

# Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Designation Factsheet

The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay is leading a process to designate a new National Estuarine Research Reserve in the Green Bay coastal area of Lake Michigan. The National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) System is a network of 30 coastal areas designated for long-term research, education, and interpretation to promote informed management of the nation's estuaries and coastal habitats. Each NERR site provides a "living laboratory" in which scientists and educators conduct research, outreach, and education regarding our estuarine-based natural resources. Reserve sites enhance place-based research, create distinct educational and training resources for K-12 students and coastal decision makers, facilitate local stewardship of aquatic natural resources, and support local economic development. To learn more about the reserve system please visit the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's website](#). To learn more about the benefits of designation of a reserve in Northeastern Wisconsin, please reference [this University of Wisconsin-Green Bay factsheet](#).

## Progress to Date

Designation is a six-step process that typically takes between four and six years to complete. Wisconsin initiated the designation process for the proposed Bay of Green Bay reserve on March 25, 2019 when Governor Tony Evers submitted a letter of interest to NOAA expressing interest in designating a reserve in the Green Bay coastal area of Lake Michigan and identifying the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay as the lead state agency for the designation process. NOAA replied affirming support for this effort on July 19, 2019.

In September 2020, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay began work on milestone two of the designation process, site selection and nomination, by standing up several committees to execute the process. They are:

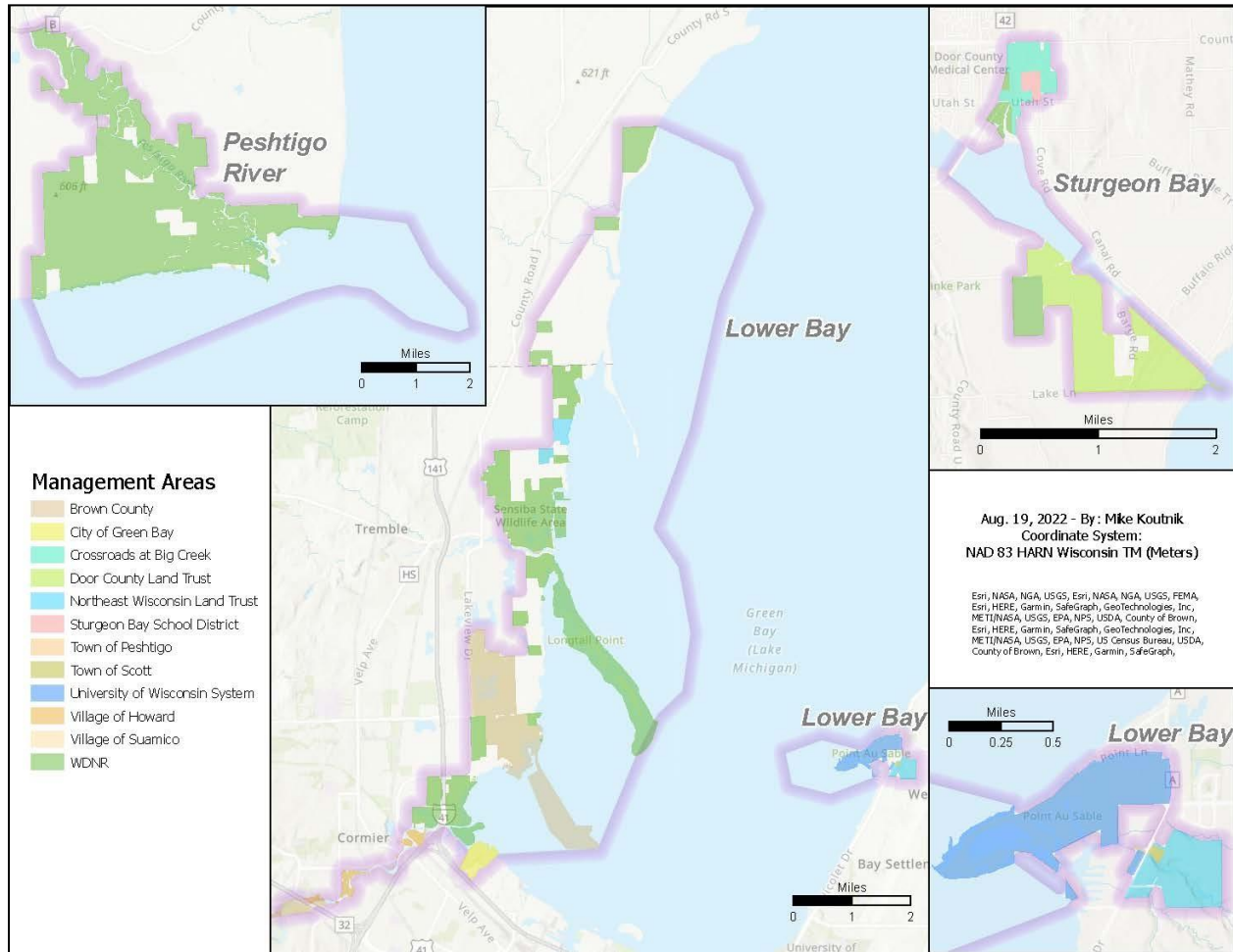
- The Site Development Committee, which was responsible for [scanning the lands and waters surrounding the Wisconsin-portion of the Bay of Green Bay](#) to identify all potential areas for the reserve, narrowing the list of potential areas for the reserve to [those that are most closely aligned with the mission of the reserve system](#), and developing [criteria](#) to apply to the top candidate areas to select the lands and waters for the future reserve;
- The Site Evaluation Committee, which was responsible for collecting information on [candidate areas](#) and applying the site selection criteria developed by the Site Development Committee; and
- The Site Coordination Committee, which was established to oversee and guide the work of the Site Development and Site Evaluation Committees.

Committee members were selected to reflect the diversity of the partners, expertise, and interests surrounding the bay, including Tribal Nations; federal, state and local government officials; non-profit organization staff; University researchers and staff, representatives from the private sector, and more. A complete list of individuals serving on each of the

forementioned committees, as well as their charges can be found on the [University of Wisconsin-Green Bay reserve website](#).

Through the work of these committees, the University-led site selection and nomination process has identified a preliminary recommended site for the reserve.

### The Recommended Reserve Site



This map shows the preliminary recommended natural area sites to be included in the proposed Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Please note, only publicly accessible lands within these areas are eligible to be included in the Bay of Green Bay NERR. Official land and water boundaries have not yet been set but will include a refinement of what is featured on these maps. The selection of a site for the reserve visitor/education center will occur at a later date. In total, the recommended reserve site includes approximately 11,500 acres of publicly owned land.

### Upcoming Public Hearing

The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay is hosting public meetings on September 7 and 8, 2022, to provide an opportunity to ask questions and share comments on the proposed designation of the Lake Michigan reserve. These meetings are open to anyone who wishes to participate.

The in-person public meeting will be held at 1 p.m. (Central) on September 7, 2022, in the S.T.E.M. Innovation Center at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay campus, located at 2019 Technology Way, Green Bay, Wisconsin 54311.

The virtual public meeting will be held at 3:30 pm (Central) on September 8, 2022 at [wisconsin-edu.zoom.us/j/99551264991?pwd=QUIPc0dhWSthRUFGaDYvakZvNG1XUT09](https://wisconsin-edu.zoom.us/j/99551264991?pwd=QUIPc0dhWSthRUFGaDYvakZvNG1XUT09). If requested upon joining the web meeting, the meeting ID is 995 5126 4991 and the attendee access code is NERR. Participants may also join the meeting by phone by using the toll-free number +1 (312) 626-6799, meeting ID 995 5126 4991, and the attendee access code 688730.

Comments on the recommended reserve site can be shared verbally at the public hearings and in written statements. Written comments should be sent to Emily Tyner, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Director of Freshwater Strategy, at [tynere@uwgb.edu](mailto:tynere@uwgb.edu). All written comments must be received no later than seven days following the public meetings (September 15, 2022).

### **Next Steps in the Site Selection and Nomination Process**

Following the public hearing, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay will carefully consider all comments received and develop a formal document nominating a site for the reserve. This document will be submitted to the Governor's Office for review and approval. If the Governor's Office approves of the site nomination, it submits the site nomination document along with a nomination letter to the NOAA administrator for consideration.

After receiving the site nomination, NOAA reviews it to determine whether the nominated site is consistent with our reserve system regulations and mission, and whether the site selection and nomination process met the procedural requirements that are outlined in statute. This internal NOAA review process can take several months to complete, and it concludes with NOAA sending a letter to the Governor accepting, rejecting, or suggesting modifications to the nomination.

If NOAA accepts Wisconsin's site nomination, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay will work in partnership with NOAA to complete the remaining milestones in the designation process. This includes, preparation of a draft and final Environmental Impact Statement and Reserve Management Plan, establishment of Memorandums of Agreement between the University and NOAA as well as between the University and local partners, public meetings, and more. Please reference NOAA's reserve system website for more information on the [designation process](#).

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Question: What would the community involvement opportunities look like for the county/region that the NERR is designated in?**

**Answer:** Reserves are home to a host of programs that foster community involvement. For example, reserves offer field classes for K-12 students and support teachers through professional development programs in marine education. Reserves provide adult audiences with locally relevant training on estuarine issues of concern to better inform coastal management decisions. Finally, reserves also typically have friends groups which sometimes help to organize volunteer events. That said, opportunities for community involvement for the county/region actually begin long before the NERR designation process is complete. For example, if NOAA accepts the state's nomination, the state will work in collaboration with NOAA and the surrounding community to develop a management plan for the reserve. The management plan will identify the reserve niche and strategic collaborations and partner opportunities, and also includes plans for resource protection, administration, public access, research, education and interpretation, construction of facilities, potential acquisition of lands and waters, and restoration and resources manipulation as applicable. For more information please contact Emily Tyner (tynere@uwgb.edu).

**Question: What programs and benefits do research reserves offer?**

**Answer:** Reserves apply science and education to improve the management of estuaries. They do this by working with communities to address natural resource management issues, such as water quality and quantity, habitat protection and restoration, and environmental change, including climate change. Each reserve brings together local stakeholders, scientists, land management professionals, and educators to understand coastal management issues and generate local, integrated solutions to coastal management challenges in their location. In addition to collecting and disseminating nationally and locally relevant data, reserves also provide the trainers and educators needed to bring the data and information to local citizens and decision makers. Reserves further benefit their surrounding community by leveraging existing NOAA resources and bringing in additional federal funding that is only available to designated reserves.

- Reserves provide adult audiences with locally relevant training on estuarine issues of concern to better inform coastal management decisions.
- Reserves offer field classes for K-12 students and support teachers through professional development programs in marine education.
- Reserves are considered "living laboratories" providing for long-term water quality and habitat monitoring as well as opportunities for both scientists and graduate students to conduct research in our nation's estuaries.

For more information please contact Bridget Faust-Accola (bridget.faust@noaa.gov)

**Question: Are there financial benefits associated with reserve designation?**

**Answer:** Yes. Following the designation of a new National Estuarine Research Reserve, the reserve becomes eligible to receive funding from NOAA annually to support its operations. Reserve system funding is appropriated by Congress under the authority of the Coastal Zone Management Act and requires a 70-30 federal-state funding match for annual operations

awards. Each reserve receives an equal amount of appropriated funding. NOAA works closely with their state partners to identify the most appropriate sources of matching funds. Reserves also become eligible for competitive funding opportunities that are only available to National Estuarine Research Reserves following designation. These funding programs include the NERRS Science Collaborative Program and the annual Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction funding competition. Finally, NOAA provides funding to support a two-year graduate research fellow at each reserve through the Margaret A. Davidson Fellowship Program. For more information on reserve system funding opportunities and matching requirements, please contact Bridget Faust-Accola (Bridget.Faust@noaa.gov).

***Question: How long does it take to designate a reserve? What are the steps in the process?***

***Answer:*** Designating a National Estuarine Research Reserve is a six-step process that typically takes 4-6 years to complete. The major milestones in the process are as follows:

- Step 1: Letter of Interest - The state sends a letter, usually from the governor, to the NOAA administrator identifying interest in developing a reserve program and nominating a site, among other things. NOAA responds to the state with a determination of whether it can consider a nomination.
- Step 2: Site Selection and Nomination - The state develops a transparent and objective process to evaluate potential sites for the reserve. Potential sites are evaluated using site selection criteria. NOAA provides basic site-selection criteria and approves the finalized criteria developed by the state. The governor submits to the NOAA administrator a site-selection document and a nomination letter identifying the proposed site and confirming the lead state agency. NOAA reviews the site-selection document and sends a letter to the governor accepting or rejecting the nomination.
- Step 3: Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Management Plan - If the nomination is accepted, the state works in collaboration with NOAA to develop a draft Environmental Impact Statement and a draft Management plan. A public scoping meeting is held prior to beginning work on the draft Environmental Impact Statement. Once the documents are prepared, NOAA announces the availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Management Plan in the Federal Register. The date of publication begins a 45-day comment period on this plan. The state and NOAA hold one or more public hearings 30-45 days after the Federal Register notice and the notice through the local media.
- Step 4: Final Environmental Impact Statement and Final Management Plan - NOAA works with the state to respond to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Management Plan. The state makes necessary changes to the document and submits preliminary and final documents to NOAA for review. Once the documents are final, NOAA publishes a Federal Register notice announcing the availability of the final plan. The date of publication begins the 30-day waiting period.
- Step 5: Designation Findings and Certificate; Record of Decision - After a 30-day waiting period, NOAA prepares designation findings for signature by the NOAA administrator. Once the designation findings and the memorandum of understanding between NOAA and the state are signed, the designation is official.

- Step 6: Designation Ceremony - NOAA presents the certificate of designation to state officials and the reserve partners. The new reserve is on its way to serving its community with long-term research, water quality monitoring, educational programs, and coastal stewardship activities.

A more detailed overview of the reserve designation process can be found on NOAA's website: <https://coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/about/designation-process.html>.

***Question: Will the federal government administer the reserve?***

***Answer:*** When a reserve is designated, the state and NOAA form a partnership. The state is responsible for the day-to-day management and operation of a reserve. NOAA administers the entire reserve system by leading visioning and strategic planning, establishing standards for designating and operating reserves, providing oversight and support for reserve operations, undertaking projects that benefit the entire system, integrating information to support national program decision-making, and overseeing and evaluating the implementation of each reserve.

***Question: If a reserve is designated, will there be restrictions to the existing cultural, recreational or commercial activities that occur in the area?***

***Answer:*** Reserve designation will not, in and of itself, change the current public uses of the lands and waters within a reserve. NOAA relies on existing state, local, and federal authorities to ensure the long term protection of reserve sites and guide their management. For example, state authorities regulate public uses on state lands and waters, and site land owners make decisions about the permissible uses of their land consistent with applicable state authorities. For any existing federal land and water included within a reserve, federal regulations will continue to regulate uses of those lands and waters. Each reserve develops a management plan that takes into consideration the beneficial consumptive uses (resource harvesting such as fishing, shellfishing, hunting, etc.) and non-consumptive uses (recreational such as hiking, birdwatching, biking etc.) and the compatibility with adjacent land uses. The state and/or site landowners may decide to change or modify the uses to meet specific reserve management plan goals and objectives for the site or at some future time for reasons that have yet to be determined or foreseen. The landowners within the reserve boundary develop a joint Memorandum of Agreement that outlines the roles of each party and identifies concurrence with managing the land to be consistent with the purposes of the reserve.

***Question: Will a new reserve involve NOAA taking land from the State?***

***Answer:*** No. NOAA does not own or manage the land within a reserve. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the operation of the reserve is coordinated between the state lead agency and NOAA. Additional MOAs are created to articulate roles and responsibilities of landowners of lands within the reserve, as needed.