

ask is if the park can survive warming climate and sea-level rise as well as the invasion of non-native plants and wildlife like Brazilian pepper and Burmese pythons.

After my two good days on the freshwater lakes, I figured it was time to revisit my old favorites—the East and Faka Union rivers. Both are accessible only by kayak or a small canoe and should be attempted only by experienced paddlers as they require navigating narrow, overgrown mangrove tunnels to reach the lakes that hold the gamefish. A good guide is Jeff Ripple's *Day Paddling Florida's 10,000 Islands and Big Cypress Swamp* which contains route information and highlights for both waters. On the East River, which now has a reservation system to protect bird rookeries and other park flora and fauna, the key is to get down to the third and fourth lakes in the chain that starts just off the Tamiami Trail. [See box on page 38 for details on making a reservation.] On the Faka Union, a long narrow tunnel taking 20 minutes to traverse at the beginning of the trip opens into a series of five lakes that only occasionally see anglers. Fishing can be outstanding in both, best months being November through April.

Today I choose the Faka Union River. The put-in is a rocky launch next to the third bridge on the Tamiami Trail to the east of Port of the Islands. I soon fool a couple of 15-inchers on the gold glitter curly-tail before slithering down the long mangrove tunnel, ducking limbs and spider webs.

I emerge into a shallow lake where the curly-tail does its job, fooling a high-stepping baby tarpon. The 'poon is soon followed by several snook as I probe the nooks and crannies along the shoreline. When the action slows, I slide quietly into the short mangrove tunnel leading to the next lake and throw a back-handed cast with my short 6-foot tunnel rod under some overhanging mangrove roots. The lure sinks and then is rocked by something big. I set the hook, and a big mama snook erupts in the air 20 feet downstream. After a quick picture of the 27-inch beauty, I release her back into the wilderness.

In the early afternoon, my curly-tail fools a nice redfish, completing the Fakahatchee slam. Not wishing to push my luck, I decide

it's time to hightail it back to my SUV and then make tracks to the Island Café in Everglades City to celebrate with one of their famous double-decker cheeseburgers.

If you go, you'll no doubt enjoy the fishing. Just keep in mind the purpose of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve is to protect this natural wonder. Mike Owens reminds us to keep a "carry-in, carry-out" mindset, specifically mentioning that this includes monofilament fishing line.

In other words, leave no trace, just take home good memories. And don't forget that the park's lakes don't open till 8 a.m. and you must have a Florida saltwater or freshwater fishing license to sample these productive fisheries. **FS**



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