

Cocohatchee better for boaters

Small boats often get through to see the 'wild' side of U.S. 41

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Meandering through mangroves, the Cocohatchee River seems far from civilization. /
Andrea Stetson/Special to Coastal Life

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IF YOU GO

- GAEA Guides Cocohatchee River Tours (kayak guided tours) Wednesdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. \$45. Tours leave from Cocohatchee River Park. 694-5513
- Naples Marina Excursions offers sunset cruises on the Cocohatchee on its pontoon boats. Times vary. Until July 10th the tour is from 7:30-9 p.m. From July 10-Aug 10 the trip runs from 7:15- 8:45 p.m. \$35, tours leave from Naples Marina Excursions, 12345 Tamiami Trail N. Naples, 592-1200

It doesn't have channel markers, so sometimes boaters just have to explore to find the way to go. Mangroves form little coves, and in places not a home or condo can be seen. The only scenery is mangroves, birds, fish and water.

The Cocohatchee River isn't as popular as the Imperial, Estero or Caloosahatchee River, but that's exactly what makes it so special. Boaters can meander up the river and never see another vessel. The river runs from just east of Wiggins Pass all the way up past U.S. 41. The very low U.S. 41 bridge over the river prevents all but the smallest boats from continuing beyond that area. Once boaters pass the

condos and marinas the river takes on a wild natural look. The only sign of civilization is one small, quaint mobile home park and one restaurant. The rest of the river is lined by only mangroves.

It's easy for people who don't own a boat to explore the Cocohatchee River. GAEA Guides offers kayak tours every Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Connie Langmann, owner, says the Cocohatchee is a very special place to visit.

"It's an estuary where the river meets the salt water of the Gulf so we get to see a lot of bird life," Langmann began. "We see herons, egrets, pelicans, ospreys, sometimes bald eagles and spoonbills. We frequently find creatures on the bottom such as sea stars and urchins and whelks and conchs and oysters. We talk about the mangrove forest we are in and where the river originates and how it comes down. It's just a beautiful area. We go through mangrove tunnels."

Naples Marina Excursions offers daily nature and sunset tours. The company also rents kayaks, canoes and paddleboards. Dorothy Hanshaw, manager, said the Cocohatchee is a extraordinary river for many reasons.

"It's a beautiful estuary," she said. "We have spoonbills and you don't see those everywhere. We see dolphins and it goes all the way out to the Gulf."

Article found and contributed to the RNMHA website by Wendell White, 7/5/2013