



Rookery Bay *REVIEW* January - June 2018



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*The official newsletter for
Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve*

About Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Rookery Bay Research Reserve, located in southwest Florida, is recognized as one of the few remaining pristine, mangrove-forested estuaries in the U.S.

Designated in 1978 following a local, grassroots movement to save the bay, the reserve now protects 110,000 acres of coastal lands and waters between Naples and Everglades National Park. It is managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, in cooperation with NOAA, and serves as an outdoor classroom and laboratory for students and scientists from around the world.

The Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center includes a two-story visitor center with interactive exhibits, observation bridge, nature trail with creekside viewing platform, art gallery, nature store and more.

The Reserve's headquarters and Environmental Learning Center are located at 300 Tower Road in Naples.

For more information, visit www.rookerybay.org or call 239-530-5940.

Director's Message



Dear Friends of the Reserve,

As we reflect on the 40th anniversary of Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, we count our many successes through the years. The strongest thread that stitches our achievements together is partnerships.

Henry Ford said, "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is a success." We have found that to be true, since the past, present and future of Rookery Bay Research Reserve is centered around many successful partnerships. (Please see the back page for a list of our partners).

At the heart of Rookery Bay is a partnership between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), both of which contribute funding to serve the missions of both agencies and the reserve. One of the main goals is to conduct and facilitate research that supports management and education.

In our management efforts, we work closely with local governments, the DEP South District office, and other state and federal agencies. Our academic partners include Florida International University and Florida Gulf Coast University, while nongovernment agencies such as the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Audubon Florida and Mote Marine Laboratory continuously help us expand our coastal knowledge. And we couldn't do it without the Friends of Rookery Bay and other volunteers who directly support our mission.

Through these partnerships, Rookery Bay Research Reserve preserves 110,000 acres as a living laboratory that supports education, research and conservation. We are honored so many dedicated professionals and residents have come together over the years to help protect Rookery Bay and ensure the information and science generated here is shared to provide a better understanding of how this amazing place works.

Thank you to all our partners on the team – past, present and future! We truly have a dream team.

Keeping up with the tides,
Keith Laakkonen



Partners in Bird Conservation

In April, Rookery Bay Reserve staff and volunteers conducted a boat tour of the Rookery Islands Critical Wildlife Area for **U.S. Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart** of Florida's 25th Congressional District. The tour was conducted in partnership with the

National Audubon Society, Audubon Florida, Audubon of the Western Everglades,

Friends of Rookery Bay and the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association.

Also participating in the event were **Kevin Claridge**, DEP's Coastal Office director; **Matt Chasse**, National Estuarine Research Reserve System, Gulf Coast liaison; and Dr. **Russell Callender**, assistant administrator for NOAA's National Ocean Service.

The tour began at the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center with a briefing about joint programs underway by the reserve and its Audubon partners. During the tour, Diaz-Balart and other guests enjoyed views of colonial wading birds flying into the rookery at sunset.

Sights and sounds from the event were captured by Elam Stoltzfus and Nic Stoltzfus of Live Oak Production group for inclusion in a documentary film they are producing about the reserve's 40 years. The film will be shown on PBS stations across Florida on Earth Day (April 22, 2019).



Through Education, it All Comes Together



Educating students and the community is a continuous effort. Through the reserve's volunteer program, tasks become a learning experience and often leave a lasting impression on those who participate. Tasks are as diverse as the volunteers themselves, and the education department appreciates the talented and enthusiastic individuals who come from many walks of life.

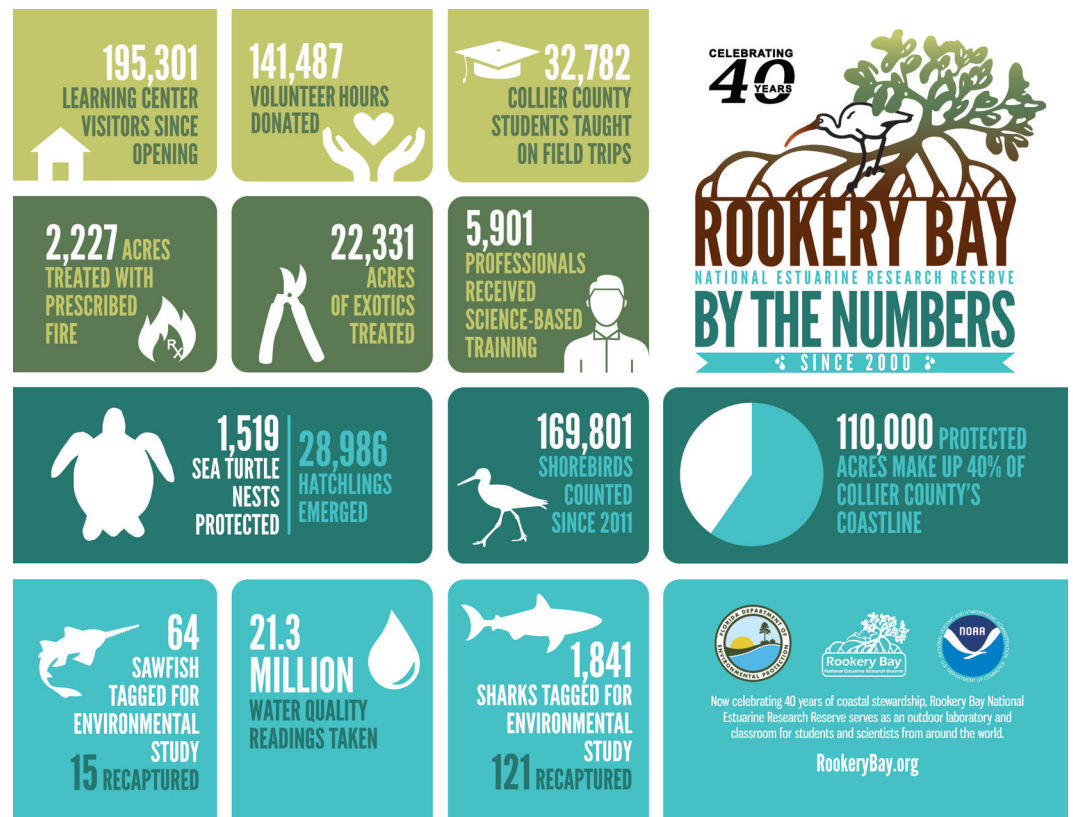


The "Rusty Zippers" team -- self-named for the effect the salty environment has on metal -- often does some heavy lifting for the facilities department. They completed several projects, including painting the observation bridge and installing fixtures to provide shade for fourth-grade students taking water quality measurements.

College students volunteer for service learning hours and fill several internships each year, doing a variety of activities ranging from sea turtle monitoring to communications. College classes and other groups pitch in to help with trail maintenance and invasive plant removal. And, through the Friends of Rookery Bay, individuals, businesses and groups (such as the Marco Island Shell Club) provide financial support every year. We can't list them all, but all program partners big and small are appreciated.

New Tool

Check out the snazzy, fresh look of the "Rookery Bay - By the Numbers" infographic, which is a communications tool used to educate a variety of audiences on the amazing diversity of the reserve's accomplishments over the years. It can be seen in poster size in the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center as well as in the sidebar of the pages of the RookeryBay.org website.



Engaging the Next Generation in a Coastal Adventure

Plans for Red Bull's first-ever "Privateers" Stand Up Paddle Race at Cape Romano were derailed in 2017 by Hurricane Irma, so the international corporation instead activated its paddleboarders to help clean up debris from Henderson Creek. The rescheduled race was held in February and engaged 240 paddlers (and nearly as many spectators) to team up to collect coins from treasure chests placed on a course created in research reserve waters. Participants also were challenged to pick up any trash they found along the course.

Many participants camped out for the weekend, and event organizers and participants left the beach cleaner than they found it. Staff and Team OCEAN (Ocean Conservation Education Action Network) volunteers provided logistic and safety assistance and engaged with event participants, partners and spectators throughout the event. Through this partnership, the reserve made a connection to an international corporation and their diverse user group from around the state and nation, including many outdoor enthusiasts who were previously unaware of Rookery Bay.

The winning team, "Team Choinski," included the reserve's own education coordinator, Sarah Falkowski.



Helping Local Communities Become More Resilient

Two workshops were hosted in partnership with NOAA's Office of Coastal Management to help address the needs of local communities in balancing environmental and economic goals to sustain healthy coasts.

The Adaptation Planning for Coastal Communities workshop in February focused on practical skills for incorporating adaptation strategies into planning processes. Local experts shared the latest science on regional climate trends, observations, and projections for the future. Trainers explained how scenario planning is a useful tool in moving beyond the challenges of making decisions, considering the many unknown factors at play.

Participant quotes from class evaluations:

"Structure and information were exceptionally well done. Presentation was A+!"

"I went with the intention to learn and I learned a lot."

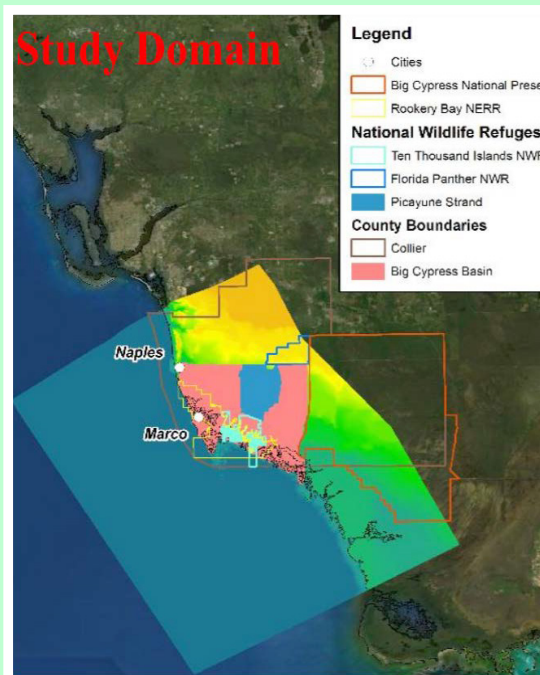
"Great references to follow up on with information in my area of study."

"The day will help me with my future work."

The Green Infrastructure for Coastal Resilience workshop was held in April with support from Florida International University's Sea Level Solutions Center. The workshop provided information on how nature-based solutions play a critical role in making South Florida coastal communities more resilient to natural hazards such as hurricanes, flooding and sea level rise.

The audience of flood plain managers, planners, land managers, policy experts and other environmental professionals heard guest speakers from the Everglades Foundation, Miami-Dade County and other regional institutions who provided first-hand examples of how to implement green infrastructure in their communities.

Facilitating Increased Regional Awareness of Coastal Changes



As an end-user of scientific data, Rookery Bay Research Reserve has actively participated in a new project titled "A Web-based Interactive Decision-Support Tool for Adaptation of Coastal Urban and Natural Ecosystems in Southwest Florida." The project's primary investigators include Dr. Peter Sheng with University of Florida and Dr. Mike Savarese with Florida Gulf Coast University. The three-year project, funded by NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, will create a dynamic model (CH3D-SWAN) with a suite of products, including maps indicating inundation, coastal vulnerability, salinity distribution and economic impact. These maps will be available for a variety of sea level rise and storm scenarios and will be specific to Collier County, using extremely detailed data and creating more accurate predictions of future conditions.

The project team is taking a collaborative approach to include stakeholders in the process, allowing the tools to be specific to their needs. In addition to providing input on how to make the tool useful to inform management on its own land, reserve staff assisted the project team with meeting facilitation and field visits focusing on hurricane impacts, stormwater and cultural resource management.

Fire Program Partners Help Burn 396 Acres in 2018

The reserve's prescribed fire program is a perfect example of the importance of partnerships. Prescribed fire is one of the most critical efforts undertaken by reserve land managers, who often work with the Prescribed Fire Training Center (PFTC) Interagency Partnership to help meet their mission. The PFTC includes federal agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs. They provide a steady supply of trainees who need hands-on experience with fire programs.



PFTC trainees assisted with several burns along the reserve's "urban interface" in early 2018.

To meet annual prescription goals, reserve staff also work with state agencies, municipalities and other groups including Florida Forest Service, Florida Park Service, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, Greater Naples Fire Department, Collier County Sheriff's Office Aviation, Marco Island Fire Department, Naples Botanical Gardens, and Florida Power and Light.

This year was especially challenging as many areas of the reserve were still flooded after the record rains of 2017, and then the area quickly swung into a drought period, making some areas too dry to burn. Despite the challenging weather, our partners helped make this a successful season.

In addition to burning units on reserve lands, staffers also assisted with prescribed fires on lands in Florida State Parks and the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge and Big Cypress National Preserve.



Reserve staff also supported interagency teams during wildfires at Picayune Strand State Forest and Big Cypress National Preserve.

Because of the number of wildfires in Collier County in 2017, the importance of prescribed fire was frequently a news topic in 2018.

The reserve's fire program was the subject of a feature story in a local newspaper as well as on the local CBS news affiliate.

Rookery Bay Research Reserve

300 Tower Road
Naples, FL 34113
rookerybay.org
239-530-5940



PARTNERSHIPS

