



# Rookery Bay

## National Estuarine Research Reserve



**Location:** Five miles south of Naples, Florida

**Date Designated:** 1978

**Area Protected:** 110,000 acres

**Web Address:** [rookerybay.org](http://rookerybay.org)

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

### Access and Infrastructure

- The Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center is a 16,500-square-foot facility with laboratories, classrooms, an auditorium, touch tank, and a two-story visitor center. Amenities include a 2,300-gallon aquarium, exhibits, a nature store, and an art gallery. Over 2.5 million people visit the reserve each year.
- Boating, fishing, shelling, and photography are among the opportunities offered at the reserve. Primitive camping is allowed on barrier island beaches in designated areas.
- The Ten Thousand Islands Field Station offers a boat dock, storage space, and dormitory accommodations for visiting researchers, and provides access to the remote Cape Romano-Ten Thousand Islands Aquatic Preserve, part of the research reserve.

### The Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

is a prime example of a nearly pristine subtropical estuary. The total estimated surface area of open waters within the boundary is 70,000 acres—64 percent of the reserve. The remaining 40,000 acres are primarily mangroves, marshes, and upland habitats. The estuary provides important habitat for many species, as well as an ideal setting for visitors to enjoy a variety of outdoor learning experiences and recreational activities.

Reserve staff monitor water, weather, and wildlife to detect short- and long-term change. Like watchdogs for wildlife, researchers can detect differences before they become problems. The reserve's training and education component takes this information to local citizens and decision makers so that the entire community can benefit from this science-based information.

**NOAA Office for Coastal Management**





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### Interesting Things to Know

- Habitats found here support 175 species of birds and many threatened and endangered animals, such as the Florida panther. The unique environment and multiple public access points support a significant and growing ecotourism industry.
- A robust visiting scientist program encourages graduate students and researchers to conduct their studies in the reserve so that reserve staff members can draw on their expertise when making management decisions. Current visiting scientist research includes studies of Burmese pythons, invasive plants, and native box turtles, and nearly 100 others.
- Reserve resource managers work with contractors and volunteers to protect habitat and sustain native biodiversity. Some of their activities include land acquisition, habitat restoration, invasive plant and animal control, listed species protection, marine mammal stranding response, and cultural resource monitoring.

### 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, prescribed fire, 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

