

# INTRODUCTION

Located at the northern end of the Ten Thousand Islands on the Gulf coast of Florida, the Rookery Bay Reserve represents one of the few remaining undisturbed mangrove estuaries in North America.

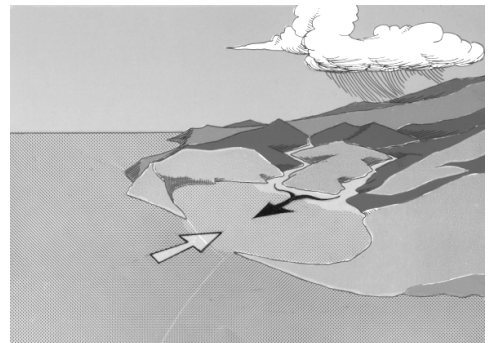
An amazing world exists within the 110,000 acres of pristine mangrove forest, uplands and protected waters of the Rookery Bay Reserve. Where rivers and streams meet the sea, a unique habitat is formed. A myriad of wildlife, including 150 species of birds and many threatened and endangered animals, thrive in the estuarine environment and surrounding upland hammocks and scrub found within the Reserve.

As part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, the mission of the Reserve is to provide a basis for informed coastal decisions through land management, restoration, research and education. The Reserve works in partnership with local communities to promote coastal stewardship.

## Estuary

An estuary is a partially enclosed body of water where fresh water and salt water mix. Most U.S. estuaries are dominated by salt marsh communities and are found at the mouths of rivers.

Rookery Bay, however, is located where that unique “river of grass,” the Everglades, seeps into the sea. Here there is no river mouth; instead, that vast, moving sheet of shallow water spills over the southern edge of Florida into the Gulf of Mexico. A series of small embayments and the Ten Thousand Islands partially enclose the oceanic water and allow the mixing of the two systems.



Mangroves have colonized the oyster reefs, mudflats, sandbars, and vermetid “worm” reefs in this region to form the largest mangrove-dominated coast in the U.S.