



Elkhorn Slough

National Estuarine Research Reserve

Location: 3.5 miles east of Moss Landing, and 23 miles north of Monterey, California

Date Designated: 1979

Area Protected: 1,739 acres

Web Address: elkhornslough.org

Management: Daily oversight and funding are provided by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management provides additional funding, national guidance, and technical assistance.

Access and Infrastructure

- The Elkhorn Slough Visitor Center includes exhibits, displays of live native plants, and a bookstore. A nine-times-larger-than-life model of life in the mud, complete with a four-foot tall innkeeper worm, allows people of all ages to take a closer look at the unseen world of the slough.
- Five miles of hiking trails meander through a variety of habitats.

The Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve provides habitat for more than 550 species of invertebrates, 100 species of fish, and 135 species of birds, including six species listed as threatened or endangered. Located on the Pacific Flyway, the reserve and the surrounding area are renowned for outstanding birding opportunities.

The mission is to ensure the perpetual health of Elkhorn Slough ecosystems and the surrounding watershed through preservation, restoration, research, education, and community engagement. Focus areas include water quality, coastal and estuarine ecosystem restoration and protection, and identifying and mitigating factors contributing to the loss of salt marsh.

NOAA Office for Coastal Management



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Interesting Things to Know

- The Elkhorn Slough Reserve winds inland nearly seven miles from Monterey Bay to Watsonville. It contains the most extensive salt marsh in California south of San Francisco Bay.
- This reserve includes threatened habitats such as maritime chaparral, coastal prairie, coastal sage scrub, live oak woodlands, and grasslands.
- Through purchase or donation, the reserve and the Elkhorn Slough Foundation have protected nearly 5,500 acres of land.
- The top challenge for this ecosystem is extensive loss of salt marsh.

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.

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

