Five Reasons to Love Estuaries

September 22, 2025

This National Estuaries Week, join us in celebrating these important habitats, located where rivers meet the sea.

Aerial view of Drakes Bay in Point Reyes, California. Credit: NOAA Fisheries

NOAA's Office of Habitat Conservation (*www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/habitat-conservation*) protects and restores habitat to sustain our nation's fisheries, recover endangered species and support coastal communities. Estuaries (*www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/estuary-habitat*) — where salty seawater mixes with fresh water draining from the land — are one of many coastal habitats in which we work. Estuaries provide homes for fish and wildlife and support recreation, jobs, tourism, shipping and more.

1. Estuaries Are Nurseries of the Sea

Estuaries are often called the "nurseries of the sea," because so many animals rely on these areas to reproduce and spend the early part of their lives. Most of the fish and shellfish we eat — including salmon, herring, crabs and oysters — spend some or all of their life in estuaries. Estuaries provide habitat (*https://spo.nmfs.noaa.gov/content/tech-memo/estuarine-fish-and-shellfish-species-us-commercial-and-recreational-fisheries*) for nearly 70 percent of the United States' commercial fish catch and 80 percent of recreational catch. On the West Coast, they also serve as nurseries for threatened and endangered juvenile salmon and steelhead making their transition from freshwater to the ocean.

Juvenile Central California Coast coho are one of many species that rely on estuary habitat. Credit: NOAA.

Bays, harbors, sounds and other estuaries include habitats like marshes, mangroves, seagrass beds and oyster reefs (*www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/oyster-reef-habitat*). Each of these

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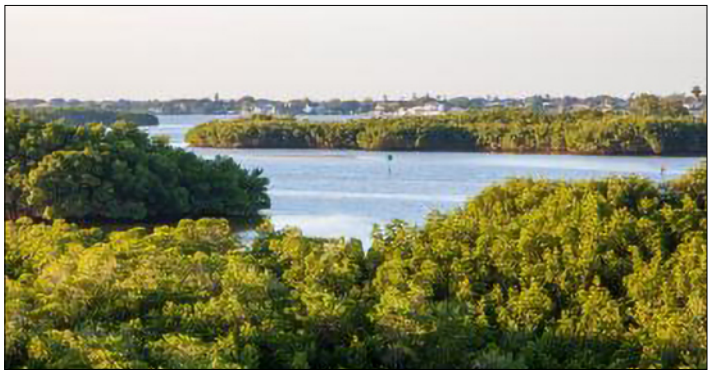
habitats are populated with creatures that thrive in that setting. With so much variation, it's no wonder that estuaries are among the most productive ecosystems on Earth.

2. Estuaries Are Homes for People, Too



Tampa Bay and its estuary in Florida is home to more than 3 million people. Credit: Tampa Bay Estuary Program.

With the number of benefits they provide, it's no surprise that people love estuaries. Twenty-two of the 32 largest cities in the world are located on estuaries. Nearly 40 percent of Americans (*https://estuaries.org/estuary-science/economics-of-estuaries/*) live on or near one. Major estuaries in the United States include the Chesapeake Bay (*www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/chesapeake-bay*), Puget Sound and Tampa Bay.

Along with that popularity comes challenges. Human activities on land can harm estuary health, degrading living conditions for species that live in or visit them. Development pressures, pollution in runoff water, and other threats diminish the ecological and economic values of our estuaries. NOAA works to restore degraded estuary habitats and rebuild the benefits they provide to fish, wildlife and people.

3. Estuaries Support the Economy

A kayaker is enjoying a sunrise paddle on the Chesapeake Bay, our nation's largest estuary. Credit: Ted Morgan.

Coastal economies rely on estuaries for jobs and industries such as shipping and commercial fishing. According to an analysis by Restore America's Estuaries (*https://estuaries.org/jobs_and_dollars/*), estuaries in the United States are home to 39 percent of jobs and support 47 percent of economic output.

One example is tourism and recreation. Tourists and residents alike visit estuaries to hunt and fish, watch birds, take photographs, hike, canoe and kayak, and observe wildlife. Tourism and recreation in coastal areas like estuaries contribute approximately $143 billion *(https://coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/tourism-and-recreation.html*) to the national economy each year. Ocean-based tourism and recreation industries employ nearly 2.5 million people.

4. Estuaries Provide Flood Protection

Restored marsh helps absorb floodwaters in Tillamook, Oregon. Credit: Tillamook Estuary Partnership.

Estuaries play an important role in protecting homes, businesses and infrastructure from damage caused by flooding and storm surge. Habitats like salt marshes and seagrass beds serve as natural infrastructure (www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/why-natural-infrastructure-important). They protect communities from flooding and erosion by soaking up water and dissipating storm energy.

In Oregon, a NOAA-supported effort in Tillamook Bay (*www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/oregon-habitat-restoration-project-supports-millions-dollars-community-and-economic*) restored habitat for salmon while reducing flooding in the surrounding communities and farmlands. Prior to restoration, the area was prone to frequent seasonal flooding, often with catastrophic impacts to landowners. With more than 440 acres of estuary habitat now restored, the area allows flood waters to move freely and quickly away from the town of Tillamook. Nearby properties and more than 500 structures are protected from flooding.

5. Estuaries Help Clean Our Water

As water runs off the land, it can carry sediment, nutrients and other pollution. Estuary habitats such as salt marshes and seagrass beds act as natural filters, trapping pollutants as water flows through them. This provides cleaner water for humans and marine life.

Some species that live in estuaries can also improve water quality. Oysters are filter feeders that trap and remove pollution from the water. A single oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day. NOAA works to restore oyster reefs in estuaries across the country, including in the Chesapeake Bay (*www.fisheries.noaa.gov/chesapeake-bay/oyster-reef-restoration-chesapeake-bay-were-making-significant-progress*). More restored reefs means more oysters, and that means more filter feeding — which can result in clearer water near those reefs (*www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/oyster-reefs-provide-habitat-and-filter-water-findings-show*).

A restored oyster reef in a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay helps filter the water while providing habitat for a number of species. Credit: Oyster Recovery Partnership.

Partnering to Conserve Estuaries

NOAA relies on strong partnerships in our work to protect and restore estuaries. We collaborate with tribes, local and state governments, other federal agencies, nonprofits and other organizations to support estuary habitats and the benefits they provide.

We provide financial and technical assistance (*www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/providing-technical-support-habitat-restoration-efforts*) to our partners, who provide additional funding and on-the-ground support. Together, our efforts help sustain the fisheries, endangered species and communities that call estuaries home.

Flounder Season Closed Oct. 15 through Nov. 30 for Commercial, Recreational Sectors

The annual closed season for the recreational and commercial harvest of Southern Flounder, from Oct. 15 through Nov. 30 of each year, is here. This statewide closure for Southern Flounder is for all sectors and all gear types, including any flounder caught as bycatch in any other fishery. The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC) was granted the authority by the Legislature to modify the shrimping bycatch exemption if the flounder stock is overfished and/or undergoing overfishing. Southern Flounder stock is presently considered to be overfished. Therefore, exemptions that previously existed for Southern Flounder caught as bycatch on a shrimping trip are still no longer applicable. The annual closed season in the fall allows mature female flounder to escape inshore waters and move offshore to spawn.

Temporary Closure of Nature & Science Center Extended Until Further Notice

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) has announced an extension of the temporary closure of the Nature & Science Center at Port Wonder to allow staff to complete critical repairs to its aquatic life support system. The Nature & Science Center will now remain closed until further notice.

This closure only affects the Nature & Science Center. The Children's Museum of Southwest Louisiana will remain open during this time.

The repairs involve draining the center's two large aquariums, relocating fish to other exhibits and quarantine areas, and conducting a full inspection once the work is complete. These efforts demand significant staff time and attention behind the scenes, limiting the ability to maintain normal operations for guests.

Animal care and safety remain our top priorities. While these repairs are underway, the team is focused on stabilizing the systems and ensuring that all aquatic residents continue to receive the best possible care.

At the end of the extended closure, staff will reassess the systems to determine if normal operations can safely resume.

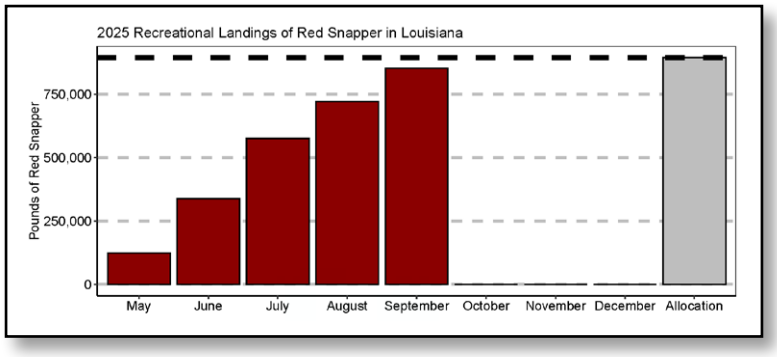
As a reminder, normal hours of operation for the Nature & Science Center are Tuesday – Saturday, 9:30 am – 4:30 pm. Tickets are $6 per person and can be purchased in the lobby.

LDWF appreciates the community's patience and understanding during this necessary closure.

Louisiana Snapper Watch

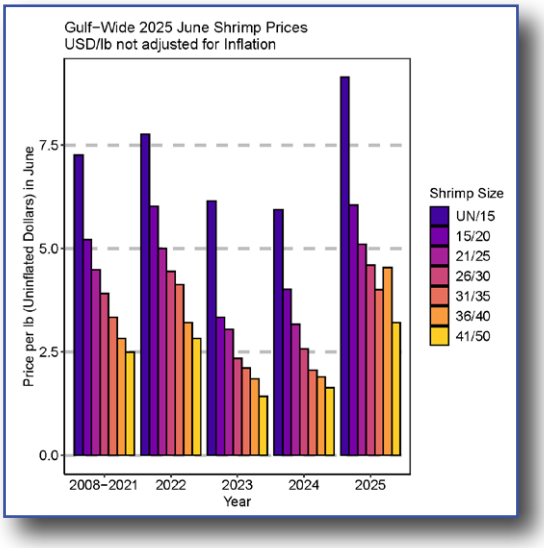
The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) released the red snapper landings estimate through Sept. 28, 2025. LA Creel, LDWF's near real-time landings data collection program, indicates that 852,823 pounds, or 95.3 percent, of Louisiana's 2025 annual private recreational allocation of 894,955 pounds has been landed.

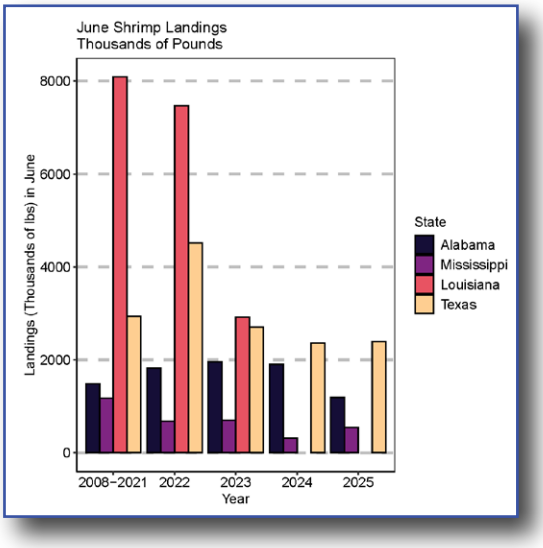
The private recreational red snapper season began May 1 in both state and federal waters, running seven days a week with a daily bag limit of four fish per person and a 16-inch total length minimum size limit. The season will remain open until recreational landings approach or reach Louisiana's allocation.



Louisiana Shrimp Watch

The shrimp watch data for the October issue includes data through June 2025. All landing data is based on trip ticket data provided by Gulf States Fisheries Commission and no estimations have been made. Since no Louisiana data have been available since January 2025, only gulf-wide shrimp prices and landings will be shown, omitting Louisiana data.





The Gumbo Pot

Crab and Corn Bisque

Recipe provided by Addie K. Martin, chef for Culicurious

This crab and corn bisque recipe features fresh blue crabs, sweet white corn, parmesan cheese and a creamy, rich soup base. Just try to resist it!

Prep: 20 min Cook: 40 min Total:1 hour

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter (2 sticks)
- 2 cups onions, chopped (1 large onion)
- 1 cup celery, chopped (3 celery ribs)
- 1 cup chopped green onions, tops and bottoms mixed
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- 2 tablespoons roughly chopped garlic
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 16-ounce bag of frozen white corn nibs
- 1 pint half and half
- 1 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1 cup crabmeat, preferably backfin
- 1/2 cup thinly sliced green onion tops

Method:

1. In soup pot, melt the butter over medium high heat.
2. Add the onions, celery, green onions, kosher salt and cayenne pepper. Cook until the onions are wilted and shiny, about 8 minutes.
3. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, about a minute.
4. Add the flour and stir thoroughly to combine. Once the flour is stirred in, add the chicken stock. Stir well to ensure it's thoroughly mixed and that nothing is sticking to the bottom of the pot.
5. Briefly remove the pot from the stove and puree the mixture with an immersion blender. Try to get the bisque as smooth as possible.
6. Return the pot to the stove and keep the flame at medium-high heat. Add the corn and the half and half and stir well.
7. Slowly bring the soup to a boil and then reduce to a simmer until mixture is heated through and thickened a bit. Total cook time here should be about 20 minutes.
8. Add the parmesan cheese, crabmeat and half cup green onion tops. Serve hot.

Note: If you don't eat all of this within the first day or two of cooking, freeze it. It freezes and defrosts/reheats marvelously. It won't last long in the fridge so freezing is your best bet on making the most of this delectable dish.

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We would like to hear from you! Please contact us regarding fishery questions, comments or concerns you would like to see covered in the Lagniappe. Anyone interested in submitting information, such as articles, editorials or photographs pertaining to fishing or fisheries management is encouraged to do so.

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https://louisianalagniappe.wordpress.com/

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