

Big Bend Seagrasses

AQUATIC PRESERVE

“The Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve epitomizes the Florida Estuarine system; a natural dynamic system that has supported indigenous Floridians for millennia and continues today. These ecological systems provide the best opportunity to study the coastal strand and should continue to be the focus of our best conservation and protection efforts.”

Gary Ellis, Gulf Archeological Research Institute

Key Accomplishments

- Staff conducted seagrass field surveys to assist the Suwannee River Water Management District’s (SRWMD) efforts in seagrass mapping.
- Coordinated with the Department of Agriculture’s Division of Aquaculture to relocate clam leases and establish live-rock leases in the Aquatic Preserve.
- Established relationships with environmental resource permitting agencies preventing excessive dredge and fill activities in the preserve.
- Established a continuous water quality monitoring program to collect baseline data in several areas of the Big Bend including: Seahorse Key, Suwannee River and Keaton Beach.



Salt and freshwater marshes are the dominant habitat along the shoreline of the Big Bend.

Project Spotlight Seagrass Monitoring

Big Bend Aquatic Preserve Seagrass Monitoring Project aims to establish baseline conditions of seagrass habitat in the Big Bend region of Florida, including distribution/cover, abundance,



A researcher measuring seagrass parameters

productivity and health. Big Bend is the second largest contiguous area of seagrass habitat in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, making it an important

resource not only to Florida but nationally and internationally as well. Aquatic preserve staff sample 75 total fixed coastal stations annually in Cedar Key, Steinhatchee and St. Marks. The preserve’s seagrass data and water quality data coupled with efforts of the Suwannee River Water Management District provides staff with excellent tools to evaluate conditions and address management needs of this resource.

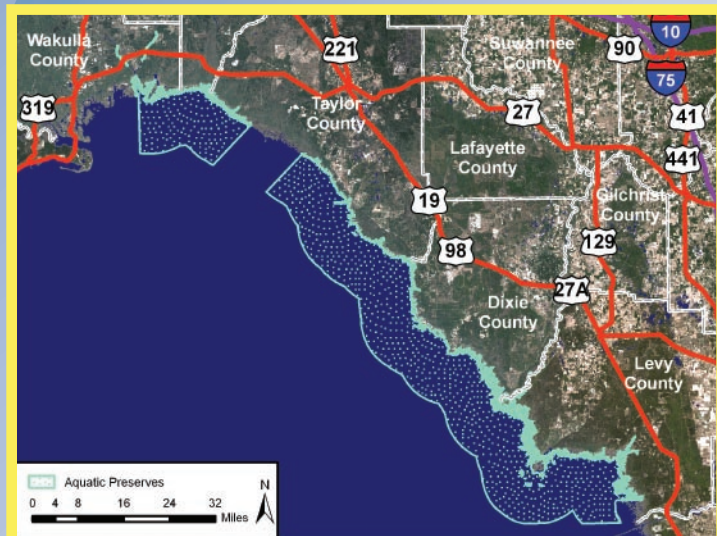
Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve

Location:

Wakulla, Jefferson, Dixie, Taylor and Levy counties

Acreage:

945,000 acres of sovereign submerged lands



Local Contact:

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Magnificent frigate bird soaring above Seahorse Key during nesting season



Most stable population of bay scallops in Florida



Clam aquaculture leases in Cedar Key



Oystercatchers wintering in Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve.

Aquatic Preserve Facts:

- The Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve was established in 1985.
- Spanning over 945,000 acres, the Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve is the largest aquatic preserve and one of the most pristine places in Florida.
- Provides habitat to a wide variety of sea and shore birds including a large nesting colony of frigate birds on Seahorse Key.
- Supports a very important commercial shellfish industry including Cedar Key clams, oysters, pink shrimp, and blue crab. This area of Florida is also a popular destination for the recreational scallop season.
- The Suwannee River region supports Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and the most viable population of the threatened gulf sturgeon. Big Bend's vast seagrass beds with mud and sand substrates are important marine habitats to this species.



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