



Waquoit Bay

National Estuarine Research Reserve



Location: South shore of Cape Cod, in the towns of Falmouth and Mashpee, Massachusetts

Date Designated: 1988

Area Protected: 2,804 acres

Web Address: waquoitbayreserve.org

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

Access and Infrastructure

The historic Sargent Estate houses the visitor center, staff offices, education programs, and lab space. The complex, built in the 1880s as a summer estate, provides views across the bay and to Martha's Vineyard.

- The reserve includes a number of trails and boardwalks:
 - ▶ The Quashnet River Trail provides an easy walk along a restored trout stream.
 - ▶ The Great Flat Pond Trail takes visitors through forested areas and includes viewing platforms over salt and freshwater marshes.
 - ▶ Dead Neck Trail is a sand track out to a jetty that affords views of Vineyard Sound and Sage Lot Pond.
- Washburn Island includes a 10-site rustic campground (reservations only) and is popular with day boaters.
- South Cape Beach State Park provides public access to a barrier beach on Vineyard Sound where visitors enjoy swimming and fishing.
- The reserve includes the ancestral lands of the Wampanoag people. The staff continues to work with the tribe, whose ancestors greeted the Pilgrims in 1620.

The **Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve** is a living laboratory and regional resource on one of the Northeast's most studied estuaries. Because the site is a representative example of the shallow bays found throughout the northeastern U.S., research here improves the understanding of these areas and promotes stewardship of the coast throughout the region.

NOAA Office for Coastal Management

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Interesting Things to Know

- Slated for development, most of the site was purchased by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at the urging of a group of local citizens in the early 1980s. The reserve is now part of the Massachusetts State Parks system.
- Washburn Island was used during World War II as an amphibious army training site.
- In the 1800s and 1900s, famous anglers including Daniel Webster and President Grover Cleveland fished the streams and ponds of Cape Cod, including the reserve's Quashnet and Childs Rivers. Local residents served as guides.
- The reserve is home to one of the largest populations of *Agalinis acuta*, a globally rare wildflower.

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

