



# 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 – April - May 2026

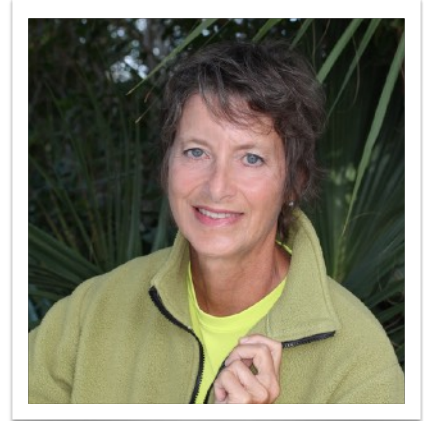
Questions before visiting the park?  
Call the park office at 239-961-1925 and check the Park's website.  
<https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park>

## Letter from Elected President

Welcome to those of you newly subscribed to The Ghost Writer Newsletter! You will find that The Ghost Writer provides a window – an enticing glimpse perhaps – into what we affectionately call 'The Fak'.

To our long-time subscribers and members of the Friends of Fakahatchee, thank you for being stewards of this remarkable treasure.

My involvement with The FAK began with listening to stories from a roommate about his visits to his brother, who was then the Park Biologist. His stories were fascinating, particularly as I was Botany/Plant Science undergrad in New England. I went on for my MBA and pursued a career in information technology. Then about 20 years ago, I started working seasonally from Bonita Springs. I discovered that this place with the curious name was nearby! I was welcomed into the Friends community by generous people who shared their considerable knowledge while we explored and volunteered in the preserve's 85,000 acres.



What I have found is that stewardship translates as 'support'. Support takes many forms depending upon one's interests, time, and means. I had limited time while working but benefited in countless enduring ways by simply becoming a member of the Friends. I have made lasting friendships, continue to experience the shared joy of discovery, and have been recharged by being in a truly natural setting.

As members of the Friends, our mission is to support the Park in preserving The Fak. As the newly elected President of the Friends of Fakahatchee Board and having had the privilege of actively serving on the Board for the past two years, I will say that we on the Board care and support you our members.

We have phenomenal volunteers who conduct interpretive tours, 38 tours this season and volunteers who have been doing a fantastic job this season helping to greet as many as 400 visitors daily at the Interpretive Pavilion of the Fakahatchee Big Cypress Bend Boardwalks. The reopening of the original boardwalk in November has attracted enthusiastic visitors from the local area, across the U.S. and abroad.

The Fakahatchee itself attracts our members and active volunteers who have many talents and interests ranging from understanding the uniquely diverse flora and fauna and cultural history, to wanting to find ways to bring more meaning and wonder to visiting family, friends and the public.

Are you curious about how to learn more with the support of our community? I invite you to reach out to Francine Stevens, our Executive Director at [Office@FOFinc.org](mailto:Office@FOFinc.org) so that we can get connected.

And speaking of support, I want to acknowledge the dedicated leadership of our outgoing President Glen Stacell. Thank you, Glen.

*Until the next Ghost Writer....enjoy the wonderful Fak!*

*Debra Taylor,  
President, Friends of Fakahatchee*

## News from the Strand

### Table display at the Interpretive Pavilion a big hit



Past President and dedicated volunteer Glen Stacell prepares the table display at the Boardwalk Interpretive Pavilion. Photo by Debra Taylor.

### Presentation at Pelican Landing Community

On April 9th, President Debra Taylor delivered a presentation to the residents of the Pelican Landing community in Bonita Springs. The session, which lasted an hour, was met with such enthusiasm and appreciation that they have invited Debra to return in the fall for a follow-up presentation. **Bravo Debra!** Photos by Steve Ivaniszyn.



## Seen in the Strand

### Rainbow over the Fakahatchee



*In this case, one picture is worth 85 thousand words. Photo by Rebecca Richards.*

### Birds galore in the Fak

*Photos by Olga Ettrich.*



*Belted Kingfisher watching for his next meal.*



*Brown Thrasher – seeking food or a mate?*



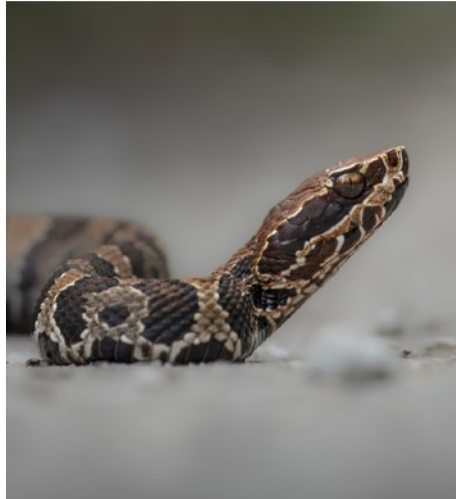
*Wood Stork, looking a bit scruffy.*

## ***Reptiles, a mammal and raptor, oh my!***

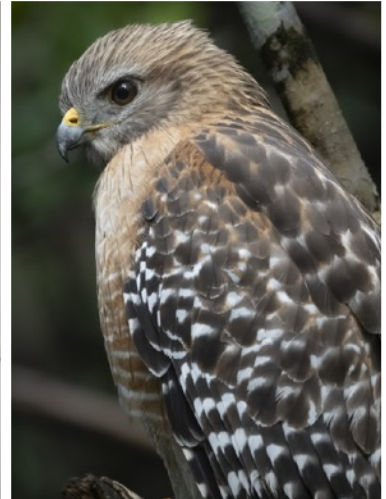
*Photos by Hannah Rowland.*



*It takes luck, patience and a good camera to photograph an Everglades Mink.*



*Beautifully distinct markings on this Cottonmouth.*



*An intense look from this Red-shouldered Hawk.*



*This Yellow Rat Snake has a raised head – the better to see you, my dear?*



*Baby Gator smiles for the camera.*

## Donation Strategies by Chris Gair

### The CRT: Truly the best of both worlds...

As we celebrate our return to the Moon, we are reminded of our triumph of being first to walk on the lunar surface in 1969. It was in that year that Congress gave us the Charitable Remainder Trust (CRT). It is made to order for IRA owners that want to help FRIENDS and family with this form of planning.

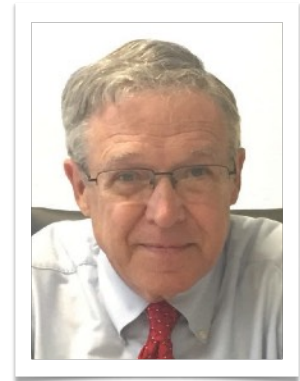
Simply put, a CRT is an irrevocable trust that distributes income to family for a set period of time after which it closes and funds a charitable purpose. It is perfect as a named beneficiary of an IRA. When the CRT is funded from your IRA, THERE IS NO INCOME TAX! That means every dollar of your tax-deferred IRA now becomes tax free. That is as good as it gets. Yes, the family members that receive income from the CRT pay tax but only those taxable earnings from the CRT's portfolio.

Now there are of course many more aspects to this form of planning that we do not have room for here. However, the tax-exempt nature of this well-established technique make a compelling case that is worth serious consideration. Next step: see your tax advisor or estate planning attorney to "run the numbers" for your particular case to see if FRIENDS AND FAMILY can benefit.

All the best as we continue to explore options to help this wonderful organization.

*Mr. Chris Gair of Fort Myers has been sharing valuable insights with the Friends regarding charitable giving in today's evolving landscape. After retiring as a Trust Officer in Southwest Florida following 48 years of service, Mr. Gair offers extensive expertise, particularly in donation strategies designed to benefit both the Friends and their donors.*

**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).**

## History Corner

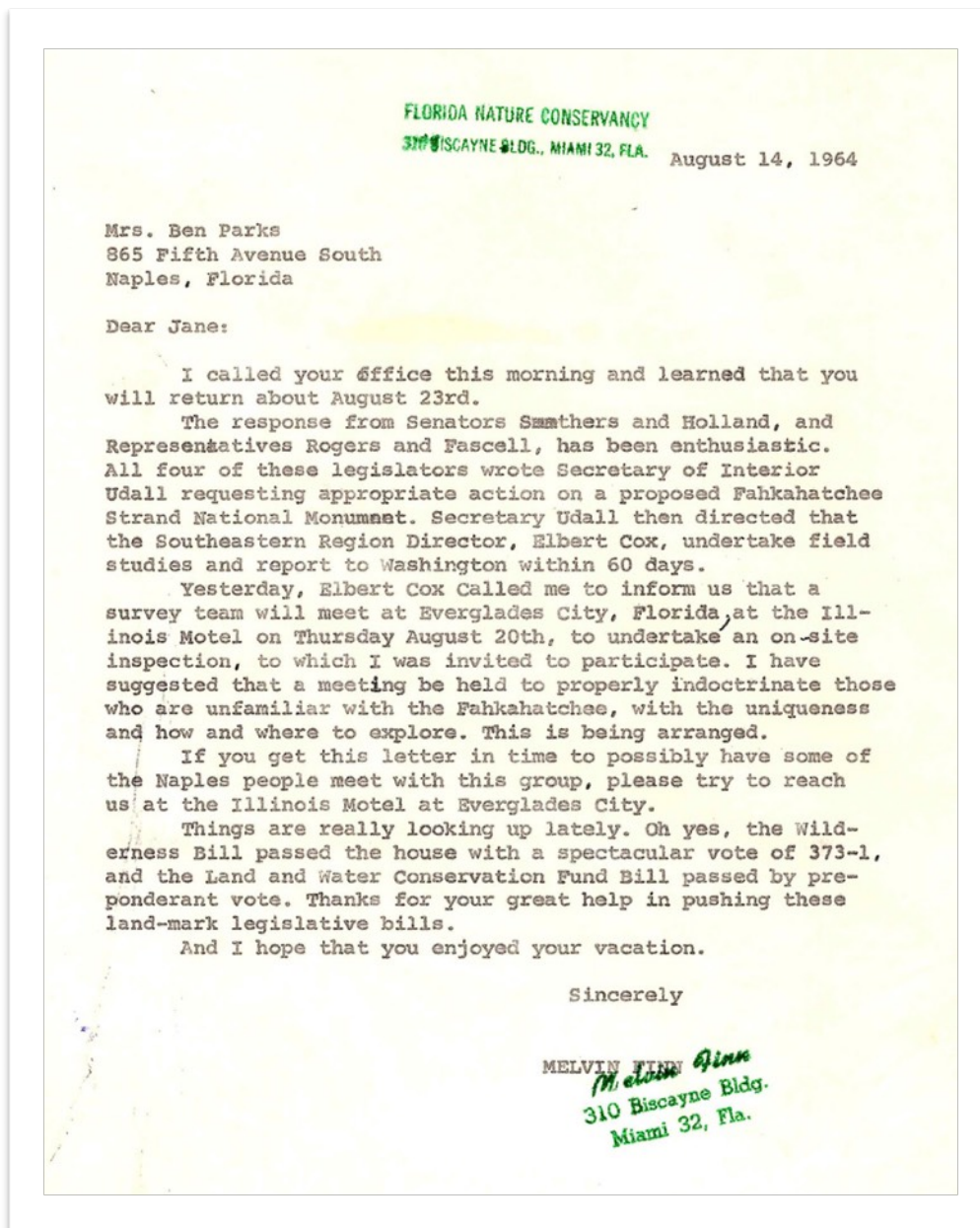
### Ninth Installment

By Francine Stevens, Executive Director, Friends of Fakahatchee

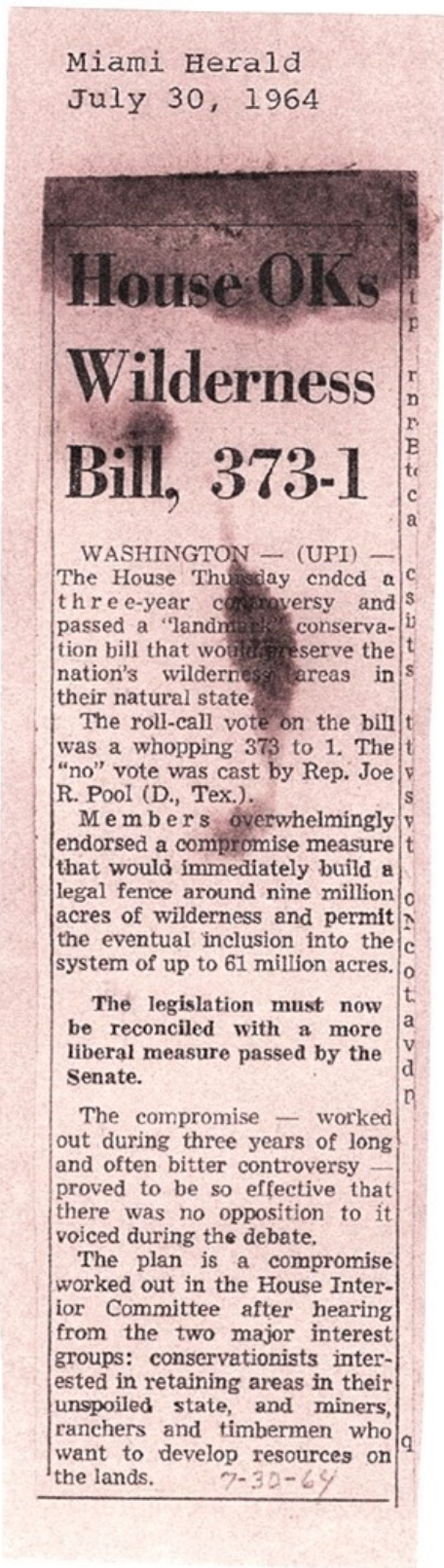
In the summer of 2023 Franklin Adams gave me two boxes of fragile historical documents: his documents and Mel Finn's documents. Newspaper and magazine articles along with correspondence dating back to 1959 detail their pursuit to save the Fakahatchee from real estate development. Jane Parks also turned 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. We are sharing the most interesting documents recording their efforts, set backs, and progress.

**Document 20** – August 14, 1964 – Mel Finn writes to Jane Parks about an upcoming survey and Wilderness Bill 373-1.



Document 21 - July 30, 1964 - Miami Herald - US House of Representatives OKs National Wilderness Bill 373-1.



Document 22 - August 26, 1964 - Jane Parks' petition makes the Fort Myers NewsPress



## Membership News

### Members make a difference!

Welcome new members Tiffany Aubin, Stephen and Daryl Izzo, and Diane Markwell.

We have 315 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:  
#fakahatcheestrand, #friendsoffakahatchee,  
#fakahatcheestrandpreservestatepark

### 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](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).