

Coos Bay

Estuary Public Access Guide



Coos Bay

Among Oregon's estuaries, Coos Bay is second in size only to the Columbia River estuary. The bay is shaped like an inverted hook, with the cities of North Bend and Coos Bay located on the peninsula formed by the hook.

Numerous sloughs and inlets extend off the main bay, and these are home to a wide variety of plant and animal life.

Historically, salt marshes surrounded the bay. However, an estimated 90 percent of the original marsh area was diked or filled as the land was developed for agriculture and industry.

Although alteration has been extensive, there are still important fish and wildlife habitat areas, including the South Slough National Estuarine Sanctuary.

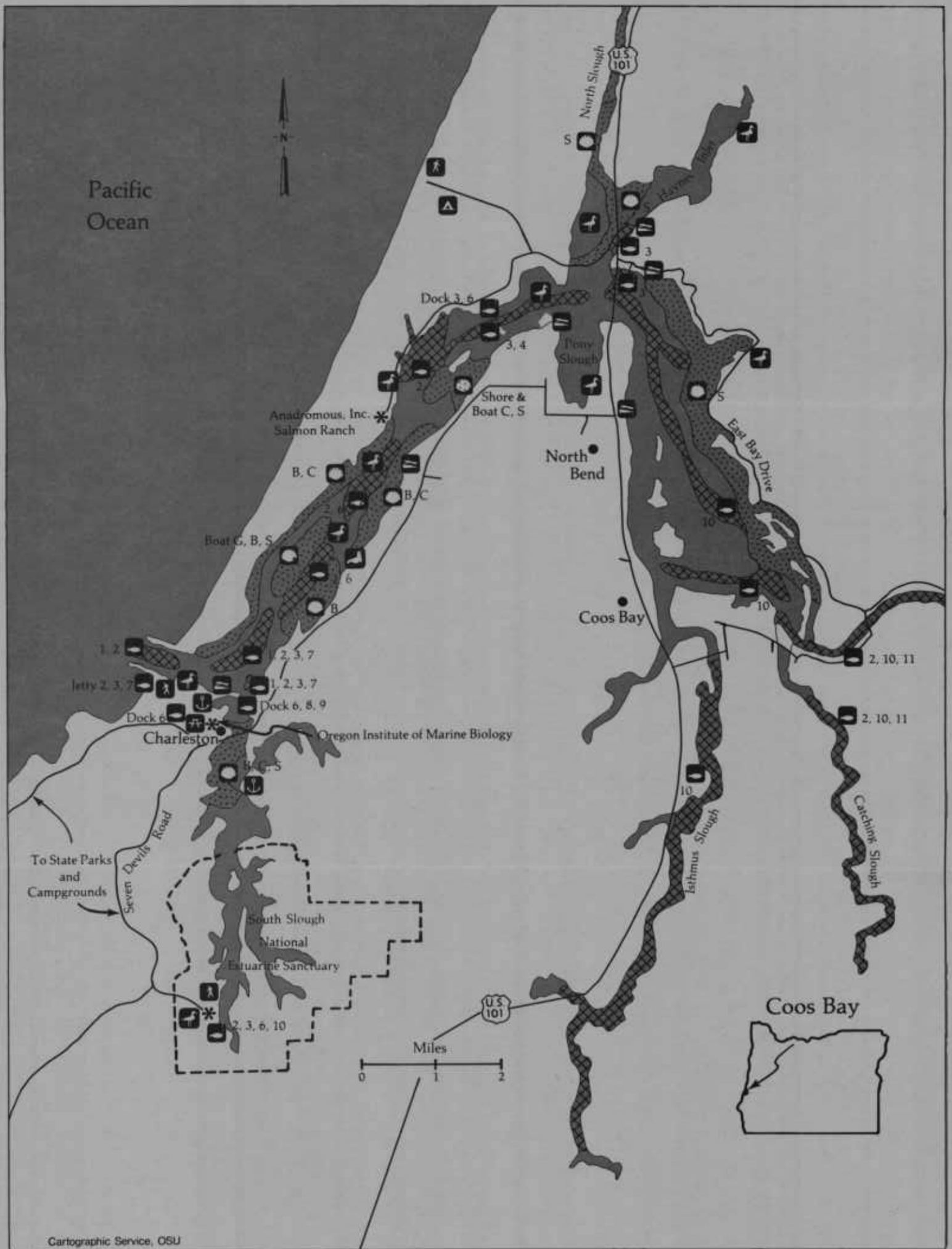
Located just south of Charleston, this sanctuary has the distinction of being the first in the nation to be so designated.

The sanctuary features canoeing, nature trails, and public tours and workshops during the summer. Phone (503) 888-9015 for more information.

Crabbing, clamming, and fishing for salmon, bottomfish, shad, and striped bass are all popular activities in Coos Bay.

Forest products processing and shipping are the mainstay of the economy in the Coos Bay area. Coos Bay is also an important commercial fishing center. The fleet is based at Charleston, near the entrance to the bay. Ocean ranching of salmon is also becoming important in the area.

This folder tells a little about the Coos Bay estuary, a few of the many species that inhabit it, and places where visitors can go.



Cartographic Service, OSU

Legend

Note that this list of activities and species covers the entire Oregon coast. Some of them do not occur in this area—so they do not appear in the map above.



Fishing

(Boat access unless otherwise noted)

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Rockfish | 8 Smelt |
| 2 Salmon | 9 Herring |
| 3 Perch | 10 Striped Bass |
| 4 Flounder | 11 Shad |
| 5 Searun cutthroat | 12 Steelhead |
| 6 Crab | 13 Sturgeon |
| 7 Bottomfish | |



Clamming

(Shore access unless otherwise noted)

- G Gaper
- L Littleneck
- B Butter
- C Cockle
- S Softshell
- P Piddock
- R Razor



Birding



Wildlife areas



Camping



Picnicking



Marina



Boat launch



Hiking, Beachcombing



Point of interest

Striped Bass

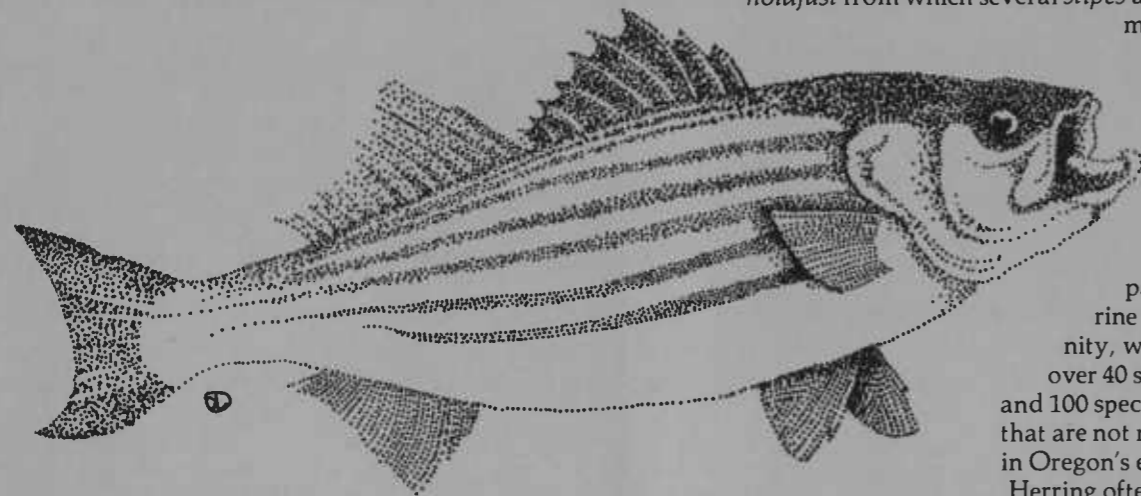
One East Coast native that has successfully adjusted to life in Coos Bay is the striped bass. "Stripers" were first transferred in 1879 from New Jersey to San Francisco Bay by fishermen who had enjoyed striper fishing on the Atlantic coast.

Striped bass are anadromous, meaning they spend most of their lives in saltwater but return to freshwater to spawn. They normally remain in or close to the estuary and do not venture far into the ocean.

From other transfers and because some individuals traveled farther than normal, the range of striped bass has been extended over the years from southern California to southern British Columbia.

A population was established in Coos Bay by 1914 and has been productive since then. Striped bass spawn in the spring in freshwater and then return to the estuary. They are aggressive feeders and consume a wide variety of fish, including small perch, smelt, anchovies, herring, shrimp, and sculpins.

The abundance of food in the estuary enables them to grow to a large size—stripers of over 60 pounds have been caught in Oregon estuaries.



Striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*)

Rockweed

The common alga called rockweed is frequently seen in protected rocky coast areas, and it is sometimes an estuary inhabitant.

Coos Bay has an area on its southeastern shore with high salinity and protected bedrock, where rockweed and other marine algal species thrive.

Such areas are rare in Oregon estuaries. Many green, brown, and red algae species can be identified at this location, of which rockweed is one of the more common.

Rockweed is also called *popping wrack* because of the popping noise that the bladders in the leaves make when they are squeezed. Rockweed can vary in color from green-brown to almost black.

It attaches to the rocks with a small disklike *holdfast* from which several *stipes* arise and merge into leaf-like "blades" with a regular branching pattern. Rockweed is an important part of this marine algal community, which includes over 40 species of plants and 100 species of animals that are not normally found in Oregon's estuaries.

Herring often deposit their eggs on the alga in lower Coos Bay.



Rockweed (*Fucus furcatus*)

Common Loon

One of the best divers in Coos Bay is the common loon. These fish-eating birds can dive as deep as 60 meters, where they remain to forage for a minute or more. Common loons also feed on amphipods, crab, and shrimp.

They forage both in nearshore and open-water habitats, and they sometimes dive over reefs.

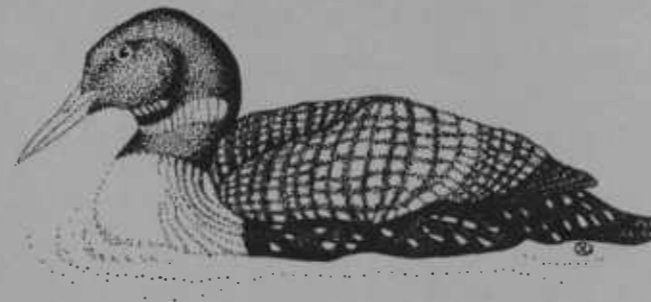
They share some feeding areas with the closely related red-throated and Arctic loons, which are present in the bay in smaller numbers. All three species are normally seen in their gray-brown-above, white-below winter plumage.

However, common loons in breeding plumage are occasionally spotted from late February to early June and in late summer and fall.

During the summer months, the loons travel to British Columbia and Alaska to breed. They return to Coos Bay in the fall to winter.

Nonbreeding common loons can often be seen along the coastline and in the estuaries in the summer.

Common loon (*Gavia immer*)



The Estuary

An estuary, or bay, is a partially enclosed coastal body of water, open to the ocean, where freshwater from the land mixes with saltwater from the sea. This simple meeting of fresh and saltwater results in a highly complex and biologically productive environment for a variety of plants and animals.

These organisms have special adaptations that help them cope with the changing salt content and the ebb and flood of tidal waters.

People have used estuaries for thousands of years. Today, sport fishing, clamming, boating, and other forms of recreation are popular here. Estuaries are also important for shipping and marine industries, and as homes for our fishing fleets.

However, these uses are not always compatible with the natural environment. Space is limited in Oregon's estuaries, and competition for its use is keen.

Despite their small size, Oregon's estuaries are important. They are critical to many species of plants, birds, fish, clams, crabs, and other animals.

This publication was prepared at Oregon State University by Kathy Pete Newman, education project aide, and James W. Good, Extension resource management specialist. Artwork is by Jan Kerns.

Extension Service, Oregon State University, Corvallis, O. E. Smith, director. This publication was produced and distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Extension work is a cooperative program of Oregon State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Oregon counties.

The Extension/Sea Grant Program is supported in part by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.

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