

# **Galveston Bay and the Galveston Bay Estuary Program**



A PROGRAM OF THE TCEQ

**PRESERVING GALVESTON BAY  
FOR GENERATIONS TO COME**

# THE GALVESTON BAY ESTUARY PROGRAM

The Galveston Bay Estuary Program is a non-regulatory program administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

**Mission** – To preserve Galveston Bay for generations to come

**Purpose** – To provide comprehensive ecosystem management through collaborative partnerships and to ensure preservation of the Bay's multiple uses

**Guiding Principles** – Sound science and consensus decision-making

The Estuary Program's partners include local, state, and federal governments, business, industry, universities, conservation organizations, Bay user groups, and citizens. They all work together to implement **The Galveston Bay Plan**, a 20-year, science-based plan designed to protect and restore the Bay.

Some of the Estuary Program's accomplishments:

- 8,000 acres of wetlands and other habitats have been saved through preservation and restoration efforts.
- Fish, shellfish, and colonial water birds are being protected through habitat projects.
- Water quality is being enhanced as communities implement plans to reduce pollution in bayous, creeks, and the Bay.

photo by  
CCA Texas



# GALVESTON BAY IS AN ESTUARY

An estuary is a semi-enclosed coastal body of water which has a free connection with the open sea and within which sea water mixes with fresh water.

Estuaries are one of the planet's most productive and important ecosystems. Estuaries like Galveston Bay are "nature's nurseries." The bay



photo by NASA



nurtures juvenile shrimp, oysters, crabs, and fin fish. Without a well-functioning estuary, there would be little local seafood in our restaurants, and recreational and commercial fishing would dramatically decline.

Galveston Bay is **your** bay—a place to fish, hunt, bird watch, boat, kayak, and of course, eat great seafood.

The estuary provides environmental, economic, and aesthetic resources to the Houston-Galveston region.

**The Bay serves different purposes for different people, but it belongs to all of us.**

## GALVESTON BAY IS VALUABLE

Galveston Bay has a tremendous impact on our economic well-being, health, and quality of life.

The Bay boasts:

- The second most productive fishery in the U.S.
- More oyster production than any other estuary in the nation.
- The largest commercial harvest of blue crabs of any Texas estuary.
- One-third of Texas' commercial fishing income.
- Over one-half of Texas' recreational fishing revenues.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> highest concentration of privately owned marinas in the U.S.
- Half of the nation's petrochemical production.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> largest port in the U.S.
- More than 4 million people living near and along its shores.

Galveston Bay's bounty comes from its different habitats, such as bayous, wetlands, sea grass meadows, and oyster reefs. Keeping these habitats healthy is vital to ensuring that the Bay continues to provide sustenance and enjoyment for generations to come.



## GALVESTON BAY IS FACING CHALLENGES

Galveston Bay faces some difficult challenges:

- **Wetland loss.** The estuary lost more than 30,000 acres of wetlands between 1950 and 1990. Wetlands provide important habitat for the bay's aquatic and wildlife species.
- **Declining sea grass meadows.** Over 70 percent of the estuary's sea grasses disappeared between 1950 and 1990. Sea grasses serve as nurseries for many species of fish, including those prized by recreational fishermen.
- **Vanishing forests and coastal prairies.** Both of these habitats are disappearing at an alarming rate; they protect water quality and are important for migratory waterfowl and rare birds.
- **Pollution.** Pollution has made many of the area's bayous, creeks, and some parts of the Bay unsuitable for swimming or fishing.
- **Seafood contamination.** Due to contaminants found in crab and fish tissue, residents have been advised not to eat seafood caught along the upper Houston Ship Channel and in adjacent areas by the Texas Department of State Health Services.
- **Population growth.** The expected 60-percent increase in population projected for the Houston region by 2025 will further stress the Bay.



**Learn more about  
Galveston Bay's challenges  
at [www.gbep.state.tx.us](http://www.gbep.state.tx.us)**

**Find Galveston Bay facts and discover the Bay's value at  
[www.gbep.state.tx.us](http://www.gbep.state.tx.us)**

# YOU CAN PROTECT AND ENJOY THE BAY

- **Visit our web site** to learn more about the Bay and what you can do to protect it. The site includes Galveston Bay facts, information about citizen and volunteer opportunities and youth education, stakeholder group stewardship ideas, and an events calendar.

**[www.gbep.state.tx.us](http://www.gbep.state.tx.us)**

- **Volunteer and participate** in Bay-related activities such as marsh planting projects, trash cleanups, and conservation landscaping workshops.
- **Reduce your impact on water quality** at home. Do not dump oil or other chemicals down the storm drain; if you use fertilizer and pesticides, apply them properly; and ensure that your septic system is properly functioning with an annual inspection and cleanout.
- **Conserve water.** Use native plants in your landscaping. Water your lawn less and ensure that no water is running into the streets. Fix leaky toilets and faucets.
- **Involve children.** Help the next generation appreciate the Bay by taking children fishing, crabbing, bird watching, canoeing, or boating.



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