

Estuaries

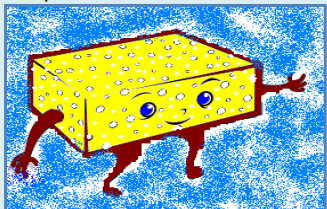
What are estuaries?

Estuaries are bodies of water where fresh water meets sea water. The fresh water comes from rivers, streams, and runoff, while the seawater comes from the open ocean. Estuaries are partially surrounded by land. Other names for estuaries include bays, lagoons, harbors, sounds, and inlets.



Why are estuaries important?

Estuaries are important because they are home to many fish, birds, and other wildlife, including horseshoe crabs, manatees, shrimp, clams, and ducks. These marine creatures may live here year-round or only part of the year. Many of them choose to raise their young in estuaries because there is plenty of food, and the surrounding land provides shelter from harsh waves and tides. Also, seagrass and other plants in estuaries provide hiding places from predators.



Estuaries are also important to humans. They provide places for people to swim and fish. They also act like a sponge, soaking up water to prevent floods. This is important because 50% of the US population lives within

100 miles of the coast. Estuaries also act as a natural filter for our drinking water by cleansing it of dirt and pollution. Without estuaries, you would be drinking and swimming in dirty water!

The Long Island Sound

The Long Island Sound is a local example of an estuary. It is 100 miles long, stretching from New York City to the tip of Long Island. That is about the length of 1,500 football fields! It sits between Long Island and Connecticut, and at its widest point is 21 miles. This estuary holds 18 trillion gallons of water! The average depth is 65 feet.

The fresh water entering the Long Island Sound mainly comes from 3 rivers: the Connecticut, the Housatonic, and the Thames. The ocean and Sound exchange water twice a day through tides. Each time they exchange 25 billion gallons of water.

The Long Island Sound is important for both animals and humans. It supports 120 kinds of fish and 125 types of birds. Many people enjoy using the Sound for recreation as well, with anywhere from 30,000 to 50,000 boats sailing on a nice day.



What harms estuaries and the animals that live there?

Like humans, fish need oxygen to breathe. During the Summer in certain areas, there is not enough oxygen, causing fish to either swim away or die, and plants to die as well. Fish also need food, called nutrients, to live. However, too much food caused by pollution will cause a plant, referred to as algae, to grow. The algae uses up valuable oxygen and blocks sunlight for fish and other plants in the water. Humans are also harming



estuaries by polluting and building on land surrounding the water. Another problem facing estuaries are animals called "invasive species." These animals come from places far away and enter waters that don't belong to them, mainly through human activities. They use up nutrients and steal the homes of animals that normally live there.

How can you protect estuaries?

There are many ways you can help. First, you can make sure to throw your garbage into a trash can, and not onto the ground or in water. Secondly, make sure to recycle whenever possible, this includes plastics, tin cans, and paper. Also, make sure to cut up the plastic rings that hold soda cans together, so that animals don't get stuck in them.

To Learn More:

Visit the following websites:
www.estuaries.gov
www.longislandsoundstudy.net
www.estuaries.org

