



# Old Woman Creek

## National Estuarine Research Reserve



**Location:** Huron, Ohio, on the southwestern shore of Lake Erie

**Date Designated:** 1980

**Area Protected:** 573 acres

**Web Address:** [naturepreserves.ohiodnr.gov/oldwomancreek](http://naturepreserves.ohiodnr.gov/oldwomancreek)

**Management:** Daily oversight is provided by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management provides funding, national guidance, and technical assistance.

### Access and Infrastructure

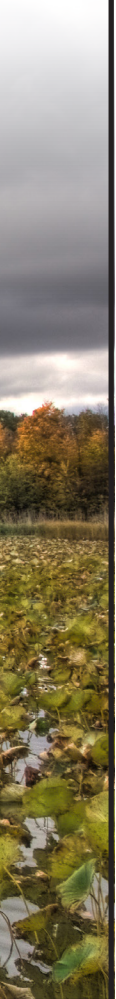
- The Mike DeWine Center for Coastal Wetland Studies, overlooking the estuary's eastern shore, holds four laboratories for ecological research and serves as a focal point for educational programs and visitors. The center features exhibits, games, estuary monitoring gear, movies, and live animals.
- The reserve has over two miles of pedestrian trails that wind through an oak-hickory forest leading to an observation deck over the estuary. Beach access is provided at the north side of the reserve.

**The Old Woman Creek National Estuarine Research Reserve** was the first freshwater estuary on the Great Lakes in the reserve system. Located on the southwestern shore of Lake Erie, the site features freshwater marshes, swamp forests, a barrier beach, upland forests, and a riparian stream, and is one of Ohio's most valuable natural resources.

As one of the few remaining intact examples of a freshwater estuary on the southern shore of Lake Erie, the reserve is a critical spawning and nursery ground for sport and commercial fish. In times of high water, important aquatic plants like the American water lotus dominate the estuary, while at all times, a wide range of animals are attracted to the reserve's abundance of food and water.

Over 200 research and monitoring projects have been completed here. The monitoring program allows the reserve to serve as a model watershed for nutrient reduction management practices aimed at limiting harmful algal blooms in the western basin of Lake Erie. The data are used to support the restoration and management of coastal wetlands and estuaries and provide firsthand benefits to Lake Erie ecosystems and communities.

**NOAA Office for Coastal Management**





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### Interesting Things to Know

- An estuary is typically a region where freshwater from a river mixes with salt water from the ocean, but this estuary differs in that the freshwater of a creek mixes with the freshwater of Lake Erie (which is actually a freshwater inland sea).
- The reserve is fostering several long-term educational programs in which students are restoring habitat and collecting data used by reserve scientists.
- The reserve has developed a citizen science program to monitor birds, amphibians, and mammals in the estuary.

### 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](http://coast.noaa.gov/nerrs).*

Office for Coastal Management

