The Ghost Writer

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

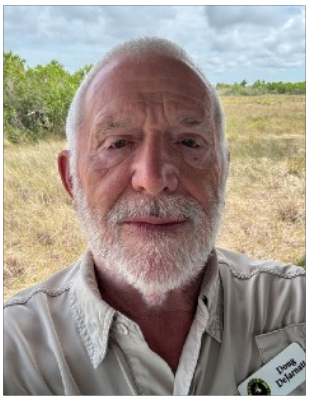
Questions before visiting the park?
Call the park office at 239-961-1925 and check the Park's website.
https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park

Message from the President

Interpretive Pavilion and Boardwalk: A Favorite Destination All Summer Long

When curious visitors from around the world stopped to discover the Interpretive Pavilion and Boardwalk this summer, CSO Volunteer Doug DeJarnatt was frequently there welcoming them and interpreting. Our regular local visitors continued to drop by to see how flora and fauna changed with the season. Combined, thousands have enjoyed what is now a gateway site to the Everglades over our 'off season' months.

Doug responded to my invitation last season to attend the Volunteer Mentoring program and is sharing some of his thoughts and encounters with us here:



"The Fakahatchee Big Cypress Boardwalk is just a few miles from my home and is part of my weekly "walking" activity. I had been on Jane's drive many times and was very familiar with both areas although I knew almost nothing about the FOF. The informational meeting turned into a training session and I was hooked."

"I'm old! Keeping active is critical for those of us considered "elderly." The Friends gave me the opportunity to get out of the house, interact with people one-on-one, learn more about my area of Florida including its history and the flexibility to adjust my available time and efforts without a rigid calendar schedule."

"My experience, still not an expert, is with our reptiles primarily alligators and Florida specific snakes. A few general facts about our gators, snakes, otters, panthers, and bears can educate our visitors and may lead to additional more specific questions or conversations. Interacting with our visitors, telling them I'm a volunteer and not a park employee, also opens more conversations about FOF and what we do to support the Fakahatchee."

Speaking of alligators...
"One of the reasons I really like this area is that it's different every day. Yesterday we had alligators bellowing and slapping the water. Today the gators were very quiet and the bullfrogs took over entertaining the visitors. Our black racers were out in force this morning around the lake path for the first time in many weeks."

"We had an 8' gator under the bridge early in the day and our regular 3' gator came back when the big one left. These were the only gators seen by any visitors. We also had a beautiful black racer digesting a big lunch in the grass near the pavilion. The two gators and the racer kept the visitor cameras clicking."

"Gators were bellowing (3 of them about 2-3 years old) around the first scope site between the Boardwalk and the road. They were there off and on for about 2 hours. Many visitors thought it was thundering rather than bellowing."

...And having fun with visitors
"Today was an eventful day on the Boardwalk. It began with a group of at least 35 motorcyclists traveling from Homestead to Naples for lunch. Four alligators – two large and two medium — swam under the bridge, much to the visitors' delight. Quite a few of the riders said they planned to return with their families when the weather was cooler. A special thank-you goes to the riders who circulated a large garbage bag before leaving so everyone could dispose of plastic bottles and other trash. They then placed the bag in the truck following their group".

President's message continued.

"Saturday was a pretty good day. Lots of visitor activity in late morning and early afternoon. There were many people from the Miami area, the UK, France and Germany... still holiday time in Europe. I've given up on my high school German and started using Google Translate for conversations."

"We had two unrelated families from France. My attempts to remember high school French caused a great deal of laughter with the families. Only one person in each group spoke English. The first French family asked me to go with them on their Boardwalk adventure and things had slowed down so I joined the group. We saw a tri-colored heron, heard a woodpecker, and discovered a sleeping black racer. No alligators.

They were impressed with the strangler figs, the large cypress trees, and, of course, the mosquitoes. That group stayed at the gator pond while I headed back. About halfway back on the boardwalk, I met the second French family. I asked if they were part of the first family and they were not. I walked with them back to the gator pond and introduced both groups. When I met them back at the pavilion later in the day, they said that they were all going to dinner together that night on Marco.

In addition to the French visitors, there was a family from Russia, a family from Israel, and a small group from Japan. I continue to be amazed by how many international visitors come during the summer. We also had Florida residents from the Miami area, Fort Myers, and Naples, several of whom remembered walking the old Boardwalk years ago. We also had visitors from Alaska and Arizona."

On other days...

"Had visitors from some surprising countries: France, Australia, Belgium, UK and for the first time the Czech Republic," and "Had many visitors from the Netherlands and Lithuania."

Every day...

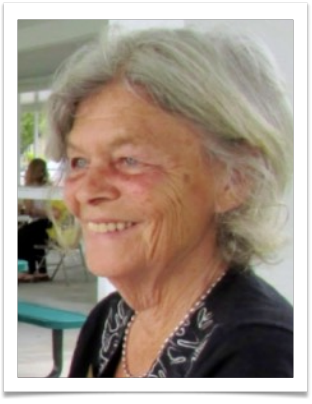
"It was a good day. It was a long day and a fun day. Thanks for letting me have some fun."

Thank you, Doug, for sharing your knowledge with visitors and your experiences with us! We appreciate all that you do and look forward to learning and having fun together this coming season as we continue our Volunteer Mentoring Program.

Debra Taylor
President, Friends of Fakahatchee

Goodbye to Marya Repko

by Francine Stevens, Executive Director, FOF



It is with a heavy heart that I share the news of Marya Repko's passing on October 1st.

For more than a decade, through spring 2025, I would visit Marya after Board meetings to collect the FOF mail and spend time with her. During those visits, I came to know a woman who was truly ahead of her time. Born in 1942, Marya began her working career at Cambridge University Press during the early days of digital typesetting. She later moved to Ireland to work as a software engineer for a company called Commology. After retiring, she returned to the United States. While taking a road trip in Florida, she discovered Everglades City, stayed for a while, and decided to make it her home because the quiet town reminded her of her hometown of Hadlyme, Connecticut.

In 2003, Marya accepted then FOF president Patty Huff's request to manage the organization's membership. Working without assistance, she created the membership excel spreadsheet and devoted countless hours to that responsibility. She also edited and published the Ghost Writer newsletter for over a decade. It is difficult to overstate how fortunate FOF was to benefit from her extraordinary dedication.

Marya also gave generously of her time to the Museum of the Everglades and served as a founding member of the Everglades Society for Historic Preservation. With history and writing among her greatest passions, she published nine books, including one on the history of Fakahatchee, and about her hometown of Hadlyme. In 2010 FOF honored Marya with the Mel Finn Award and with an Excellence Award in 2025 for managing the organization's membership. Marya made a lasting, positive impact on the Friends of Fakahatchee and Everglades City. Hers was truly a life well lived.

Tickets now on sale for 2026-27 Friends Tours

Thanks to the commitment of our tour volunteers, tickets are now on 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 at https://tinyurl.com/FOF-tours.

Phil McGuire opens the tour season with a Night Sky Experience on November 7, followed by the first swamp walk with park biologist Cole Luttrell on November 14.

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/FOF-nightskyexperience. 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/FOF-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/FOF-biologist-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-morning-tram-tour. Photo by Francine Stevens.

Members' Welcome Back Luncheon set for Dec 12

Information about purchasing your tickets for the annual Members' Welcome Back Luncheon on December 12, 2026 will be published in the November newsletter and in a special bulletin to our membership.

News from the Strand

Third Wednesdays
October 21, 2026
November 18, 2026
December 16, 2026
January 20-2027
February 17, 2027
March 17, 2027
April 21, 2027

Fakahatchee Preserve Bio Blitz 2026/2027 schedule

The goal of our Bio Blitz is to record all mammal wildlife observations at different stations along Jane's Scenic Drive. These observations are put into a database to help us understand wildlife trends over time. This year, our Bio Blitz will be held on the third Wednesday of each month between October and April.

Schedule

7:45AM – Arrive at the park office to sign up for your observation station. Observation stations are first come, first served.
8:00AM – Begin driving to your observation station.
8:30AM to 10:30AM – Observation period.

You will need a chair, compass, binoculars, and camera for the Blitz. Since you'll spend two hours at your observation spot, be sure to bring enough snacks and plenty of water. Remember 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.

For questions please contact Volunteer Coordinator Jacqueline Wright.
jacqueline.Wright@FloridaDEP.gov, Cell: 239-940-4377

Volunteer to Assist Park Staff

Ranger Jackie Wright is new Park Volunteer Coordinator

Ranger Jackie Wright was recently appointed as the Park's Volunteer Coordinator. Projects in the Park 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, bio blitzes, and much more!

Ranger Jackie and the staff 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 visitors, and at the visitor center next to Janes Scenic drive.

If you are interested in volunteering to help park staff, you can e-mail Jackie at: Jacqueline.Wright@FloridaDEP.gov or call her at 239-940-4377.

Volunteer Opportunities for the Friends of Fakahatchee

Many ways to volunteer for Friends

Do you love the Fakahatchee? Do you enjoy interacting with people? Whether you prefer mornings or afternoons there are many ways to help. Even a few hours each week can benefit the Friends (and benefit you, too).

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.

Volunteer 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.

Donation Strategies by Chris Gair

QCDs Win Again...

Managing a foundation is multitasking at its best. Friends is no exception. Tracking donors is critical to a foundation's future success. Who is donating and why; is the donor base representative of the membership and are the donations unrestricted or with caveats for a particular purpose? All this and more goes into the mix to get a clear picture of our source of funding.

The results are in and QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTIONS (QCDs) are on the rise. I write extensively about the benefits of this giving technique and am most gratified to see more and more of our donors taking advantage. It is rare given the complexity of the Internal Revenue Code that one technique can result in a universal benefit.

As we know, when you use your required annual distribution from your IRA as a source for charitable gifting, you get the best result possible. That is just what a QCD is: The donation never enters your tax picture whether you itemize deductions or not. In fact, only about ten percent of us do itemize so it is all the better.

So, from Francine and all the good folks that make Friends the special organization it is, many thanks. Let's keep a good thing going and make QCDs a winner for us all every year.

FIDELITY Charitable℠

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/

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.

History Corner

Twelfth 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 29 – January 18, 1966 – Gulf American pays $6,326.000.00 to purchase 63,000 acres out of the 75,000 acres in the Fakahatchee.

Collier County News
Feb. 11, 1966

Gulf American Buys Big Tract At Fakahatchee

Purchase of 63,000 acres of the 75,000-acre Fakahatchee Strand, one of the last haunts of the panther and black bear in Florida, has been announced by the Gulf American Land Corporation. Sale price was reported at $6,326,000.

Located a few miles north of the Tamiami Trail and just west of State Road 29, it had been sought for preservation as a national monument in a drive sponsored by the Junior Women's Clubs of Florida.

Gen. Charles E. Jung, managing director of Golden Gate and G. E. "Toby" Carroll, attorney representing GALC, made the announcement here Thursday.

The Strand, often called the state's "most beautiful green jewel," because of its 38 species of orchids, including seven found nowhere else in the world, was bought from the J. C. Turner Lumber Company, parent firm of Lee Tidewater Cypress.

Gen. Jung said that Gulf American Land plans to immediately go ahead with construction of a $1 million dollar lodge complex on the property similar to the firm's River Ranch Acres in Polk County. The complex will have camp sites, riding stables, skeet range, picnic areas and nature trails.

FILES PROTEST

Paul Frank, an active member of the Florida Conservancy, told The NEWS he has written Congressman Paul Rogers in protest against the sale of Fakahatchee Strand which in Seminole language means "River of Vines."

"Loss of the Strand will be the most terrible thing that has happened to Collier County," said Frank. "As a piece of real estate, the Strand is inconsequential. The area should be preserved not destroyed. It contains the most valuable cross section of wild-life remaining in Florida."

Frank said he believes there is still "an excellent chance" of the federal government taking the property. He predicted a number of public protest hearings regarding the sale and said that when the truth is known to the public, the government may re-buy the property as a national monument.

"Greed is at the bottom of the sale," Frank said. "Florida still has thousands of acres on both coasts available for real-

(Continued on page 8)

Fakahatchee

(Continued from page 1)

estate sub-divisions. Why must they go far into the interior of our county and rob us of our heritage?"

Gen. Jung said that Gulf American Land does not plan to cut up the entire tract into lots for resale as had been feared by conservationists. He would give no indication of the amount of land to be used for ranch lodge operation but said present plans are to fence the tract and stock it with deer, wild hogs and wild turkey.

MEMBER BASIS

Promotion of the nearly 100 square mile tract, Jung said, will be on a membership basis, and all members will be entitled to use of the facilities for a period of 10 years.

The deed to the land, signed by Turner Lumber Company president Neil E. Firestone, was filed in the county clerk's office Thursday at about the same time Jung was making his announcement.

The purchase price, understood to be covered in part by mortgage, would indicate an acreage price of approximately $100 an acre.

The Strand is a long narrow strip of 75,000 acres that runs from near the Miles City Settlement below Sunniland Oil Field to the 10,000 Islands east of Fahka Union River.

Preservation of the Strand was asked by conservationists because it is a unique self-sustaining ecological area which supports many varieties of vanishing Florida wildlife.

Document 30 – February 11, 1966 – Gulf American plans a private sportsman lodge in the Fakahatchee.

Feb. 11, 1966

Gulf American to Sell Tracts in Wilderness?

By TOM MORGAN
Naples Bureau Chief

EAST NAPLES — Gulf American Land Co. purchased the Fahkahatchee strand under financial arrangements which allow the subdivision and resale of the area by lots, court house records revealed Friday.

The provision is contained in a mortgage filed shortly after Gulf American officials announced the purchase of the strand and said it "would not be cut up into lots."

The 63,000-acre purchase, for $6,326,000, covers a virgin wilderness area which conservation groups are seeking to have purchased by the federal government as a national monument.

The mortgage which the company gave the J. C. Turner Lumber Co. reads in part:

"It is understood and agreed that the mortgagor intends to subdivide and sell the land encumbered hereby and to be able to do in conformity with the real estate laws of Florida provides for releases conforming to that law."

NEWS AROUND FLORIDA

Asked about the language in the mortgage, Gulf American attorney G. E. Carroll said, "It has nothing to do with subdividing" and is only a form which had been approved previously by the lumber company and which the seller refused to change.

"The land will remain in a natural state for 'x' number of years," Carroll said. "It is the same as River Ranch Acres another Gulf American development in Polk County," reported Gen. C. E. Jung, director for Gulf American's Golden Gate Estates in Collier County. "It's not going to be cut up. Nothing is going to happen for at least 10 years. It won't be cut up and there will be no canals."

Jung said Thursday it would become a ranch-type operation "because of the tremendous interest shown by sportsmen and conservationists in the preservation of this tract" and a large part "would remain in its natural state."

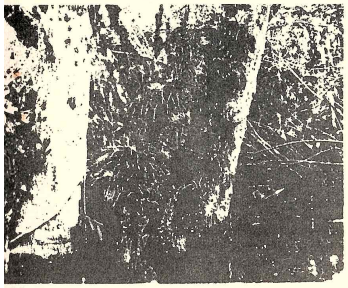
If the company follows the same procedure used at River Ranch, it soon will begin selling off the land in parcels as small as an acre and a quarter to individual installment buyers. The company makes no promises to install improvements, not even the minimal drainage and access guaranteed on adjoining Golden Gate Estates.

While the land may remain in its natural state for many years, as company officials promise, its ownership could be divided among thousands of contract purchasers. This would make it difficult should the federal government decide at a later date to buy the strand.

The Fahkahatchee strand runs from north of Miles City south across the Everglades Parkway, now under construction, and the Tamiami Trail, ending at the northern boundary of Everglades National Park. A bill calling for the federal purchase of the strand was scheduled for introduction in this session of Congress.

Document 31 – February 13, 1966 – Jane Parks asks Congressman Rogers aid to Save the Fakahatchee.

ng the watercourses of the central drainage axis, chids, bromeliads and ferns on Pond Apple trees, hee Strand.

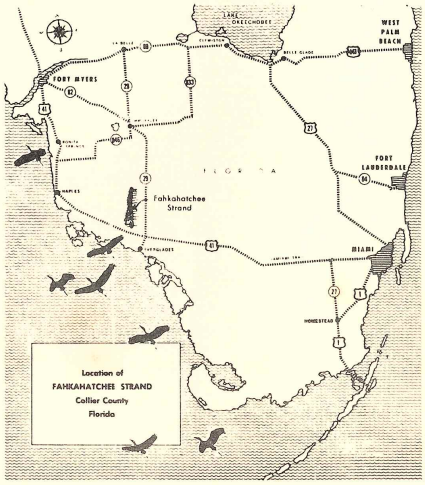


scene with Pop Ash and Pond Apple trees h orchids, ferns and bromeliads, Fahkahatchee

...THE TIME IS NOW!
FOR FAHKAHATCHEE STRAND

SUPPORT THE FAHKAHATCHEE STRAND
WILDERNESS NATIONAL MONUMENT !

Write now to :
Hon. Stewart Udall
Sec. of Interior
Washington, D. C.
and
Rep. Paul G. Rogers
House Office Building
Washington, D. C.



THE DAILY NEWS
COLLIER COUNTY
Feb. 13, 1966

'Save Fakahatchee' Movement To Ask For Cong. Rogers' Aid

A meeting in Naples today with Congressman Paul Rogers in protest against the sale of 63,000 acres of the Fakahatchee Strand, Collier County's last wilderness area, to Gulf American Land Corporation, has been called by Mrs. Ben Parks, conservation chairman of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs.

A number of prominent local residents who have been working in recent months in an effort to preserve the Strand as a national monument will attend, Mrs. Parks said. Congressman Rogers' visit to Naples today is in connection with the dedication of the Collier County Free Public Library on Central Avenue at 2:30 p.m.

NOT GIVING UP

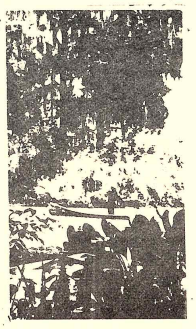
"We are not giving up," said Mrs. Parks. "This invaluable self - sustaining ecological area was sold while the campaign to preserve it was under way by the Junior Women's Clubs of Florida.

"It's the last habitat of Florida wildlife and it must be preserved. A great number of people in the state are unhappy about this sale and I might add we have some very prominent people on our side.

"When Gulf American Land bought the Fakahatchee Strand they announced Thursday that the wilderness area would not be subdivided. Yet, I am told, that within an hour following the announcement, they filed a mortgage here calling for subdivision and resale of the tract. We want to know what is going on and we intend to find out."

Sale price of the Strand was reported to be $6,320,000. The area was sold by the J. C. Turner Lumber Company, parent firm of Lee Tidewater Cypress.

The drive to preserve the Strand as a national park was originally sponsored by the Junior Women's Clubs of Florida. Mrs. Parks is junior chairman of the Conservation of Natural Resources Department of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs.



Membership News

Members make a difference!

Welcome new member Cristina Gillies.

We have 282 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

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
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.

Platinum Transparency 2026 Candid.

FOF earned a 2026 Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency. See what your donations help us accomplish at https://tinyurl.com/candid-platinum

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.