

## **Preface**

This field guide was designed to assist students, young and old, in exploring the Rookery Bay ecosystem. It is not intended to be a comprehensive description of all plants and animals found in the Rookery Bay Reserve, but rather a beginning point for the novice coastal explorer. The flora and fauna described in this guide are those that may be found while participating in field trips conducted by Reserve staff, and those that have special significance (e.g. listed as endangered). This field guide covers both estuarine and upland communities.

This guide encourages readers to learn the common and scientific names of organisms, and some facts about their natural history. Students are encouraged to take the next step in learning about this unique ecosystem through books and scientific literature that focus on specific groups of plants and animals (see bibliography). Readers are also encouraged to explore Rookery Bay Reserve with the goal of understanding the organisms as well as their own roles in the function of this unique system.

We wish to acknowledge the contributions of the numerous colleagues that assisted in providing content or editing suggestions:

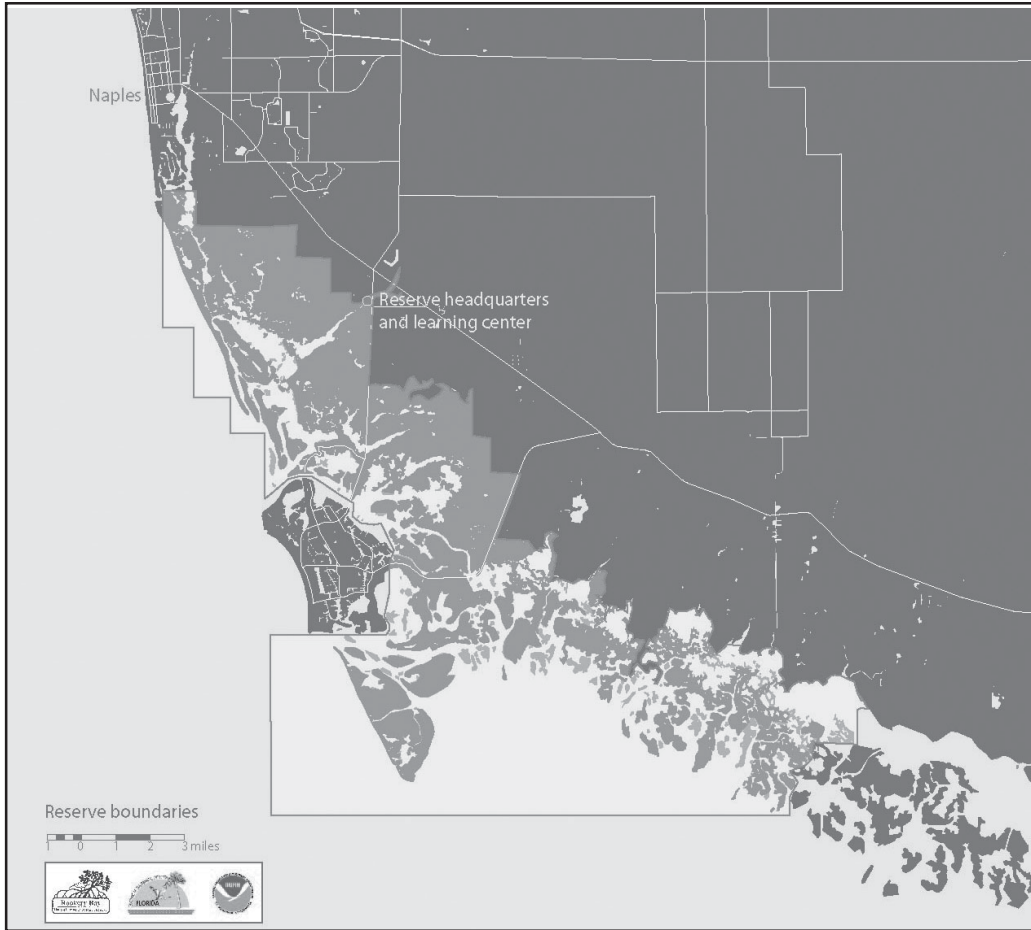
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## Introduction

The Rookery Bay Reserve is part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, a network of 26 protected areas representing different biogeographic regions of the United States. Reserves are protected for long-term research, environmental monitoring, education and coastal stewardship. Established by the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, the reserve system is a partnership program between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the coastal states.



Representing what is considered to be one of the few remaining, relatively pristine mangrove estuaries in the United States, Rookery Bay was formally designated as a National Estuarine Research Reserve in 1978. The Rookery Bay Reserve is managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas.

The Rookery Bay Reserve is located near Naples on the southwest coast of Florida. In 2003, the Reserve's boundaries were officially expanded to 110,000 acres of coastal lands and waters. The Rookery Bay Reserve provides a basis for informed coastal decisions through stewardship, research and education.