

Survival in an Estuary

Life in a Transition Zone





As you view the images that follow, observe the environmental conditions for species that live in the estuary. Be prepared to describe physical conditions for one species. Consider conditions such as temperature, space, other species, weather, and water flow.



What is an estuary?

An estuary is a partially enclosed body of water where two different bodies of water meet and mix (e.g. fresh water from rivers or streams and salt water from the ocean, or fresh water from rivers or streams and chemically distinct water of a large lake).



Estuaries

- Estuaries are formed where fresh water meets and mixes with ocean water.
- Estuaries are found where rivers meet the sea.
- Estuaries are found where rivers meet chemically distinct lakes.



Estuary Features and Landforms

- Each estuary includes a variety of habitats. Some may be bordered by marshes.
- Estuary features such as swamps or lagoons form behind barrier islands and beaches.



Estuary Features and Landforms

- Bays, harbors, sounds, and inlets are all estuaries.
- Bayous are formed by channels of slow moving water leading from a river or lake.



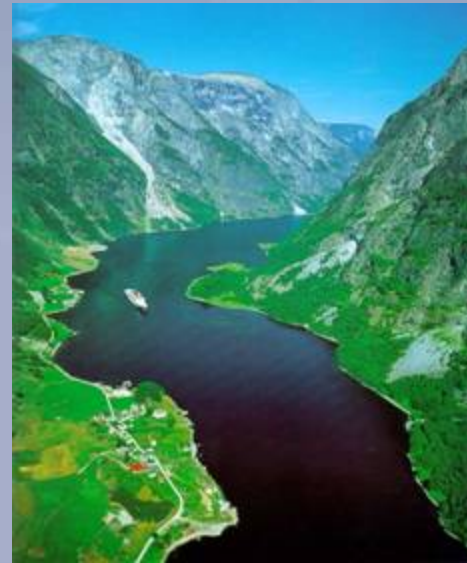
Estuary Features and Landforms

- Salt marshes form in estuaries in areas protected from high-energy waves.
- Tidal flats are part of many estuaries. Oyster and clams are harvested here.



Estuary Features and Landforms

- Mangrove forests surround wetland areas in southern estuaries.
- In mountainous areas, estuaries may be found in seaside fjords.



Estuary Life

- Many types of plants grow in estuaries. One of the most common is cordgrass.
- Eelgrass is another common plant that grows in brackish water.



Residents of Estuaries

- Many bivalves, such as oysters (above), and mussels (below), inhabit estuaries.



Residents of Estuaries

- Blue crabs are harvested to eat.
- Diamondback terrapins are the only turtle that lives in brackish water.



Residents of Estuaries

- Killifish thrive in estuaries.
- Alewives live in salt water but move through estuaries and into rivers to spawn. They are a favorite prey species for salmon and many other predators.



Residents of Estuaries

- Coho salmon migrate up rivers to spawn each year, returning to the area they were spawned.
- Great blue herons feed on fish and amphibians living in estuaries.

