



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 – March 2026

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>

Annual Meeting Lines Up 2026 FOF Leadership

The Friends Annual Organizational meeting took place as scheduled on Saturday the 28th of March at the park office.

The Officers elected by the Board are President Debra Taylor, Vice President Carol Spagnolo, Treasurer Phil McGuire, and Secretary Maria Sentmanat. Directors serving on the Board are Kevin Cunniff, Rudi Ettrich, Deborah Jansen, Glen Stacell, and Tom Trotta. The Board appointed Bruce Bunch and Tom Maish as ex-officio members of the Board.



From left: Tom Maish, Carol Spagnolo, Glen Stacell, Deborah Jansen, Debra Taylor, Francine Stevens, Maria Sentmanat and Phil McGuire. Board members not pictured: Kevin Cunniff, Rudi Ettrich, Tom Trotta, Bruce Bunch.

Friends of Fakahatchee District 4 CSO of the Year

On the 14th of March at the Fort Foster State Historic Site the Friends were awarded the District's 4 CSO Of the Year. There are 18 CSO's in District 4.

A very special thank you goes to Carol Spagnolo, Norma Gordon, Tom & Judy Maish for making the long three-hour drive to receive the award on behalf of the Friends organization.



Brian Fugate Assistant Director of Field Operations, Norma Gordon, Tom Maish, Jackye Maxey Treasurer Florida States Park Foundation, Carol Spagnolo, Chuck Hatcher Director of State Parks, Jeremy Sweeney and Steven Bass.

Friends Annual Members Meeting & Volunteer Appreciation Picnic

The annual picnic is always the right time and place to celebrate our accomplishments and all the volunteers who made them possible. Steven Bass, the Park Volunteer coordinator, assisted by Jacqueline Wright, had more than 30 certificates to award to volunteers who contributed anywhere from 50 hours up to over 10,000 hours of service. Although a dozen volunteers were present at the picnic to receive their award, we are in possession of only a handful of randomly taken photos (shown below). *Our heartfelt thanks goes out to each and every dedicated volunteer!*



From left: Jacqueline Wright, Helen Melde, David Baniak and Amy, Leila Hickey and Cole Luttrell. Photo by Phil McGuire.



Paul Bisset, Carol Spagnolo, Gordon Saager and Karol, Norma Gordon, and Karl Kepford. Photo by Phil McGuire.



Deborah Jansen, Dino Barone, John DaSilva and Cathy, and Ted DeGroot. Photo by Phil McGuire.



Maria Sentmanat receives her volunteer appreciation certificate from Volunteer Coordinator Steven Bass and Jacqueline Wright.



Dino Barone receives his certificate.



Paul Bissett receives his certificate.

Last Tours of the Season



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.



Last chance for our popular Moonlit Tram Tours. Get your tickets and more information at Eventbrite, <https://tinyurl.com/moonlight-tram> Photo Charlie Egli.



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

Afternoon with Franklin Adams well attended

"An Afternoon with Franklin Adams," on February 27 was organized by Park Ranger Interpretive Chair Jacqueline Wright. The event was held at the boardwalk Interpretive Pavilion, and was well attended.



Jacqueline Wright joins Franklin Adams at the Interpretive Pavilion for the day of his talk.



Franklin spoke about his efforts to save the Fakahatchee from real estate development.

Fakahatchee gets new entrance sign

With financial support from the Friends, the fabrication and installation of an entrance sign for Fakahatchee on Janes Scenic Drive was completed at the request of the Park Manager. The new sign establishes a clear identity for the Preserve and fulfills a longstanding requirement. Visitors have already begun to photograph themselves at the Fakahatchee sign upon arrival.



The Friends' tram tour enters Janes Scenic Drive beneath the new sign. Photo by Carol Spagnolo and Norma Gordon.



Terry Trottier, Charlie McGinnis, Michelle Dalton, and Jeanette Atkinson are among the first to capture a photo moment by the new sign. Photo by Debra Taylor.

Boardwalk Chickee gets new thatch roof



Debra Taylor has a look at the newly installed thatch roof while Andy Padla stays in the shade! Photo by Francine Stevens.

Thanks to continued financial support from the Friends group, the chickee hut at the original boardwalk – constructed in 2017 – been re-roofed with fresh thatch.

FOF featured at Environmental Day Leadership Class



Francine Stevens, Debra Taylor, and Phil McGuire staff the FOF informational display. In late February the Friends were represented at the 2026 Environmental Day Leadership Class at the North Collier Regional Park. Approximately 50 experienced leaders from public and private sectors throughout Collier County visited the Friends exhibit as well as visiting with a dozen more environmental organizations.

FOF volunteers explore interpretation



The Friends volunteers attended an Interpretive Program Class hosted by the Big Cypress National Preserve. The class was conducted by Outreach and Education Coordinator Lisa Andrews and seasonal park ranger Jay Kissel. Photo by Debra Taylor.

Seen in the Strand

Fakahatchee Preserve Bio Blitz wraps up April 15

The final Bio Blitz date for the 2026 season is April 15th. We invite everyone to help park staff gather vital data on wildlife trends. 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)

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. 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, Phone: (239)-253-6374

Wildlife abounds in the Fakahatchee

Many thanks to the intrepid photographers who shared these glimpses of the abundant species that flourish in the Preserve. Photographers noted in the captions.



Everglades mink. Photo by Ronald Klap.



Barred Owl. Photo by Ronald Klap.



Busy boardwalk. Photo by Phil McGuire.



Boardwalk Eagle. Photo by Andy Padla



Juvenile Yellow-Crowned Night Heron.
Photos this page by Walter Wallenstein.



Red-Shouldered Hawk.



Fakahatchee Beaked Orchid.

Donation Strategies by Chris Gair

Beware the mutual fund trap

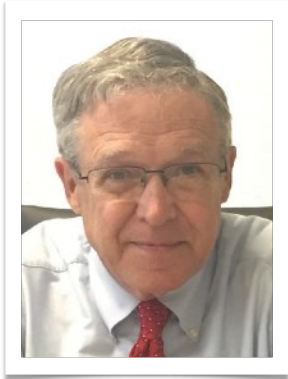
Mutual Funds and their close cousins, Exchange Traded Funds, are absolutely the best choice for millions of investors. I won't discuss their many advantages here, but there is one potential downside to watch closely.

The funds themselves never pay tax: you do. They are a pass-through entity in that all taxable transactions are allocated to the owners. Dividends and interest can be fairly well predicted but capital gains cannot. Typically, these amounts are passed out (whether or not reinvested back in the fund) in November and December and they can be a big surprise. So if you experience that, it can be a great time to consider augmenting your charitable gifting. Though this all typically occurs late in the year, consult with your advisor about how a gift to the FOF may help reduce your taxes and help the cause we all share.

The key here is to know it is coming and to be prepared to respond. Forewarned is forearmed and the good folks at the FOF are always ready 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 Volunteers needed

Park Manager Jeremy Sweeney is seeking volunteers to assist with Boardwalk maintenance. Ideal candidates for ongoing maintenance will possess skills in board replacement, trimming, hammering nails, and general upkeep.

Please contact Volunteer Coordinator Steven Bass via email at steven.bass@floridadep.gov or call the Park Office at 239-961-1925.

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 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.

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.

Membership News

Members make a difference!

Welcome new members Michelle Berndgen, Christopher Ott, and Ann Pope.
We have 321 members.

Officers

Debra Taylor, President
Carol Spagnolo, Vice President
Phil McGuire, Treasurer
Maria Sentmanat, Secretary

Directors

Kevin Cunniff
Rudi Ettrich
Deborah Jansen
Glen Stacell
Tom Trotta
Bruce Bunch, Ex-Officio
Tom Maish, Ex-Officio
Francine Stevens, Executive Director

2026 BOD meeting schedule

April 19
May 17
June 21
August 16
September 20
October 18
November 15
December 12

*Meetings are scheduled
for 10:30 AM*

Contact the Friends of Fakahatchee at
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

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, 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.