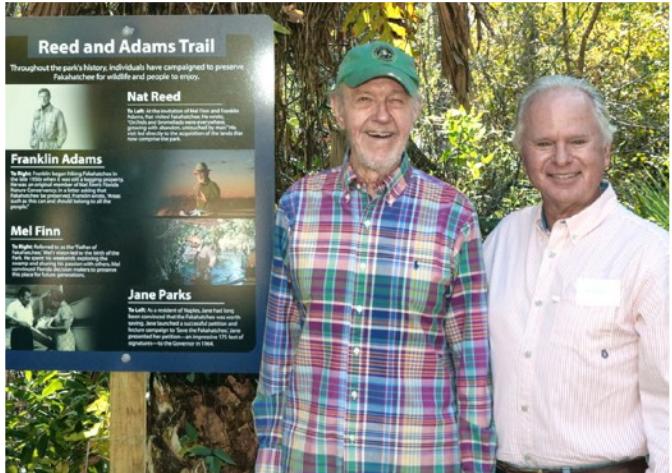
Franklin's family: Future son-in-law Bob Bourassa, Franklin's daughter Heather Sweet, Franklin and Kathy Adams, grandson Michael Sweet.



Park Manager Jeremy Sweeney, FOF President Glen Stacell, Franklin and Kathy Adams.



Rudi and Olga Ettrich, Francine Stevens, Norma Gordon, Jeremy Sweeney, Mike Owen Gary Schmelz, Franklin Adams, Heather Sweet, Bob Bourassa, Jim and Nikki Woodard, Glen Stacell, Bernice Schmelz, Deborah Jansen, Carol Spagnolo, Tom Maish, Bruce Bunch. Michael Sweet kneels in front.



Our heartfelt thanks to Jay Staton for capturing these special moments. Jay is a close friend of Franklin, and an accomplished photographer in Naples. Jay created the 17-minute documentary on the Fakahatchee.

To view more of Jay's work, visit his website at <http://www.jaystatonphotography.com/>

Jay's work in the Fakahatchee can be enjoyed on his YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@1NATURELOVERJ>

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

## **Message from Vice President Debra Taylor: Launching a Friends volunteer program at the Boardwalk**



*Debra Taylor (left) and volunteer Gordon Saager on the new Boardwalk.*

Please bring your lunch and water, a notebook, and binoculars, if you have them. You will learn about the different volunteering opportunities such as simply greeting and orienting visitors, roaming the boardwalk to point out interesting things, and – for those who are willing – guiding future tours. We will walk the Boardwalk in the afternoon and inevitably interact with visitors for a little hands-on experience.

**I will repeat the mentoring session on Tuesday, December the 16th, again from 10 AM to 3 PM.**  
I will confirm January mentoring session dates at a later time.

Participation in my mentoring sessions will enable you to make an informed decision regarding volunteering at the boardwalk. Once prepared to volunteer independently, you will select days and time frame that suit your availability.

Note that volunteers will be required to be members of the Friends of Fakahatchee and to register as a volunteer with the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. I will assist you with these formalities.

Please contact Francine Stevens to let her know the date you plan to meet me at the boardwalk by calling 239-695-1023 or you can e-mail Francine at [Office@FOFinc.org](mailto:Office@FOFinc.org)

Thank you and see you later alligator!

*Debra Taylor  
FOF Vice President*

As we commence our second season following the opening of the new Boardwalk site and Interpretive Pavilion, I invite you to join the Friends of Fakahatchee volunteer team, composed of both novices and Master Naturalists. This opportunity will allow you to learn about the Friends organization, the Fakahatchee Preserve, and the unique natural environment surrounding the Pavilion and Boardwalk. I will mentor volunteers to effectively share this knowledge with visitors interested in understanding their destination and the experiences that await them.

Visitation was high last year, and we expect popularity to increase exponentially now that the reconstructed “old” Boardwalk is open to the public.

**I am inviting you to meet with me on either the 2nd or the 16th of December to launch the volunteer mentoring program. New Boardwalk entrance location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/4m4f3LceXx8W7NWc7>**

**Tuesday, December 2nd – From 10 AM to 3 PM**

**Meet me at 10:00 AM next to the panther sculpture in the Pavilion.**



*The award winning new Boardwalk and Pavilion. Photo by David Corban.*

## Member's Welcome Back luncheon set for Dec 20



**FRIENDS OF FAKAHATCHEE**

Welcome Back  
luncheon for members  
Saturday 20th of December  
12:30 to 3:30 pm  
Under the pole barn located next to the park office.

Park Manager Jeremy Sweeney and his staff will present updates regarding this season's park initiatives, including the opening of the newly reconstructed historic boardwalk.

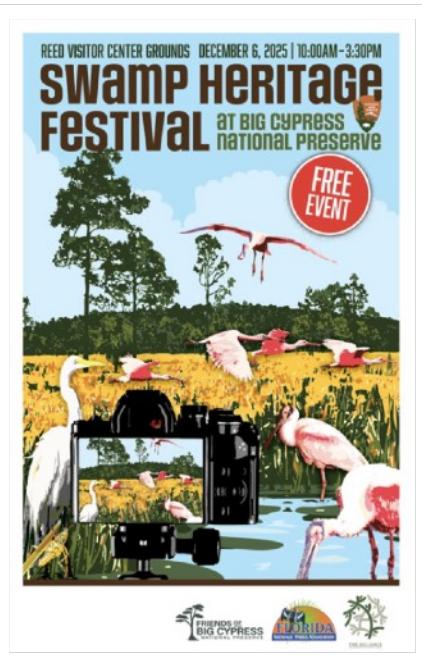
**TEXAS ROADHOUSE**  
Chicken & spare rib lunch with side dishes catered by the Texas Roadhouse

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

Tickets for the annual Welcome Back Luncheon for FOF members are now on sale on Eventbrite. The luncheon will be held at the pole barn on Saturday, December 20, from 12:30pm to 3:30pm. Park Manager Jeremy Sweeney and his staff will present updates on the upcoming season's Park initiatives, including the opening of the reconstructed "old" Boardwalk. Chicken, spare ribs, and sides will be catered by Texas Roadhouse.

Purchase your tickets here: <https://tinyurl.com/FOF-picnic2025>

## Join FOF at the Big Cypress Swamp Heritage Festival



The Friends will host an informational table at the Big Cypress Swamp Heritage Festival on the 6th of December from 10 AM to 3:30 PM. The Festival will be held at the Nathaniel Reed Visitor Center grounds, 33000 Tamiami Trail East, Ochopee.

*Join us for an engaging and informative day.*

For more information,  
visit <https://www.nps.gov/bicy/planyourvisit/swamp-heritage-festival.htm>

## Tickets still on sale for 2025-26 Friends Tours

Thanks to the commitment of our tour volunteers, tickets are still for sale on Eventbrite. To read details and see the complete schedule of this season's Tours, and to purchase tickets, please visit the Friends Eventbrite page, <https://tinyurl.com/FOF-tours>.



*Enjoying the night sky beneath a blanket of stars offers a peaceful experience. More details and tickets for Night Sky Experience at Eventbrite, <https://tinyurl.com/sky-experience>. Photo by Elizabeth William.*



*Early reservations are recommended for our popular Moonlit Tram Tours. Tickets sell out rapidly; get your tickets and more information at Eventbrite, <https://tinyurl.com/moonlight-tram> Photo Charlie Egli.*



*Participating in a Swamp Walk led by Park Biologist Cole Luttrell in the heart of the Fakahatchee Preserve is truly an unforgettable adventure. For details and tickets visit the Swamp Walk Eventbrite page <https://tinyurl.com/biologists-swamp-walk>. Photo by Rita Bauer*



*More than 1,000 people have experienced the Fakahatchee on our enjoyable Friday Morning Interpretive Tram Tours. Tickets and details at Eventbrite, <https://tinyurl.com/FOF-tram-tour> . Photo by Francine Stevens.*

## News from the Strand

### Friends hosted informational table at Naples Zoo Panther Festival



*Left: Official Tours truck with new wrap and the FOF display at the Panther Festival.*

FOF was once again invited by Tim Tetzlaff, the Executive Director of the Naples Zoo, to host a Friends table at their Panther Festival on November 1st.

Special thanks to Tom and Judy Maish, Charlie and Carla Egli, Carol Spagnolo and Norma Gordon for their efforts. Carol and Norma designed an impressive display board; with assistance from Debra Jansen, the pair illustrated the ancestry of female Panther K 408, who's story was featured in our August–September newsletter.

Additionally, when Tom provided Tim with a photograph of our recently wrapped truck, Tim requested that the Friends truck be positioned in the Zoo adjacent to the Friends table. The vehicle attracted considerable attention from festival attendees.



*Carol Spagnolo with the FOF display she and Norma Gordon created, with assistance from Deb Jansen, at the Panther Fest.*

*(l to r) Tom Maish, Norma Gordon, Carol Spagnolo, and Charlie Egli pose with the newly wrapped truck.*

### It's a wrap thanks to Brian Hampton

While seeking striking photographs for a vehicle wrap on the Friends' new safari type truck, Tom Maish contacted photographer Brian Hampton, who had captured an exceptional image of two panthers walking side by side.

Brian generously donated the use of this photograph for the project. However, as the original was taken at night, it would have resulted in a predominantly black wrap, which would not be ideal under the Florida sun. Fortunately, Brian welcomed the idea of adapting his photograph into a daytime scene with the assistance of AI technology.

With Charlie Egli, Francine Stevens worked with the wrap shop owner on the design composition and to be certain the Friends' QR code could be easily scanned from any nearby vehicle on the road.

Brian travels to many of the world's most scenic destinations, and we extend our sincere gratitude for his valuable contribution to our newly wrapped truck. To see more of Brian Hampton's amazing work check out his website at [www.BrianHamptonPhotography.com](http://www.BrianHamptonPhotography.com)



*(l to r) Rudi Ettrich, Rudi's daughter and Olga Ettrich, Carol Spagnolo, Maria Sentmanat, Glen Stacell, and Tom Maish. Photo by Francine Stevens.*

## First Biologist-led Swamp Walk of the season – "Spectacular!"

It was the first Park Biologist-led Swamp Walk of the season by Cole Luttrell, and Board member Maria Sentmanat's very first time assisting. Former Board member Wally Baldwin joined the Swamp Walk and later texted, "Cole did an excellent job and so did Maria! It was a spectacular day!"



Board member Maria Sentmanat assisted Cole with this happy group on the Swamp Walk.



It was a lovely, short walk to the Swamp Walk location.



Cole spoke about the delicate Clam Shell orchid. Photo by Maria Sentmanat. Close up of Clam Shell orchid, by Debra Taylor. It blooms from October to February.



Park Biologist Cole Luttrell points out the Long Strap fern growing on a tree limb.

## A garden is never finished (Quote by Shunryu Suzuki)



Tell that to Norma Gordon and Carol Spagnolo who have truly taken this to heart by stepping up to revive the native plant garden in front of the visitor center, long overdue for some TLC. Their dedication and shared commitment to protecting native plants have led them to invest many hours in weeding, pruning, removing dead or overgrown plants and spreading mulch. Thanks to their hard work, the native plants can thrive again for our butterflies and birds, offering a warm welcome to both guests and wildlife. As a bonus Carol and Norma will continue to care for the garden, because a garden truly is never finished! Photos by Carol Spagnolo and Norma Gordon.

## Fakahatchee Preserve Bio Blitz 2025/2026 schedule

We invite everyone to help park staff gather vital data on wildlife trends. This year the Bio Blitz will be held from November 2025 through April of 2026. Please arrive by 7:30 AM at the Park Office to register for the Blitz each day you are observing. At the Park Office you will receive instruction regarding the observation sites that will be indicated by distance in miles north of gate 1. You will complete your observations at 10:30 AM.

At each site you will document the following for each sighting of each animal: Date, Time, Animal observed, Direction of animal travel, and Observer comments (Life stage, size, health, Male/Female etc.)

You will need a chair, compass, binoculars, and camera for the Blitz. Since you'll spend two hours at your observation spot, remember to bring enough snacks and plenty of water. You will want to dress for outdoor conditions, and choose sturdy footwear suitable for walking along the rough and uneven Janes Scenic Drive.

The park's Bio Blitz is an excellent chance to connect with others who share your interests and to discover more about the diverse wildlife protected within the Fakahatchee Preserve.

**The monthly dates are as follows:**

December 10th  
January 14th  
February 11th  
March 11th  
April 15th

All observations collected will provide valuable data to support the Park Biologist's ongoing research. Contact Steven Bass, Park Specialist and Volunteer Coordinator, if you are interested in volunteering or if you have questions about volunteering for the Bio Blitz.

Email: [steven.Bass@FloridaDEP.gov](mailto:steven.Bass@FloridaDEP.gov)

Phone: (239)-253-6374

## Donation Strategies by Chris Gair

### It is time to consider a QCD.

For the Friends Annual Appeal, it is worth repeating the value of a QCD from an IRA. A donation strategy several of our donors are taking advantage of.

No matter how you slice it, in my humble opinion, the QCD or Qualified Charitable Distribution is the single best tax efficient way to donate to Friends.

If you are over 70 ½ you can transfer up to \$108,000 to a qualified charity this year. The good news is that your gift never appears on your form 1040 and if you're taking Required Minimum Distributions, this amount is reduced dollar for dollar thereby lowering your AGI (Adjusted Gross Income).

And it is easy to do. Simply contact your IRA custodian with the details of your gift and in most cases, they will send you a check ready to deliver to the charity. Let your tax preparer know and that is all there is to it. Simple by design.

For 2026, the limit is estimated be \$111,000 as indexed annually by inflation.

In spite of all the hype and rhetoric about the Big Beautiful Bill, the immediate and total tax benefit of a QCD looks to me to be your best bet. And of course, your gift is destined to go toward the wonderful cause we all share.

For those of you that have followed my writings, first let me say thank you and also you will know I have touched on this before. That said, with many of the people I help, QCDs is a subject that all too often is overlooked.

Questions: Just call Francine Stevens and she will, as always, be only too glad to help.

*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/>

## Volunteer to assist Park Staff

### Park Specialist Steven Bass is the Volunteer Coordinator



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

Projects managed by Steven present various volunteer opportunities to work with and assist Park Staff, such as clearing trails, tending the butterfly garden, helping with repairs and general maintenance, and much more.

Steven will train volunteers 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](mailto:steven.bass@floridadep.gov) or call him at (239) 253 6374.

### Volunteering for the Friends programs 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 meet the public's demand.

**Interpretive Tram Tour.** We need guides for our popular Tram Tour. **Guides and drivers for the Interpretive Tram Tour, extraordinary skills are not required, training will be provided.**

#### 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 and answer visitors' questions.
- 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).**

## Membership News

### Members make a difference!

Welcome new member Christopher and Robin Pritchard

We have 334 members.

Bob and Nancy Dix transitioned from a **Patron** membership to a **Benefactor** membership.

Our heartfelt thanks for their generous support!

#### Officers

Glen Stacell, President

Debra Taylor, Vice President

Carol Spagnolo, Secretary

Phil McGuire, Treasurer

#### Directors

Kevin Cunniff

Rudi Ettrich

Deborah Jansen

Maria Sentmanat

Tom Trotta

Bruce Bunch, Ex-Officio

Tom Maish, Ex-Officio

Francine Stevens, Executive Director

#### Board of Directors meeting schedule

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.

**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:  
#fakahatcheestrand, #friendsoffakahatchee,  
#fakahatcheestrandpreservestatepark

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/>.

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).

