



Connecticut

National Estuarine Research Reserve



Location: Southeastern Connecticut with uplands in Lyme, Old Lyme, and Groton, and an offshore area connecting them that includes the lower Connecticut River, Long Island Sound, and the lower Thames River

Date Designated: 2022

Area Protected: 52,160 acres

Web Address: estuarineresearchreserve.center.uconn.edu

Management: The University of Connecticut is the lead state agency, working in close collaboration with Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, and other local organizations. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management provides funding, national guidance, and technical assistance.

Access and Infrastructure

- The reserve includes several established state parks and natural area preserves, including Lord Cove Natural Area Preserve; Roger Tory Peterson Natural Area Preserve; Bluff Point State Park, Coastal Reserve, and Natural Area Preserve; and Haley Farm State Park. State park locations are accessible to the public and offer a variety of recreational opportunities. Natural area preserves and coastal reserves do not widely support active recreation, but can easily be enjoyed via kayak or canoe from several nearby public launch sites.
- The headquarters for the reserve is at the University of Connecticut Avery Point campus in Groton, which houses the primary administrative, research, and education offices. Additional facilities are located at the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Marine District Headquarters in Old Lyme, and provide support for sites along the Connecticut River.

The Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve protects a large area of Long Island Sound (including parts of Fishers Island Sound), portions of the lower Thames River, and portions of the lower Connecticut River. The site includes unique habitat types not found in the other four national estuarine research reserves within the Northeast, and provides examples of offshore characteristics such as rocky hard bottom areas, as well as different habitats and species that occur in shallow to approximately 50-meter water depths. These areas, as well as their upland counterparts, provide an integrated and diverse mosaic of land and seascapes for a host of species, including many that are threatened or endangered.

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Interesting Things to Know

- The Connecticut River, part of which is protected by the reserve, contains the highest fish diversity in the region with 78 species, including Atlantic salmon and the endangered shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon. It is also the only major river in the Northeast that does not contain a major port facility at its mouth, because of shallow, sandy areas just offshore.
- This reserve includes areas within the Connecticut River recognized as “wetlands of international importance” by the Ramsar Convention, noted for their extraordinary assemblage of natural and undisturbed plant and animal communities, a nesting site, and stopover grounds for migratory birds.
- The Bluff Point complex is the last significant piece of undeveloped land along the Connecticut coast and includes several unique landforms, including a sea-level fen and a cove forest. It is a significant stopover area for migrating birds.
- Long Island Sound is a major economic driver of Connecticut’s blue economy, contributing \$7 billion annually to the regional economy. Protecting portions of the rivers and tributaries that feed the sound, and a section of the sound itself, helps protect the resources within.

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 monitoring program, known as 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.

To learn more, visit coast.noaa.gov/nerrs.

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