

Cape Haze

AQUATIC PRESERVE

“Cape Haze is a Florida place where the sense of wilderness and encounters with the genuinely wild persist-- where there remains the chance to experience our state's original bounty and heritage of nature. That's what aquatic preserves are all about.”

Ernest D. Estevez, Ph.D.

Director, Center for Coastal Ecology, Mote Marine Laboratory

Key Accomplishments

- Interagency agreements and citizen partnerships have led to enhanced public access to productive fishing in the back bays.
- Manatee and seagrass protection areas were established under these same agreements in early 2005.
- Conducted monthly water quality monitoring for twelve years within the aquatic preserve. This indicates that water quality is generally good, but increases in turbidity, bacteria and nutrients are associated with rainwater runoff.
- Results from ongoing inter-agency programs and citizen partnerships provide a basis for understanding long-term changes in water quality and estuary health.



Kayaking the “blueway trails”

Project Spotlight

Seagrass Monitoring along Transects

Seagrasses are submerged habitats that serve as an indicator of estuary health. Seagrass health depends on good water clarity, so changes in water quality, hydrology and salinity directly affect seagrass abundance and diversity. To characterize seagrass conditions, annual monitoring was established in 1998 at 50 sites throughout the region, including two sites in Cape Haze. Each fall, data is collected from the shoreline to the deep edge of seagrass



Researchers investigating seagrass beds

beds to determine species type, abundance, shoot density, blade lengths, maximum depth and sediment type. With help from research partners and the use of aerial photography, the seagrass data is examined for changes over time. The results

are presented regularly at scientific conferences. Overall, seagrasses appear to be relatively healthy throughout the region, though there has been some loss of acreage and density over the seven year time period of the study. However, since the 2004 and 2005 hurricanes, there has been an increase in abundance and acreage. The sites in Cape Haze are relatively healthy, stable seagrass populations supporting strong fisheries in this aquatic preserve.

Cape Haze Aquatic Preserve

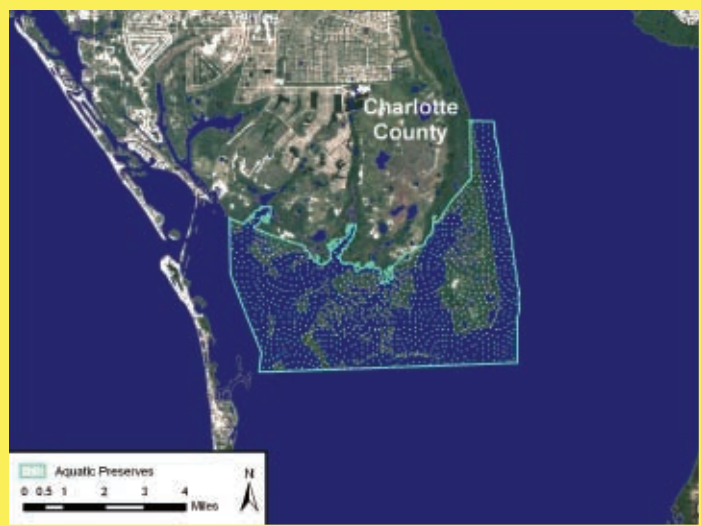


Location:

Charlotte County

Acreage:

11,000 acres of sovereign submerged lands



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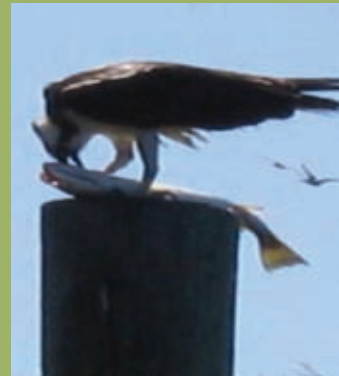
Aerial view of Cape Haze



Fiddler crabs



Clams from commercial aquaculture harvest



Osprey with catch

Aquatic Preserve Facts:

- Cape Haze Aquatic Preserve is east of Boca Grande, surrounded by the Gasparilla Sound-Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserve and the Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park.
- This preserve is a maze of islands and shallow passages, where Catfish and Whidden Creeks meet Charlotte Harbor to mix with water from the Gulf of Mexico.
- An intricate network of mangrove forests and seagrass meadows provides rich habitats for all life stages of shellfish, crustaceans and fishes, including over 100 invertebrate species and 200 fish species. The quiet islands serve as important bird rookeries.
- Kayaking, birding, and fishing are recreational activities compatible with these shallow waters.
- Clam aquaculture and crabbing are local commercial enterprises.
- Over 70% of commercially important fish and shellfish species rely on estuaries at some stage of their lives.



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