

National Estuarine Research Reserve Commonly Asked Questions on Site Designations

What are the primary goals of the reserve system?

The primary goals of the reserve system are to:

1. Ensure a stable environment for research through long-term protection of National Estuarine Research Reserve resources.
2. Address coastal management issues identified as significant through multidisciplinary research within the reserve system.
3. Enhance public awareness and understanding of estuarine areas and provide suitable opportunities for public education and interpretation.
4. Conduct and coordinate estuarine research with in the reserve system and make available information for improved understanding and management of estuarine areas.

How do you initiate the site designation process?

The first formal step is for the state to submit a letter to the NOAA Administrator expressing interest in developing a reserve program and engaging in the site nomination process, indicating a need for funds for site selection (if applicable), and identifying the lead state agency or agencies for contact. It is usually the Governor who submits the letter since (s)he is required to send the site nomination letter once a site has been selected. NOAA will respond to the state with a determination as to whether it can consider a nomination and provide funds.

NOAA strongly encourages states to discuss the site designation process with its Estuarine Reserves Division staff prior to submitting a formal letter to NOAA.

We already have a site in mind for our state. Is it necessary to go through the site selection process?

Yes, the state is responsible for developing a site selection process that examines potential sites throughout the entire biogeographic subregion within the state and then narrows down the options to the best location. The site selection process has been proven valuable in clarifying issues and priorities and in engaging interested parties.

How long does it take to designate a reserve?

In the past, most site designations have taken an average of four to six years. However, the range has been three and half to thirteen years (if significant issues arise).

How much money is available for site designation?

A state is eligible for up to \$100,000 from NOAA for the site designation process. This must be matched on a 50/50 basis with non-federal funds. Pre-designation activities normally include site selection, preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement and management plan, and a limited basic characterization of the physical, chemical and biological characteristics of the site. It is recommended that the preliminary application for the site selection phase request \$25,000 to \$40,000.

Does the designation of a reserve bring more rules?

Reserve designation does not add any new regulations. As part of the site designation process, NOAA will examine whether existing state authorities adequately protect a proposed site for long-term research and education. **There are no federal regulations imposed as a result of reserve designation.**

Will the federal government run the reserve?

The reserve system is a partnership between NOAA and coastal states. The state is responsible for the day-to-day management of a reserve. NOAA administers the entire reserve system.

NOAA responsibilities include:

- establishing standards for designating and operating reserves
- providing support for reserve operations
- undertaking projects that benefit the entire system
- integrating information to support national decision-making
- overseeing and evaluating the implementation of the reserve

Has NOAA identified priority areas for reserves?

NOAA is committed to completion of a system of reserves representing the diverse biogeographic and typological character of the estuaries of the United States and estuarine-like systems of the Great Lakes. However, it is constrained by limited funding and staff resources.

For this reason, the priorities for accepting new nominations are as follows:

- First priority will be given to nominations that incorporate both a biogeographic sub-region and an estuary type not represented by existing or developing reserves.
- Second priority will be given to nominations that incorporate either a biogeographic subregion or an estuary type not represented by existing or developing reserves.

What are core and buffer areas?

Core and buffer areas occur within the proposed reserve boundary. Core areas are the least disturbed areas where no future disturbance should occur that would affect the ecological integrity of the reserve. They are the key land and water areas that are protected for long-term research on natural processes. The determination of which land and water areas are “key” to a particular reserve should be based on specific scientific knowledge of the area. Buffer areas protect the core area; they are normally relatively undisturbed places. Reserve facilities are located in buffer areas.