

Proposed National Estuarine Research Reserve: Atchafalaya

National Estuarine Research Reserve System

This network of 30 sites protects and conserves more than 1.3 million acres of coastal and estuarine habitat and is managed by a partnership between NOAA and coastal states. NOAA provides federal funding and oversight, while state agencies or universities implement day to-day operations for each reserve. Reserve staff work with local communities to address challenges related to natural resource management such as nonpoint source pollution, habitat restoration, invasive species, and more.

Value of Establishing a Reserve in Louisiana

Louisiana the only salt-water coastal state in the country without a National Estuarine Research Reserve. The proposed site in the Atchafalaya River Basin will add the unique estuarine habitat of an actively growing river delta that is not currently represented in the System. This research reserve would also positively affect the health of Louisiana and the Atchafalaya River Basin's ecosystem and economy, and support local communities by helping to preserve an area for use, study, and appreciation by future generations. It will complement and extend the work of existing programs working in this region, including the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, the Louisiana Coastal Management Program, Louisiana Sea Grant, and various non-governmental organizations and academic institutions. The reserve will provide additional opportunities, capacity, and funds for research, training, stewardship and education by leveraging system-wide programs to protect and enhance the Atchafalaya River Basin and Louisiana's coastal environments. To learn more about reserve system-wide programs, visit coast.noaa.gov/nerrs.



Reserve System Snapshot

- ~1.3+ million acres of public land and waters
- 4.5K miles of waterfront and diverse habitat
- 280 NERRS monitoring stations
- 3,000+ educators and 81,000+ K-12 students receive outdoor STEM education
- 36,000+ volunteers and community members support NERRS restoration, education, and stewardship.

Programs and Potential Focus Areas

Each reserve administers four core programs using similar protocols to ensure they are locally relevant and nationally significant: Research and Monitoring, Stewardship, Training, and Education. These programs are tailored to address local issues and priorities important to each reserve. The priority issues that will be addressed through these programs are described below.

Climate Change and Rising Sea Level

The Atchafalaya research reserve will conduct research and monitoring related to climate change and its local effects on Louisiana's coastal habitats. The System Wide Monitoring Program (SWMP) will collect short- and long-term monitoring data to inform matters related to water quality and decisions about community resilience. Reserve staff will have the opportunity to implement and study habitat restoration projects, and will have access to the system's competitive grant program, the Science Collaborative, which funds science projects to support decision-making for resilient coasts.

Habitat Conservation and Water Quality Improvements

Reserve programs can strengthen the stewardship of sites through land conservation and preservation. These core programs are also used as a framework for supporting local initiatives. The Atchafalaya reserve, for example, will provide comprehensive water quality monitoring data that can be used to support management efforts for the Atchafalaya River Basin.

Education for Everyone

The proposed Atchafalaya reserve would offer field classes for K-12 students and support teachers through professional development programs in marine education. The reserve is considered a "living laboratory", providing for long-term water quality and habitat monitoring, as well as, providing a site for both scientists and graduate students to conduct research. Research reserves also provide regional and local consensus-building training, workshops, and skill-building opportunities for coastal decision makers.

Support for the Proposed Atchafalaya Reserve

The designation process for the Atchafalaya research reserve is being led at the state level by the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority. Louisiana State University and Louisiana Sea Grant are also key partners in the designation effort, and led the effort to identify a proposed site for a Louisiana research reserve. Throughout the designation process there are several opportunities for public input through public meetings and open comment periods. For more information on this designation process please go to: <https://coastal.la.gov/our-work/key-initiatives/atchafalaya-national-estuarine-research-reserve/>.