



Apalachicola

National Estuarine Research Reserve



Location: Located 80 miles southeast of Tallahassee and 70 miles east of Panama City, Florida, where the Apalachicola River meets Apalachicola Bay

Date Designated: 1979

Area Protected: 234,715 acres

Web Address: dep.state.fl.us/coastal/sites/apalachicola

Management: Daily oversight is provided by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management provides funding, national guidance, and technical assistance.

Access and Infrastructure

- The headquarters is a LEED-certified education and research facility that features a 5,400-square-foot nature center with three 1,000-gallon tanks containing local freshwater, brackish, and saltwater aquatic life. There's also a hands-on discovery room and a mural depicting local ecosystems.
- Visitors can explore over 1,600 feet of raised boardwalk traversing the nature center's 28 acres. A coastal hammock shaded by live oaks and magnolia trees opens up into a freshwater marsh and a stand of slash pine.
- Recreational activities include boating, fishing, hiking, camping, swimming, picnicking, and wildlife viewing. A canoe and kayak trail system stretching more than 100 miles was designated a national recreation trail in 2008. It is part of the 1,515-mile Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail.

The Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve represents one of the most productive estuarine systems in the Northern Hemisphere. The economic and environmental benefits are enhanced and protected by the programs and initiatives led by reserve staff members.

Research and monitoring projects at the reserve address high-priority issues impacting the productivity and biodiversity of the bay. Important habitats regularly monitored include the barrier island beaches of Cape St. George Island, wetland areas, aquatic vegetation, and oyster reefs. To manage these diverse natural communities, there exists a similarly diverse group of natural resource managers who work to preserve the important biological functions and services provided by this system.

NOAA Office for Coastal Management

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Interesting Things to Know

- The reserve is the estuarine component of the much larger Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint watershed, which traverses three states and covers nearly 20,000 square miles. The upper reaches of the basin begin about 90 miles above Atlanta, Georgia, where the Chattahoochee originates as a small mountain stream.
- This reserve is a major forage area for trans-Gulf migratory bird species and supports a local fishing industry worth \$14-16 million annually, which in turn directly supports up to 85 percent of the local population.
- The reserve is a United Nations-designated world biosphere reserve, a protected area that demonstrates a balanced relationship between people and nature.
- One of six biodiversity hotspots in the country, the reserve is home to 109 plant and 54 animal species listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern, including the American alligator, Florida manatee, bald eagle, and loggerhead sea turtle.

About the Programs

The nation's 30 research reserves represent a tremendous asset, protecting nearly 1.4 million acres and providing habitat where plants and wildlife thrive. Community benefits include recreation, flood protection, and water filtration. Because the following programs are offered at each reserve, the system is able to make an environmental impact at the local level, as well as nationally.

Stewardship. Site protection and enhancement are part of every research reserve. Activities may include managing land and water resources, restoring habitat, controlling invasive species, maintaining biodiversity, and reducing environmental stressors.

Research. Reserve research is focused on how environmental factors—such as nutrient loading, climate change, invasive species, and storms—impact coastal ecosystems. The System-Wide Monitoring Program, or SWMP, provides long-term data on water quality, weather, biological communities, habitat, and land-use and land-cover characteristics. This combination of research and data provides a strong, science-based foundation for addressing coastal management challenges.

Training. To provide the community with the information and skills needed to integrate coastal science into local decision-making and everyday lives, reserves provide specialized courses and information. Reserve training professionals are active in community planning and improvement initiatives.

Education. Local data generated at the reserve provide students with a firsthand experience of local environmental conditions. Educators lead student, teacher, and citizen field trips that are life-changing experiences, as participants see, feel, and smell what makes an estuary one of the most remarkable places in the world.

