

The Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area: Economic Prosperity, Recreation and Flood Mitigation Based on Natural Assets

The Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area (LSCNRA) is a creative idea to realize the economic potential of the fabulous natural and historic resources of the upper Texas Coast. The LSCNRA, conceived as part of an integrated, long-term flood mitigation system, focuses on the low-lying tidal and brackish marshlands and the surrounding upland areas. The concept emerged from work funded by The Houston Endowment and conducted by the SSPEED Center at Rice University in association with the Green Think Tank of Houston Wilderness. While providing flood protection benefits, the LSCNRA would also help realize the significant potential economic value these lands have for geotourism--bird-watching, kayaking, history trails, and hiking, and more traditional uses such as fishing and hunting.

What is a National Recreation Area?

National Recreation Areas are designated by Congress as land and water with outdoor recreation potential of national significance. Most emphasize water-based recreation and range in size, contiguity, land ownership structure, governing institutions and functional purposes. Some are stand-alone units, while others comprise a cluster of noncontiguous lands and structures. Recognition as a National Recreation Area would place the upper Texas coast alongside the Boston Harbor and the Golden Gate National Recreation Areas as nationally acclaimed tourism and recreation destinations.

What does the upper Texas Coast have to offer?

- The initial study area for a LSCNRA covers about 700,000 acres of tidal marshland and adjacent brackish wetlands and coastal prairie along with more than 350,000 acres of bay and estuarine area.
- The upper Texas coastal region has the benefit of being highly accessible with recreational opportunities of this area as impressive as they are varied. These opportunities include:
 - World-class bird-watching on High Island and Bolivar Flats along with the East End Lagoon, San Luis Pass on Galveston Island, the rookeries of Drum Bay and coastal and forested habitats of Freeport and the San Bernard area.
 - Fishing and crabbing in Galveston Bay and associated bodies of water.
 - Seasonal hunting within the wildlife refuges and management areas and on private property.
 - Kayaking on the backside of the Bolivar Peninsula, the marsh lakes of the mainland of Chambers, Galveston, and Brazoria Counties and the oyster reefs and sea grass flats of Christmas Bay.
 - Bicycle trails in Galveston and Surfside.
 - Cultural, architectural, military and maritime historical landmarks of both Texas and the United States.

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What are the benefits of National Recreation Area Designation?

- A National Recreation Area designation would serve to drive economic development by packaging and promoting year-around tourism and outdoor recreation, while protecting the ecological services that support the region's bountiful estuaries and rookeries, and the low-lying lands that help to mitigate storm surge during large hurricanes. By its 10th year of operation, the Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area is estimated to:
 - Attract 1.5 million visitors and support \$192 million in local sales, more than 4 times the current level;
 - Sustain 11% more jobs in the tourism industry.
- At seven similar national sites similar to the proposed LSCNRA, visitation grew an average of 565% in the first ten years of operation.

National Recreation Area Partnership Structure

The LSCNRA is proposed as a partnership in which local, state, and federal governments along with non-governmental organizations and private property owners voluntarily choose to participate. The partnership blends local priorities with National Park Service opportunities.

- A charter for the LSCNRA, developed by those interested in participating, would be tailored to local preferences, needs and circumstances.
- Landowners within the area could elect to participate, depending upon their needs and desires. All decisions to participate would be voluntary.
- If individual landowners choose not to opt into the LSCNRA, they would not be subject to guidelines or management criteria that might be adopted under the charter now or in the future.
- The Park Service brings funding and staffing to the table, contributing its expertise in areas such as education, science, visitor services, and planning.
- A general management plan developed by the partnership guides national recreation area operation and helps coordinate participating agency activities. The general management plan does not override partners' decision-making authorities.

For more information, see:

<http://houstonwilderness.org/index.php/NationalRecreationArea/index2>

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