

Because of its value to the scientific community, the Reserve maintains a balance of compatible public use and protection, encouraging *passive or low-impact activities* to ensure continued long-term preservation of essential coastal resources. With the exception of recreational fishing and commercial shellfish harvest, allowed public use within the Reserve is non-consumptive.



The Reserve protects some of the most diverse sub-tropical habitats in the country, and *wildlife viewing* is spectacular.

Many native plant and animal species, dependant on these habitats, are species listed as endangered, threatened or of special concern by state and federal governments. *Bird watching* and *nature photography* are two activities that

residents and visitors may enjoy here year round. Some opportunities exist on land along Shell Island Road and on the *Trail Through Time* at the end of



Shell Island Road. Boat access, however provides a better chance to see coastal wildlife in its natural setting.

One of the most notable endangered species that is seasonally abundant in the Reserve is the Florida manatee. Other listed species that rely on Reserve lands or waters include American crocodile, Atlantic green and Ridley sea turtles, brown pelican, wood stork, least tern and snowy plover. Numerous coastal wading birds, such as roseate spoonbill and reddish egret, can be seen fishing in muddy shallows, and osprey and bald eagle are frequently observed grabbing a meal out of the bays and lagoons.



Southwest Florida's coast is known for its white sand beaches, and *shelling* is fantastic. The Reserve contains several island

beaches with an abundance of beautiful shells in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors. Live shelling is prohibited, but shell enthusiasts often find some real treasures washed ashore, particularly after storm events. Key Island, Cape Romano, and the Ten Thousand Islands can only be accessed by boat.

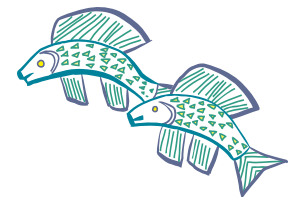
Boating is becoming tremendously popular within the Reserve. One in 18 Floridians owns a vessel, and a growing number of residents and tourists enjoy the availability of rental vessels on a regular basis. There are a number of public boat launch locations providing access to the

barrier island beaches and mazelike mangrove waterways where nearly 200 species of fish are known to reside.

Fishing is allowed throughout the Reserve as long as it is done in compliance with local, state and federal laws. Recreational fishing represents a primary public use of Reserve resources, and there are numerous charter boats, fishing guides, and boat rental services nearby to quench the thirst of sport fishermen. In the quiet backwaters of the Reserve, recreational species include snook, redfish, mangrove snapper, spotted sea trout, and the ever-elusive tarpon.

Possibly the most enjoyable, low-impact recreational activities in the Reserve are *canoeing and kayaking*.

There is a canoe launch and marked paddle trail at the end of Shell Island Road designed to provide quiet enjoyment and up-close and personal wildlife observation opportunities. About two miles in length, the *Shell Point Canoe Trail* leads visitors through a watery maze of mangrove tunnels, mud flats, oyster beds and rookery islands.





Archaeologists have determined that the Rookery Bay area was the site of a Calusa Indian village 3,000 years ago. As a non-agricultural coastal people, the Calusa relied on the

productive estuary for survival, with shellfish as their mainstay. *Exploration* of the canoe trail provides thought-provoking opportunity to contemplate the Calusa civilization and how they made use of the many natural resources within the estuary.

Primitive *camping* is allowed at designated areas within the Reserve, although campfires may be prohibited during high fire hazard periods. Camping and boating visitors are encouraged to utilize Leave No Trace guidelines, which were originally established by the National Outdoor Leadership School. This set of “outdoor good manners” was adopted by the Reserve to help protect the area from unintended abuse by outdoor enthusiasts.

Additional recreation opportunities at Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve can be found at the new *Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center*. The 16,500 square foot



facility offers many opportunities to experience the local environment, such as a picnic patio, floating dock, and a planned pedestrian bridge and boardwalk and trail through the mangrove and pine upland habitats across Henderson Creek. Current exhibits within the Center include:

- a sculpted mangrove rookery with wading birds
- marine aquariums featuring fish and other live specimens collected from Rookery Bay and the Ten Thousand Islands
- interactive exhibits featuring ongoing research and restoration projects being undertaken within the Reserve
- children’s discovery area

The Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve is managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in cooperation with the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration. The Reserve is one of 26 nationally designated sites conducting estuarine research and education, and protects one of the few remaining relatively undisturbed mangrove estuaries in the nation.

For more information please call (239) 417-6310, write to 300 Tower Road, Naples, FL 34113, or visit www.rookerybay.org



Recreational Activities

The Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, located just south of Naples, Florida, encompasses 110,000 acres along the Gulf of Mexico. An amazing world exists within the pristine, mangrove-fringed waterways, uplands and freshwater wetland habitats that can be found only a few miles away from one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country. This estuarine environment, where rivers meet the sea, provides an ideal setting for visitors to enjoy a variety of *outdoor learning experiences* and outstanding recreational activities.

