Narragansett Bay

National Estuarine Research Reserve

Location: 12 miles north of Newport and 12 miles south of Providence, Rhode Island, on four islands in the geographic center of Narragansett Bay

Date Designated: 1980

Area Protected: 4,332 acres (terrestrial and submerged)

Web Address: *nbnerr.org*

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

Access and Infrastructure

- The headquarters, lab, and learning center, located on Prudence Island, are only accessible by public ferry or private vessel. Private vessel is the only means of getting to Patience, Hope, and Dyer Islands.
- In the learning center, exhibits highlight local flora and fauna and include a kid's area and natural resource identification station. An educational classroom and conference room is available for school groups, workshops, or meetings.
- Residential facilities are available as short-term accommodations for scientists, school groups, or other educational programming.
- Prudence Island offers a sandy beach and the estuary education shed, complete with exhibits, seasonal aquariums, and touch tanks. Adjacent to this is the World War II-era Navy T-wharf, which serves as a popular fishing pier and water-quality monitoring platform.
- Outdoor interpretive kiosks are located at the learning center and along popular walking trails.

The Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve contains diverse upland, aquatic, and estuarine habitats, including coastal grasslands, coastal shrubland, forested wetlands, lowland streams, coastal marshes, cobble and rocky shores, eelgrass beds, and muddy bottoms. Both Hope and Dyer Islands are important rookeries for colonial nesting wading birds. Prudence Island is home to a small residential and seasonal community, but almost 85 percent of the island is protected from development; approximately 60 percent falls within reserve boundaries.

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Interesting Things to Know

- The south end of Prudence Island was formerly owned by the U.S. Navy and used as a munitions depot during World War II. Turned over to the state in 1980, the property was briefly used as a state park before being included as research reserve property.
- Data collected through the reserve's monitoring programs are used in local and state-wide water quality, habitat, and vulnerability assessments. Data on sea level rise and salt marshes help the region improve climate resiliency and plan for marsh migration.
- Wildlife cameras installed in the reserve's pine barrens, salt marsh, and coastal grasslands support research and education. Camera trap photos shared on social media showcase a wide variety of wildlife species using these important habitats.
- Prudence Island's unique pine barrens include pitch pine trees that need periodic fires to thrive. Stewardship activities to sustain this rare upland habitat involve removing invasive species, selective woodcutting, and conducting controlled burns.

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.

Office for Coastal Management