

THE WEEKS BAY PROGRAM...

National Estuarine Research Reserves serve as important control areas for studying the effects of regional coastal development. Improved understanding of natural processes and human activity at estuaries provides the basis for sound management decisions. Weeks Bay estuary is a field laboratory for scientists and students, and a place for the public to learn about estuarine ecology in a natural setting.

As once expansive coastal wetlands continue to disappear under encroaching development, preservation of these sites becomes critical. Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve not only protects its own estuary, but offers opportunities for research leading to statewide and national wetlands protection, offers science to management professional training, and improved public awareness of our estuarine resources.



Some of the many features at Weeks Bay include:

- Nature Trails
- Boardwalk Trails that are handicapped-accessible
- Native Pitcher Plant Bog with Boardwalk
- Native Landscaping
- Visitor Center – Displays of ecological, historical, archaeological, live and preserved specimens that are indigenous to the Mobile Bay-Weeks Bay Area
- Research and Educational Facility – Contains research offices and an auditorium with a seating capacity of 50
- Picnic Areas

Policies accommodate traditional recreational activities, commercial fishing and other uses of the site, so long as those activities do not disturb the reserve environment and are compatible with research and educational purposes.

WEEKS BAY HOURS

Monday thru Saturday: 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM
Closed State and Federal Holidays

For Group Tour Reservations or Questions
Call (251) 928-9792 or visit our websites at
www.weeksbayreserve.com **or the friends**
group at www.weeksbay.org

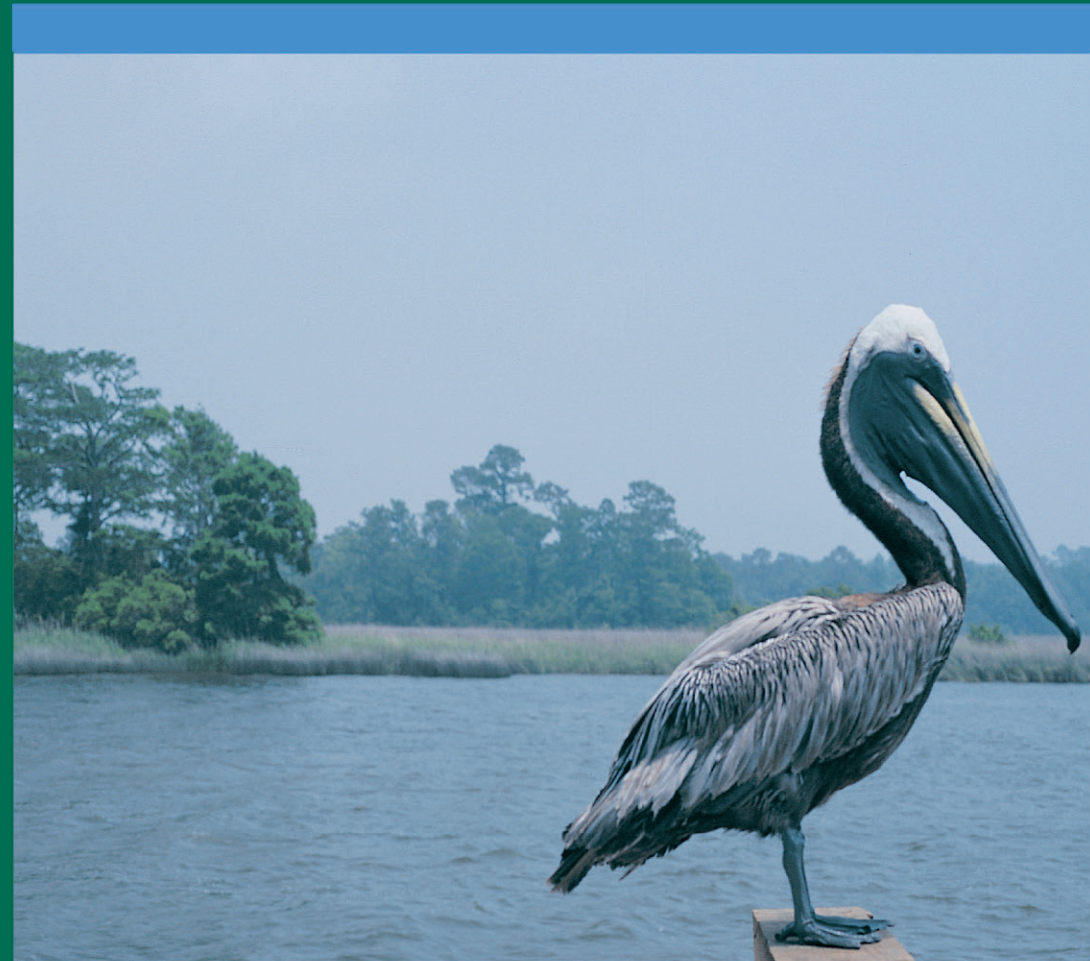


Weeks Bay Visitor Center is Located on U.S. Highway 98 between Fairhope and Foley, just west of the Fish River Bridge in south Baldwin County, Alabama.

Financial support for this publication was provided, fully or in part, by a grant under the Federal Coastal Zone Management Act, administered by the Office for Coastal Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Silver Spring, MD.

Printed 2018

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Weeks Bay
Alabama



Alabama Department
of
Conservation and Natural Resources
State Lands Division
Coastal Section



WHAT IS AN ESTUARY?

Where the rivers meet the sea!

An estuary is a semi-enclosed body of water where fresh water from rivers mixes with salt water from the oceans.

An estuary is an ecosystem in motion, obedient to the force of the tide, the push of the wind, the gravity of the earth and the biological demands of all creatures within it. Estuaries are sites of vigorous interaction between land, sea, fresh water and air. Here, plants and animals from land merge with the abundance of sea life. In its shallow, sunlit waters the incoming tide combines the life-giving nourishment of the sea with the nutrient-laden waters of a river into one of the most productive environments on earth.



WEEKS BAY ESTUARY...

Weeks Bay is a small estuary in Baldwin County that receives waters from the Magnolia and Fish rivers. It is connected by a narrow opening to Mobile Bay. The Bay itself is approximately 1,718 acres with an average depth of 4.8 feet.



WHY PRESERVE THIS ESTUARY?

- **Education** – The estuary is ideal for scientific research and environmental education.
- **Marine Fish and Shellfish Production** – 90% of the fish, shrimp, oysters and crabs caught by commercial fishermen use estuarine areas for spawning, nursery or feeding grounds.
- **Water Quality** – Coastal wetlands act as natural water purifiers. They remove silt and filter out and absorb pollutants such as waterborne chemicals.
- **Recreational Fishing** – Fish River, Magnolia River and



Weeks Bay are ideal habitats for such sought-after species as largemouth bass, bluegill, redear, crappie, spotted seatrout, sand seatrout, red drum, flounder, mullet and blue crab.

- **Birds** – Nearly 350 species of resident and migratory birds use this coastal wetlands site as a breeding, nesting, feeding or wintering habitat.
- **Flood Control** – Fish River, Magnolia River and Weeks Bay basin can temporarily store flood waters, reducing the threat of flood damage.
- **Shoreline Stabilization** – By absorbing wave and storm energy and slowing water currents, wetlands vegetation serves as a buffer against shoreline erosion.
- **Wildlife Habitat** – The estuary provides habitat for numerous plants and animals, some classified as threatened or endangered.
- **Recreation** – Coastal wetlands offer unspoiled open spaces for aesthetic enjoyment of nature and activities such as hiking, birdwatching, wildlife observation and photography.

THE NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE SYSTEM...

In the late 1960s, widespread concern arose over disturbing trends in coastal areas throughout the country. Pollution of coastal waters, closing of shellfish beds, draining of marshes and other man-induced damage to valuable and productive estuarine systems were a few of the problems.

In 1972, the United States Congress passed the Coastal Zone Management Act, which included the National Estuarine Sanctuary Program. Congress delegated to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) the overall responsibility for administering the program and working with states in establishing estuarine sanctuaries. In 1986, the name was changed to the National Estuarine Research Reserve System.

The goal of the program is to establish and manage, through federal-state cooperation, a national system of reserves representing the different coastal regions and estuarine types that exist in the United States and its territories. The program authorizes matching grants to states for acquiring significant estuarine areas, developing and operating research facilities, and conducting educational programs.



WWW.WEEKSBAYRESERVE.COM



WEEKS BAY NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE

In February, 1986, Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve was established as a protected education and research site. Weeks Bay, the nation's 16th national estuarine reserve, is Alabama's best remaining unspoiled estuary. The boundaries encompass more than 9,000 acres of land and water in and around Weeks Bay and along Mobile Bay. Acquisition of additional tracts is planned for expansion of the Reserve. The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) is responsible for overall management of the Reserve through the State Lands Division's Coastal Section.

National Estuarine Research Reserve System

