

# SOUTH SLOUGH RESERVE PADDLING GUIDE



## DISCOVER THE MEANING OF THE SOUTH SLOUGH NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESERVE

**SOUTH SLOUGH**, a southern extension of the Coos Bay estuary, is a drowned river mouth where saltwater from the ocean and freshwater from rivers and streams meet and mix to form a highly productive **ESTUARINE** community. The continual motion of ocean tides and upland runoff provide nutrients for a wide variety of plants and animals. In 1974 the State of Oregon and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) identified 4400 acres of the South Slough as a **RESERVE** to preserve and protect this valuable resource for research, education and low-intensity recreation.

**ADMINISTRATION:** The nation's first estuarine reserve, a cooperative agreement between the State of Oregon and the U. S. Department of Commerce.

**SIZE:** The South Slough estuary drains about 26 square miles of coastal land. The Reserve is comprised of 4400 acres of land and water that yields:

600 acres of  
tidelands

100 acres of  
freshwater marsh

A 23 acre forested  
island (Valino Island)

Over 3600 acres  
of upland forest

**TRIBUTARIES:** The South Slough is divided into two major water arms. The Winchester creek, or western arm, is formed where this creek leaves its headwaters in the south to flow northward to Charleston and the ocean. The Sengstacken, or eastern arm, is formed where John B., Talbot and Elliot creeks empty into the shallow basin of the estuary.

**HISTORY:** From as far back as 2000 years, Native Americans used the vast wealth of the South Slough for food and shelter. Local legends were told of a place called "Bal-di-yasa" where all life began. This mystical place is where Charleston stands today.

From the 1850's to the 1930's the stillness of the South Slough was punctuated with the sounds of falling timber, steam whistles and the clang of cow bells. Cedar, spruce and hemlock trees were transported to rafting sites first by oxen teams and later by railroads. Homesteads appeared where bottom land could be created from diked and drained marshes.

From the 1930's to the present, the stillness once again returned to the South Slough. The occasional hum of a boat could be heard as oyster growers travelled through the slough. Cattle ranching and logging continued, but largely the South Slough was left in the hands of nature.

## BEFORE YOU START



Coast Guard regulations require at least one approved flotation device for each passenger.



Know the tides. Always try to travel with the tides whenever possible.



Plan with the wind. Prevailing winter winds are usually from the southwest while spring and summer winds are from the northwest. Winds are usually heavier in the afternoon hours.



Always allow plenty of time when travelling against strong currents or wind. Longer trips enable you to observe more of the Reserve - including wildlife.



Allow at least two hours to leisurely paddle the length of the slough - ONE WAY (4 hours roundtrip). More time should be allotted to travel up the Sengstacken (eastern) arm of the slough.



## TRAVELLING BY CANOE

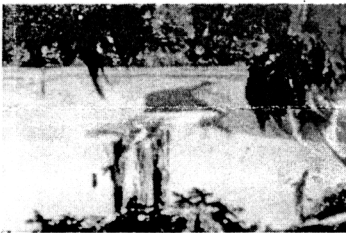
### IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU BE AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING . . .

• **USE THE ENCLOSED MAP** to stay in the channel where the water is the deepest. Avoid running aground on sandbars and mudflats. On low tides, short cuts will only get you stuck.

• **STAY IN THE CANOE** to avoid getting stuck above your knees in soft mud. Test the mud with your paddle to see if walking is practical.

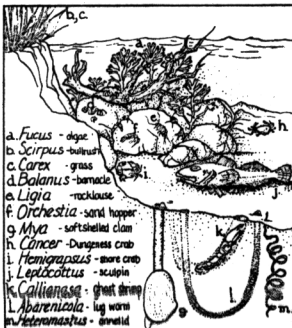
• **PROTECT THE ESTUARY** by helping us keep this area clean and natural for others to enjoy. Collection and disposal of any flotsam or litter you find will be appreciated by everyone.

• **BE PREPARED** for the changes in weather and tides. Wind and current can make travel easy or nearly impossible.

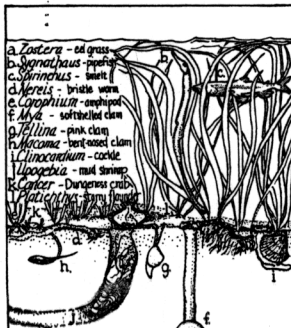


## ESTUARIES - HOMES FOR MANY LIVING THINGS

AS YOU CANOE THE SOUTH SLOUGH, YOU WILL HAVE THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO VIEW THE ESTUARY'S TIDEFLATS, SALT MARSHES, OPEN WATER AND FOREST COMMUNITIES. ESTUARIES SUPPORT A TREMENDOUS NUMBER OF DIFFERENT PLANTS AND ANIMALS, MANY OF WHICH ARE ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT. HERE ARE SOME THAT CAN BE FOUND IN THE SOUTH SLOUGH.



SHORELINE



MUDFLAT



CHANNEL

## PLEASE OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING:



Overnight camping is prohibited. State and county campgrounds are located within a 1/2 hour drive of the Reserve.



Please respect private property on neighboring lands.



Oyster beds are a private enterprise operated by a special permit within the Reserve. Please do not disturb.



Open fires are permitted only with the written permission of the Reserve manager.



Properly dispose of all litter and waste. Take out what you bring in.



Salmon, trout and steelhead angling requires an Oregon license and is subject to regulation.



Hunting is permitted only during established seasons and with an Oregon license. Discharge of firearms for pleasure or target shooting is strictly prohibited.

THANK YOU FOR MAKING SOUTH SLOUGH NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE A BEAUTIFUL AND SAFE PLACE TO VISIT.

South Slough National Estuarine  
Research Reserve

P.O. Box 5417  
Charleston, Oregon 97420

Telephone: (541)888-5558  
Internet: [www.southsloughestuary.org](http://www.southsloughestuary.org)

**WELCOME TO SOUTH SLOUGH NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE**



By canoe you are at motion much like the tide. Incoming tides will guide you toward the southern reaches of the slough and into some of the many fresh water creeks that flow into the estuary. Outgoing tides carry you toward the north as the water recedes to the ocean.

This guide will also move you through time. At times you may be floating above fish traps that were constructed by coastal Indians, along railroad pilings that were used to carry logs to the estuary, past tidegates that held back the flooding tidal waters so that cattle would have pasture to graze upon, and into a natural research and education area where complex problems of modern society may be solved.



**CHARLESTON**

This coastal port is home to many commercial and sport fishing boats as well as several processing plants for fish and shellfish, many of which are dependent upon estuaries during some portion of their lives.

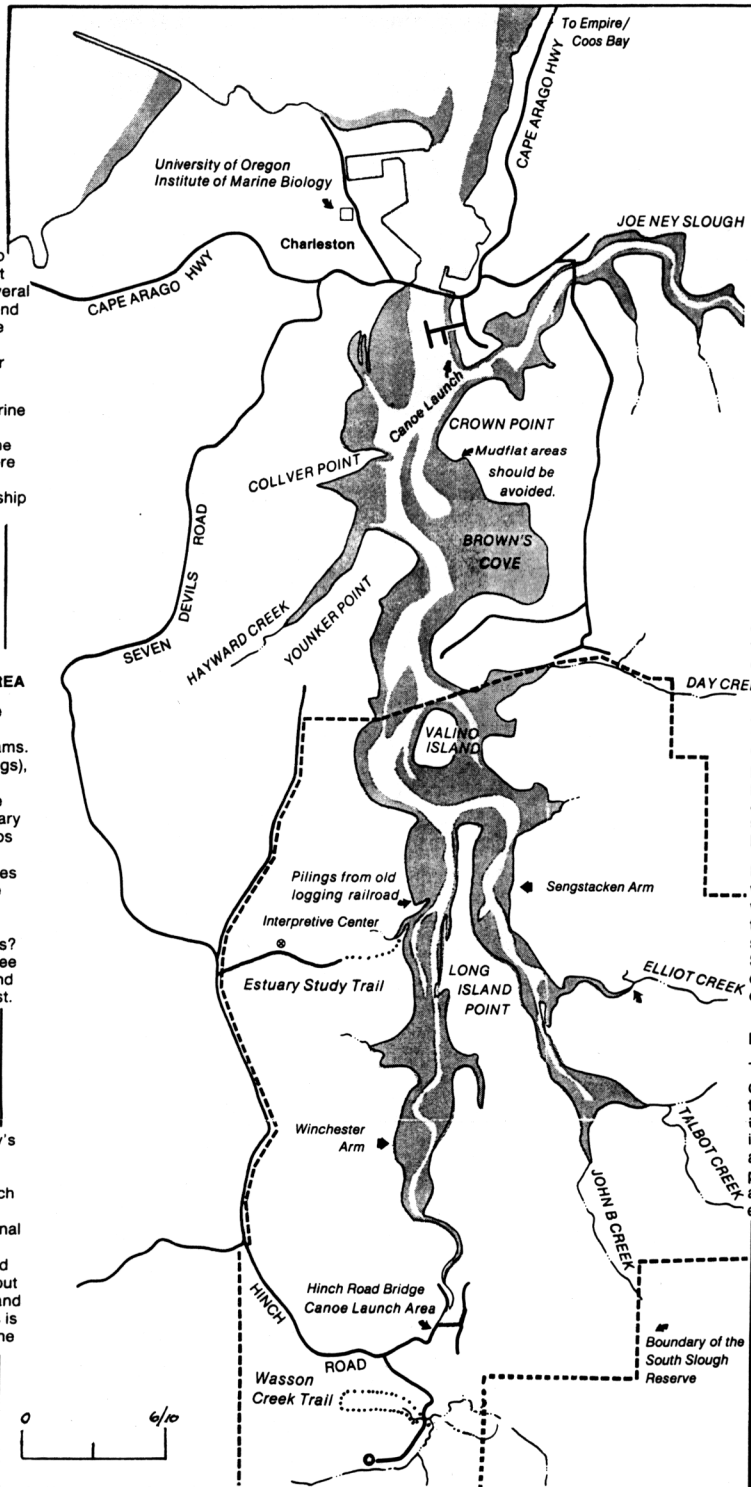
The Oregon Institute of Marine Biology, located here, conducts research within the reserve to help us learn more about the functioning of estuaries and their relationship to food chains that may ultimately extend to you!

**ESTUARY STUDY TRAIL, RESTROOMS & PICNIC AREA**

A significant purpose of the reserve is to provide and conduct educational programs. The railroad log dump (pilings), Rhode's family homestead, dikes and dock pilings have been accessed by the Estuary Study Trail for school groups to learn about the South Slough's natural communities and man's use of them. Are you familiar with the four distinct communities of an estuary and their inhabitants? From the lookout you can see Valino Island to the north and Long Island Point to the east.

**INTERPRETIVE CENTER**

Have you checked on today's weather and tides? Do you have time to walk a trail or view displays and films which complement your visit by canoe? South Slough National Estuarine Reserve staff welcome your questions and can provide information about other organized programs and activities. The headquarters is only a 5 minute drive from the Hinch road bridge canoe launch.



**PORT OF COOS BAY INDUSTRIAL ANNEX LANDING**

This is the recommended takeout or starting point from the northern end of the slough. Large fishing boats and heavier waves can be avoided by beginning or ending your trip at this location. **NEVERTHELESS**, watch out for rough water when wind and tide conditions produce hazardous conditions. There is a small fee for launching from this facility. Inquire at the trailer office for more information. Why are there so many seagulls in Charleston?

**VALINO ISLAND**

Several thousand years ago, when the level of the sea was lower than it is now, two rivers carved and cut Valino Island from the main body of Long Island Point. As icecaps and glaciers receded and melted, the level of the sea rose to drown this river mouth.

Around 1910, a casino and saloon were built on the island. Grape vines, which still produce fruit, were later planted by the Valino family. Just north of the island a metal stake marks the northern boundary of the reserve.

During low tides, the eastern waterway around the island will be impassable. If tide and time are in your favor, paddle southeast into the Sengstacken arm for a completely different experience.

**LONG ISLAND POINT**

This very narrow point of land divides the South Slough into two distinct water arms. Dead trees, or snags, that are visible in the vicinity of the point serve as hunting perches for birds of prey, homes for cavity nesters, and food sources for insect eaters.

**HINCH ROAD BRIDGE CANOE LAUNCH (COUNTY PROPERTY)**

As you first begin your canoe adventure, the adjacent land for about 3/10 of a mile is private property. In the early 1900's large logging camps were located in this area and employed most everyone in the surrounding hills. This portion of Winchester Creek is heavily dominated by the tides so that when the tide is out, there may be only a small amount of water flowing through this portion. Incoming tides once again flood the creek. **PLAN YOUR TRIP THROUGH THE UPPER PORTIONS OF WINCHESTER CREEK WHEN INCOMING TIDES PROVIDE ADEQUATE WATER FOR EASY ACCESS.**

From here it is a short distance to the north where the Winchester (west) arm widens. Travel through this portion of the slough invites observations of kingfishers, Great Blue Herons, and expansive eelgrass beds that provide food and hiding places for many small fish.

**SENGSTACKEN ARM**

This area is named after the family that operated one of the finest cattle ranches in the Elliot Creek area, and offers vistas and opportunities for exploration of an exceptionally scenic portion of the South Slough. Otter slides on the Elliot Creek dike tells of this animals dependence upon the rich food sources of the South Slough. Wading birds, like the Great Blue Heron, have long legs and feet adapted to feeding in the shallow water and soft bottoms of mudflats. Off the rounded point between John B. and Talbot Creeks, Native Americans once netted smelt. These fish that live in the ocean, return to the estuary to lay their eggs and rear their young.

\* Note: If time permits, an outstanding side trip is an exploration of Elliot Creek. Portage your canoe over the narrow dike to begin your exploration of this area.