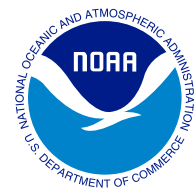


Welcome to the Family!

National Estuarine Research Reserve System
A Primer for New Employees



Office for Coastal Management
coast.noaa.gov/nerrs



Yes, **WELCOME TO THE RESEARCH RESERVE FAMILY!**

As a new research reserve employee or volunteer, you've become part of the team that has made the research reserve system what it is today—the premier resource for estuarine education, research, recreation, and stewardship across the country. To help you get started, we thought you might benefit from an overview of the administrative workings of the reserve system. We cover only the basics here, since the best way to learn the details is through experience and conversation.

While we tried to provide a good overview, I guarantee we will fall short in at least one area: conveying the heart and soul of the places and the people associated with the reserves. Estuaries are special, and they attract special people. The passion and innovation found here keep me excited about our work and coming back for more.

The reserve system is an incredible network, representing a team of thousands working and covering over 1.3 million acres of land. But the sites themselves are unique, ranging from 570 acres to over 370,000. Some employ dozens of staff members who work out of the country's most modern research labs, while others work as small divisions within state organizations, with thousands of acres to manage by only a handful of people.

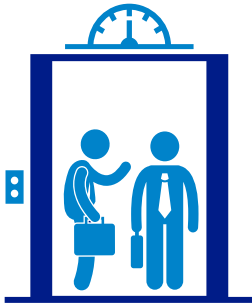
Each reserve seems to work as a nuclear family, and the reserve system acts as the extended family. Have a question about trail delineation, or an idea for a way to improve the water quality monitoring protocol? Call on one of your peers within the system. And if you get a chance to go the annual meeting—well, you know how reunions are. It's a great chance to catch up with people you immediately feel connected to.

The positive and meaningful work we do is wide-ranging and hard to put into words. We provide science experiences and information to community leaders, citizens, and children, and thousands enjoy the fantastic recreational opportunities this protected natural resource provides. Let's not forget our role in protecting a natural habitat vital for people, plants, and animals. I am often awestruck by the opportunity and the responsibility.

I'm sure you'll feel this way too after spending just a short time at your research reserve. What is provided in these pages is a look at the essential behind-the-scenes framework that makes it all possible.

Welcome to the family. I look forward to meeting you soon.

Erica Seiden
Program Manager
Ecosystems and National Estuarine Research Reserve System Program



GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE SYSTEM

Who, What, and Why

The research reserves are 29 sites covering over 1.3 million acres, all dedicated to preserving estuaries and serving local communities and the nation. The goal is to protect and study this important natural resource, the estuary. Each site includes programs focused on land stewardship, research and scientific monitoring, training programs for the public and local officials, and education.

The system was established by the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972. The reserves operate through a partnership program between NOAA and the coastal states. NOAA provides funding and national guidance, and each site is managed on a daily basis by a lead state agency or university with input from local partners. Coastal challenges addressed include nonpoint source pollution, resilient communities, habitat restoration, and invasive species. Supporting and advocating for all the reserves and the work they do is the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association—a nongovernmental, nonprofit ally and friend.

then there's the

Mission Statement

The mission of the reserve system is to practice and promote stewardship of coasts and estuaries through innovative research, education, and training using this network of sites. As a system, we have developed programs in each of these functional areas using similar protocols and approaches, which allows us to meet national objectives while focusing on local issues.

and of course

Our Charge

We are places. Research reserves ensure the protection of representative estuaries across the nation as places dedicated to estuarine science, education, and stewardship.

We do work that is locally relevant. Each reserve in the national system is a community hub for integrated approaches that bring together science, stewardship, and education to effect positive change in their community's most pressing coastal issues.

We have a national impact. We work together as a system to deliver science and education programs with regional, national, and international impact.

We study how estuaries work and how they are changing. Our science, data, and maps are applied to inform decisions critical to maintaining healthy estuaries, watersheds, and coastal communities. Our monitoring programs make us sentinels for estuarine change across the nation.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF OUR EXISTENCE

ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPORT

“Partnership” is a word you will hear time and time again, for the partnership concept infiltrates just about every aspect of the operation. This is particularly true on the administrative front. The organizations listed below work hand-in-glove to keep the operation moving forward. NOAA and the coastal states work collaboratively to develop and implement the system’s strategic plan, with implementation support from the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association.

NOAA – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management oversees the implementation of the program. Duties and support include the following:

- National coordination, leadership
- Technical assistance
- Environmental compliance
- Funding (70 percent)

State Partners

State partners are in charge of day-to-day operations. Duties and support include the following:

- Land ownership, management, resource stewardship
- Staff members
- Program implementation
- Funding (30 percent)

NERRA – National Estuarine Research Reserve Association

This nonprofit, nongovernmental organization was established in 1987 to advance the work of the reserve system. Duties and support include the following:

- Advocate for the reserve system and promote its work with Congress, the presidential administration, and NOAA
- Gain funding and support for research reserve programs and products from Congress, the federal administration, and NOAA
- Increase awareness, use, and support for the system among partner organizations
- Educate the public about estuaries
- Work to strengthen the programs and the reserve friends and foundation network





WHAT MAKES IT WORK ROLES

Each reserve has several core functions, or sectors: training, research, education, and stewardship. At the NOAA level, sector leads offer guidance on and coordination between each of these functions.

The strategic committee, composed of two coordinators from each sector, drives the strategic planning process and makes recommendations on national funding opportunities. Each reserve is also assigned a NOAA liaison to help coordinate administrative functions and act as a bridge to NOAA.

Responsibilities throughout the system are summarized below.

System Leadership, Coordination

- Leadership and visioning for system
- Strategic planning (committee chair)
- Leader of management sector
- Coordination with reserve association leadership
- Coordination of Office for Coastal Management resources for system

National Education Coordinator

- Coordination with NOAA Office of Education
- Evaluation of reserve system education programs
- Technical assistance on education products (curriculum, online tools)

National Stewardship Coordinator

- Sentinel Site Program oversight
- NOAA Sentinel Site Program implementation
- Habitat mapping and change program oversight
- Coordination with other NOAA programs to support stewardship efforts

National Coastal Training Program Coordinator

- Guidance and approval of training strategies
- Program performance and evaluation oversight
- Technical assistance with ecosystem services projects

National Research Coordinator

- Strategic planning to meet research and monitoring goals
- Technical assistance on projects and initiatives
- Coordination with other organizations regarding science and technology issues

Science Collaborative Program Manager

- Primary NOAA point of contact for grants administration
- Program guidance and oversight
- Competitive proposal funding process oversight
- Communication of research accomplishments

NOAA Site Liaisons

- Provide link among reserve sites, partners, and NOAA
- Involved in grant management – operations, construction, and acquisition
- Take part in management plan development and review
- Participate in site evaluations (known as a 312 review)
- Support environmental compliance
- Facilitate technical assistance
- Provide connection to NOAA products, services, and staff members

NERRA Leadership

- Governing board comprises the 29 reserve managers and representatives from the reserves' sector and friends groups
- Executive committee representing staff leaders from multiple reserves
- Led by an executive director who advocates for the reserve system and works with Congress and NOAA to support and enhance system mission

Friends and Foundation Network

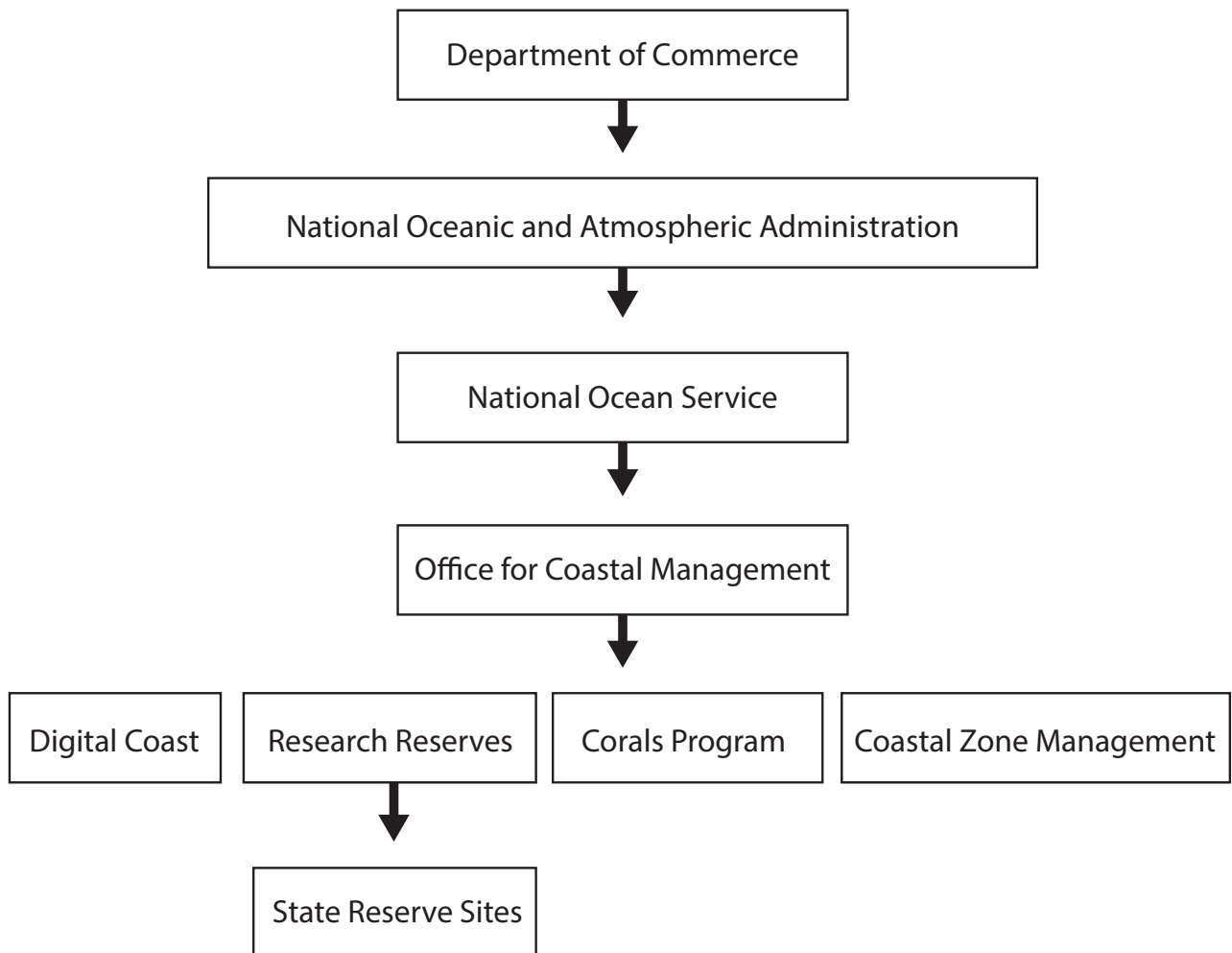
- Supports NERRA and the national system as a whole
- Assists reserves on the local level in the form of individual friends groups
- Enhances communication among friends groups

Research Reserve Staff

- One manager at each reserve responsible for daily oversight and big-picture thinking about how the system can advance estuary management and science
- A team of coastal management specialists for each sector (training, research, education, and stewardship) working in an integrative way on both site-specific and system-wide issues
- Science Collaborative researchers and Coastal Management Fellowship participants

FOR THOSE WHO LIKE ORG CHARTS
ORGANIZATIONAL CHARTS

To see the full organizational chart for these organizations, visit their websites.





Under the Coastal Zone Management Act, Congress annually provides appropriations to support the National Estuarine Research Reserve System through two funding lines.

- Operations, research, and facilities (ORF)
- Procurement, acquisition, and construction (PAC)

Operations, Research, and Facilities

The majority of the appropriations in this funding line goes to the annual operations awards, which support the day-to-day operations of the reserve, including staff time, equipment, travel, and facilities. NOAA develops annual guidance directing the expenditure of operations award funds, including requirements for funding core positions (manager, research coordinator, and education coordinator) and outcomes such as the System-wide Monitoring Program, Teachers on the Estuary, and Coastal Training Program.

NOAA provides operations award funds through a cooperative agreement, which means that both the state and federal government have a substantial role in developing the funding proposal. The operations funds are awarded noncompetitively, and each reserve generally receives an equal amount of funding. Reserves must match the federal funds at a ratio of 70 percent federal to 30 percent nonfederal.

In addition to the operations awards, the operations, research, and facilities appropriations line also supports the following:

- Centralized Data Management Office (CDMO)
- Science Collaborative
- National products
- Additional special allocations, such as funding to support designation of additional research reserves

Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction

These funds are used to support construction of infrastructure, such as research facilities, dorms, exhibits, boardwalks, or small-scale habitat restoration projects. Funds may also be used for land acquisitions that would protect key ecological areas for the reserve. These projects must support priorities identified in a current management plan.

Procurement, acquisition, and construction funds are normally awarded competitively; therefore, not every reserve is awarded funding every year. NOAA develops a federal funding opportunity notice that is posted on Grants.gov. Reserves then submit applications for projects, which are evaluated by merit reviewers, and the top-rated projects are selected for funding. Once selected, competitive funds are awarded in the form of a grant, which means less federal involvement. These funds require a nonfederal match, but the federal and nonfederal ratio differs depending on the type of project funded. Acquisition projects require that 50 percent of total project costs are supported by nonfederal funds, while construction projects require the same 70 percent federal to 30 percent nonfederal match ratio that is required by the operations awards.

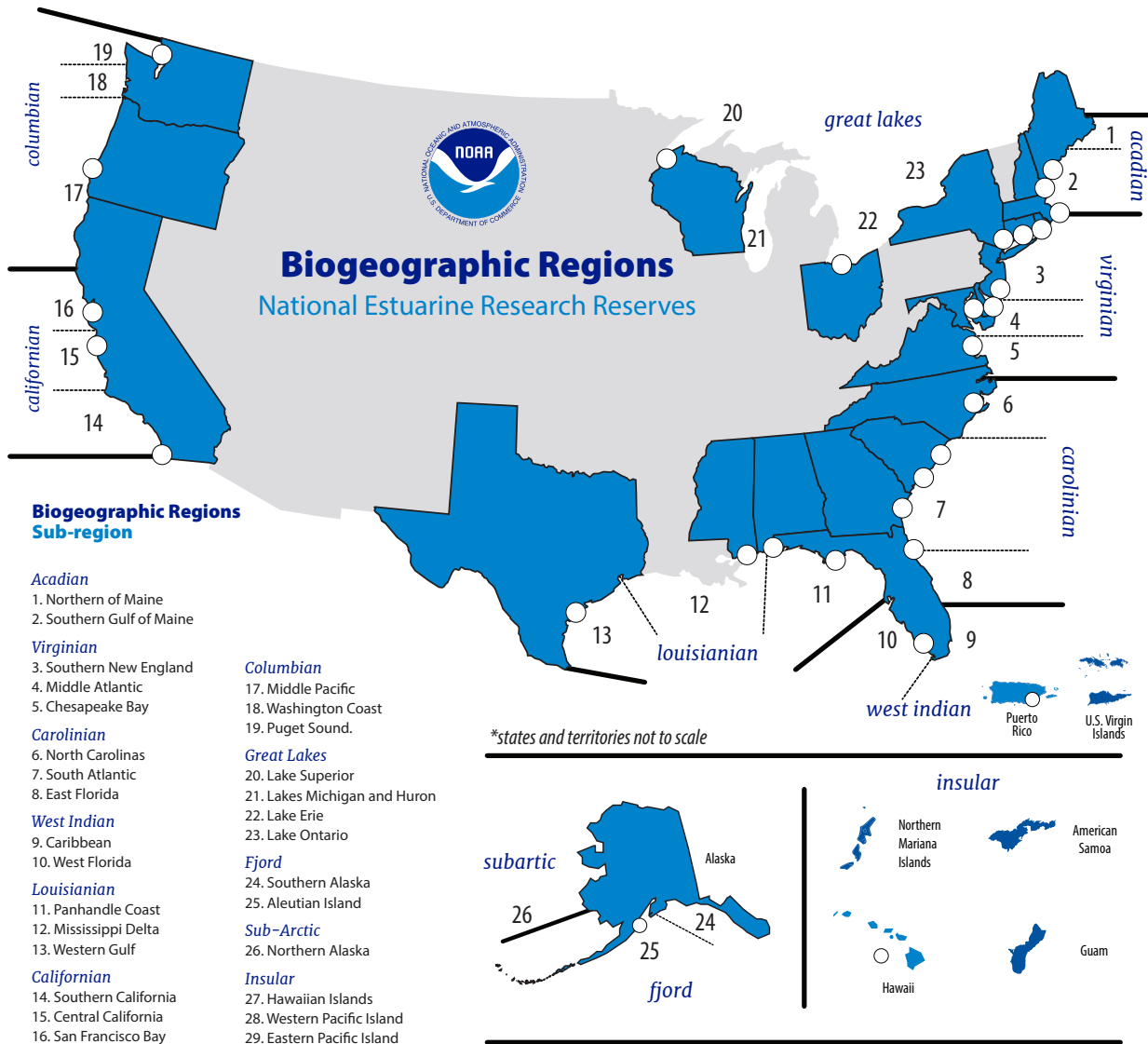
NOAA has occasionally reserved a portion of these funds to support equipment purchases at all of the reserves. In this limited instance, these funds are awarded according to need, and the individual reserves do not have to compete for this portion of the funding.

Other Sources of Funding

Additional funding beyond federal resources is a requirement of the system and comes from various outside sources, including states, external research partners, state and private universities, a range of private entities, and the fundraising efforts of reserve friends groups and foundations.



WHO'S YOUR BUDDY? THE NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE SYSTEM



How are research reserve sites chosen?

An important factor for determining a suitable site has to do with biodiversity. While all functioning estuaries are important, an estuary in the southern part of the country is different from a Pacific Island-based estuary. The system wants to protect the various estuaries and better understand the differences and similarities between them, hence the need for biogeographic diversity.

The relationship between a site and its greater community is also an important determining factor. The area must not only be suitable for long-term research, but designation of the site must enhance public awareness and understanding of estuaries

and provide opportunities for public education. The people who live and work near research reserves are a large part of the role the sites play, and often help shape how a reserve comes to be. The Wells Research Reserve, for instance, was born out of a kitchen-table conversation that evolved into a nonprofit foundation and led to the official designation, all thanks to a few community members with a lot of passion and vision.

Step one for the designation process is a request from a state. See coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/about/designation-process to learn more.



AND FINALLY WAYS TO LEARN MORE

Website Resources

- NOAA Office for Coastal Management – coast.noaa.gov
- Research Reserve System – coast.noaa.gov/nerrs
- Estuaries Education – coast.noaa.gov/estuaries
- Science Collaborative – graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding
- National Estuarine Research Reserve Association – nerra.org
- Grants Online – grantsonline.rdc.noaa.gov/flows/home/Login/LoginController.jspf
- Centralized Data Management Office – cdmo.baruch.sc.edu
- NERRA Friends and Foundations Network – nerra.org/about-us/friends-partners

Information Sharing Options

- Research Reserve System intranet – coast.noaa.gov/NerrsIntranet/Default.aspx
- ALL listserve – nerrsall@csc.noaa.gov

To join, subscribe at csc.noaa.gov/mailman/listinfo/nerrsall

- Manager listserve – nerrsmanagers@csc.noaa.gov (To join, subscribe at csc.noaa.gov/mailman/listinfo/nerrsmanagers)
- Coastal Training Program Coordinator listserve – NERRS-CTP@csc.noaa.gov (To join, subscribe at csc.noaa.gov/mailman/listinfo/nerrs-ctp)
- Education Coordinator listserve – nerrseducators@csc.noaa.gov (To join, subscribe at csc.noaa.gov/mailman/listinfo/nerrseducators)
- Research Coordinator listserve – NERRS-RC@listserv.sc.edu (To join, email melissa@belle.baruch.sc.edu or Marie.Bundy@noaa.gov or chris.kinkade@noaa.gov)
- System-wide Monitoring Program (SWMP) Technicians and Coordinators listserve – NERRTECH@listserv.sc.edu (For communications about technical issues related to SWMP data and equipment; to join, email melissa@belle.baruch.sc.edu or Marie.Bundy@noaa.gov or chris.kinkade@noaa.gov)
- The annual research reserve meeting held each fall

Performance Metrics and Research Database

- Education performance metrics database – noaaedeval.knack.com/unified-data-call#nerrs
- Coastal Training Program performance metrics database – coast.noaa.gov/nerrspm/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fnerrspm%2fNERRS%2fDefault.aspx
- Research and Monitoring database – coast.noaa.gov/nerrsresearch/Account/Login?ReturnUrl=%2Fnerrsresearch%2F

Personal Contact

- Peers at other reserves
- Your sector lead or NOAA liaison
- NERRA – nerra.org

Social Media

- NERRA Facebook – facebook.com/estuaries
- NERRA Twitter and Instagram – [@estuaries4life](https://twitter.com/estuaries4life)
- NOAA Digital Coast Facebook – facebook.com/NOAADigitalCoast
- NOAA Digital Coast Twitter – [@NOAADigCoast](https://twitter.com/NOAADigCoast)

TOP ACRONYMS

General

- CZMA – Coastal Zone Management Act
- NERRA – National Estuarine Research Reserve Association
- NERRS – National Estuarine Research Reserve System
- NOAA – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- OCM – Office for Coastal Management
- Section 312 – Section of the CZMA that requires periodic evaluations of the research reserves
- Section 315 – Section of the CZMA that created the National Estuarine Research Reserve System

Education

- KEEP – K-12 Estuary Education Program
- TOTE – Teachers on the Estuary
- CAE – Conservation Action Education Program
- EC – education coordinator
- Knack – education performance metric database on a Knack database system

Coastal Training Program

- CTP – Coastal Training Program
- CTPC – Coastal Training Program coordinator
- CDM – coastal decision maker
- APA – American Planning Association
- TA – technical assistance

Research

- SWMP – System-wide Monitoring Program

Stewardship

- HMC – habitat mapping and change
- SSAM-1 – Sentinel Site Application Module
- CCVATCH – Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Tool for Coastal Habitats
- SC – stewardship coordinator
- GIS – geographic information system

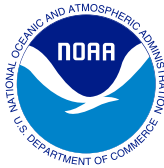
THE RESEARCH RESERVES' ANNUAL MEETING

Tips from Someone Who Has Been There

This meeting involves representatives of all sectors, and usually each reserve site is represented. It is here that the feeling of “family” is cemented, for this is where we come together to learn from each other and solidify our passion for the estuary and our work.

There's a lot to take in during this time. What follows are some tips that we hope will help you make the most of this opportunity.

- Try to look across agendas ahead of time to identify sessions outside of your sector that may be of interest.
- The week will be pretty packed, so don't feel guilty if you need to find some down time.
- Don't be nervous about jumping in and participating, even if it's your first time or if you're new to your sector!
- Read through the agendas, particularly from your sector, and don't hesitate to ask your NOAA sector lead about context or anything that you don't understand.
- Don't hesitate to speak up. A fresh perspective is often one that makes “the old guard” think differently about an issue and move it in a positive direction.
- Come to social events and networking opportunities. These are times when you are most likely to have meaningful conversations and meet a wider range of people.
- The reserve alphabet soup of acronyms can be overwhelming. Don't be shy—ask the speaker to please explain.
- Seek out folks from other reserves in your region, as you will probably be collaborating with them in the future.
- Arrange a side meeting ahead of time with your NOAA site liaison to get to know that person, and what he or she can do to support you.
- Bring some cash, as you will want to participate in the NERRA auction. It's a lot of fun.



OFFICE FOR COASTAL MANAGEMENT

coast.noaa.gov