

St. Joseph Bay

AQUATIC PRESERVE

"The upland habitats that closely interrelate and influence each other, along with the St. Joseph Bay system, tell an unforgettable story of Florida's cultural past in this area. One of the most pristine coastal bays in all of Florida, the shallow, crystal clear waters of St. Joseph Bay support a wide variety of marine life. Extensive seagrass beds and salt marshes provide valuable habitat to fishes, sea turtles, migratory birds, and other fascinating invertebrate species. In biodiversity terms, they could be described as fragile "aquatic rainforests"."

Kim Wren, Aquatic Preserve Manager

Key Accomplishments

- Establishing a GIS database of seagrass prop scars to assess management options for protecting these valuable habitats.
- Furthering conservation and protection of the bay's unique and fragile ecosystem through interagency coordination, public/private partnerships, and targeting of research and monitoring. Action projects includes seagrass and prop scar documentation, scallop population monitoring and water quality. This data provides staff with an increased knowledge of the bay's health and allows staff to better manage these resources as a whole.
- Active involvement in community-wide events to increase awareness of the significance of Florida's Aquatic Preserves includes local seafood and river festivals, participation in monofilament recycling programs, seagrass awareness month and derelict crab trap removal events.
- Ongoing biological monitoring of valuable commercial and recreational fish and invertebrate species will supply habitat data that will identify areas that these important species utilize during critical life stages and will allow for better management practices in these areas.



St. Joseph Peninsula is world-famous for its white, sandy beaches

Project Spotlight

Water Quality Monitoring

In an effort to protect the water and habitat quality of St. Joseph Bay, the aquatic preserve began participation in a statewide

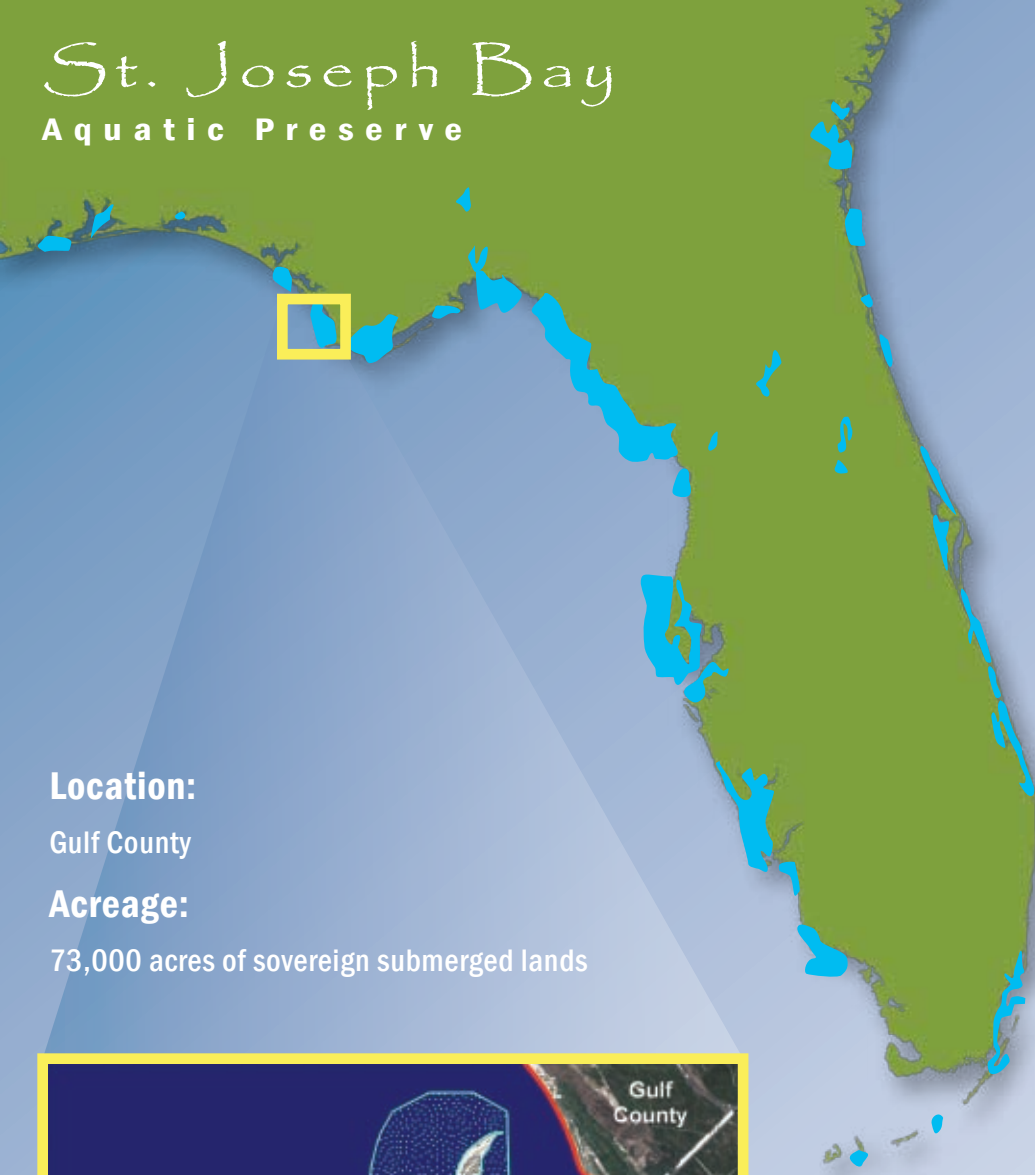


Datalogger attached to a dock

initiative in Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas (CAMA) to expand water quality monitoring to all of the aquatic preserves. The data collected from this project will provide valuable insight on long-term trends and short-term variability in water quality. Dataloggers will be used to record continuous water quality parameters at 30-minute intervals including, dissolved

oxygen, salinity, temperature, water level, turbidity and pH. Analysis of this data will provide useful information on the day-to-day dynamics that occur at these particular locations within St. Joseph Bay.

St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserve



Location:

Gulf County

Acreage:

73,000 acres of sovereign submerged lands



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Aquatic Preserve Facts:

- Formed by a narrow spit of land extending out from Cape San Blas, St. Joseph Bay is the only embayed body of water in the eastern Gulf of Mexico not influenced by the inflow of fresh water.
- St. Joseph Bay is host to one of the richest and most abundant concentrations of marine grasses along the north Florida coast.
- Five different species of seagrasses occur within these vast meadows that cover approximately one-sixth of the bay bottom.
- These seagrass beds, along with the expansive salt marsh habitat in St. Joseph Bay, serve as important nursery and foraging grounds for a wide variety of species.
- Other habitats include the St. Joseph Peninsula, which is also a major forage area for migratory birds, in particular for trans-gulf migrants in the fall and spring.



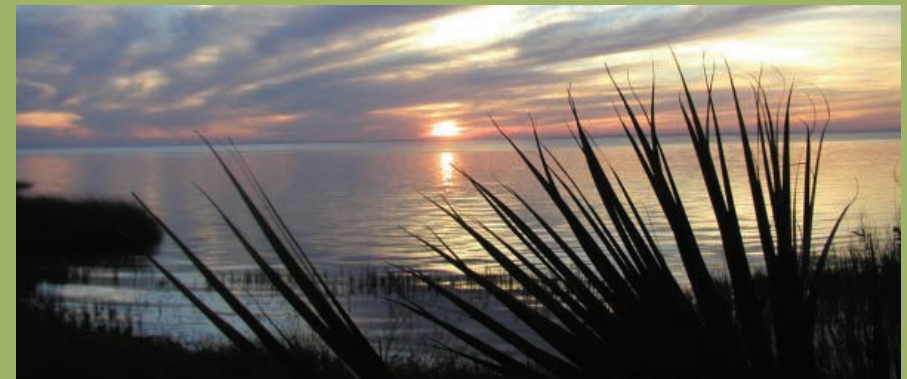
Beach on St. Joseph Peninsula



Scallop in seagrass beds



Eastward view from the fire tower



Sunset over St. Joseph Bay



A publication funded in part by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Coastal Management Program, pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NA04NOS4190035. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the State of Florida, NOAA, or any of its sub-agencies.