



Explore an Estuary



Estuaries are places where rivers meet the ocean and salt and fresh waters mix. They are among the world's most productive ecosystems. Worldwide, estuaries nourish hundreds of species of fish, shellfish and invertebrate animals. Oregon's estuaries sustain young Dungeness crab, salmon, herring, oysters and shellfish. They provide stopovers where migrating waterfowl can rest and find food.

With vast tidal flats, extensive marshes and meandering channels where stormwater can pool, estuaries can reduce the devastating effects of flooding. Estuaries improve water quality by filtering out sediment and pollutants. Some – like the South Slough inlet of the Coos estuary – are beautiful, natural places that provide opportunities for work and recreation.

Stewardship

Oregon is committed to maintaining the integrity of the South Slough and protecting it from activities that could harm its ecosystem. The reserve's 4,800 acres of land and water are a living laboratory. Researchers are learning to restore salt marshes, streams and tidal channels, as well as species. Careful monitoring before a restoration project begins can help scientists understand what to do. After a natural habitat has been restored, continued monitoring shows how the environment responds to the changes.

Why Are Estuaries Special?

Research

Science occurs year-round in the estuary. Researchers track the twice-daily rise and fall of the tides – and the consequent changes in water quality and chemistry – as well as more subtle phenomena, like small fluctuations in sea level measurements that can provide evidence of far-off tsunamis. Scientists collect data to describe changes in local climate and watch for the arrival of invasive plant or animal species that can disrupt the native ecology of South Slough. Scientific staff cooperate with researchers working in other estuaries to share lessons learned at South Slough.

How-Can I Get Involved?

There are many ways to help. Volunteers greet visitors, assist with research, and guide paddle trips and hikes. Join a workshop to learn about natural history, cultural history and coastal ecology. Visit the South Slough Interpretive Center for fascinating glimpses of the past, and spectacular views of the estuary and forest. Join the Friends of South Slough and receive discounts on purchases at the Friends of South Slough Bookstore and more.

Education

Each year, thousands of people visit South Slough to learn about estuaries. South Slough's management commission believes that estuaries are intrinsically valuable and that people are motivated to care for and protect estuaries as they become aware of the value they provide. Visiting students include elementary and secondary classes studying Oregon's natural history, and graduate students training for careers in marine science or coastal management. Learning goes beyond the classroom.

Many visitors receive their first lessons about estuaries when they step into the South Slough Interpretive Center looking for an opportunity for recreation. Education also occurs at community festivals, through professional training for teachers, and on guided hiking, paddling and birding tours.

Training

The Coastal Training Program assists resource managers, elected officials, community leaders and professionals whose decisions affect the coast. South Slough provides technical consulting, develops publications, and offers workshops, conferences or field trips, often in partnership with other training institutions.



South Slough

National Estuarine Research Reserve

South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve, established in 1974, is the founding member of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System. Since its establishment, the reserve system has grown to include research reserves in almost every coastal state. Each reserve typifies a unique range of coastal habitats. Estuarine reserves were established to improve our understanding of estuaries and coastal wetlands.

South Slough Reserve is managed by the Oregon Department of State Lands and the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Interpretive Center Hours

The Interpretive Center on Seven Devils Road is open year round from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesdays through Saturdays.

Trails are open every day from sunrise to sunset.

Hours

Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Contact us at:

P.O. Box 5417
61907 Seven Devils Road
Charleston, Oregon 97420
(541) 888-5558

www.southsloughestuary.org



South Slough
National Estuarine
Research Reserve

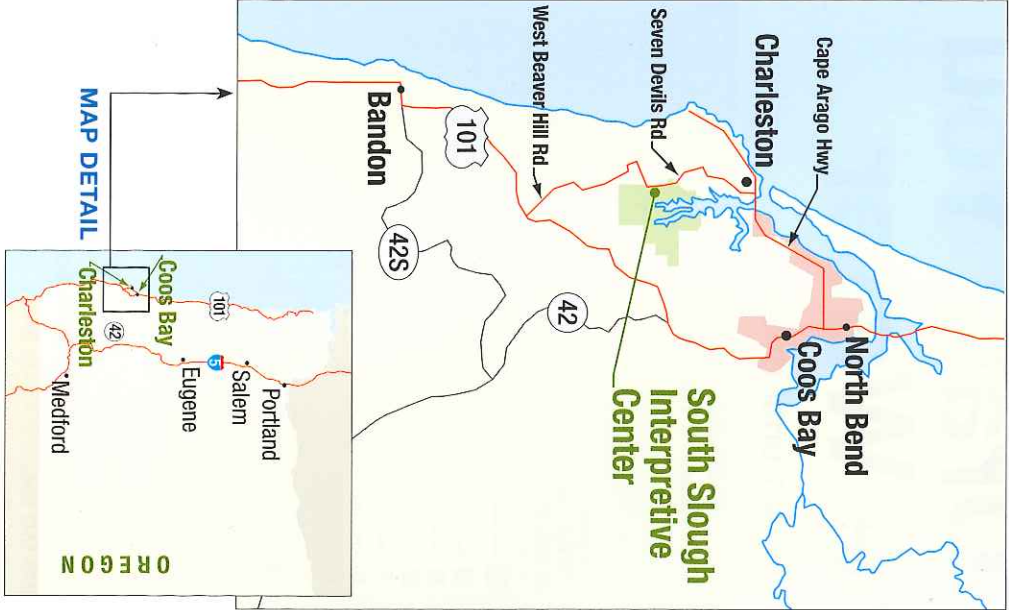
Driving directions

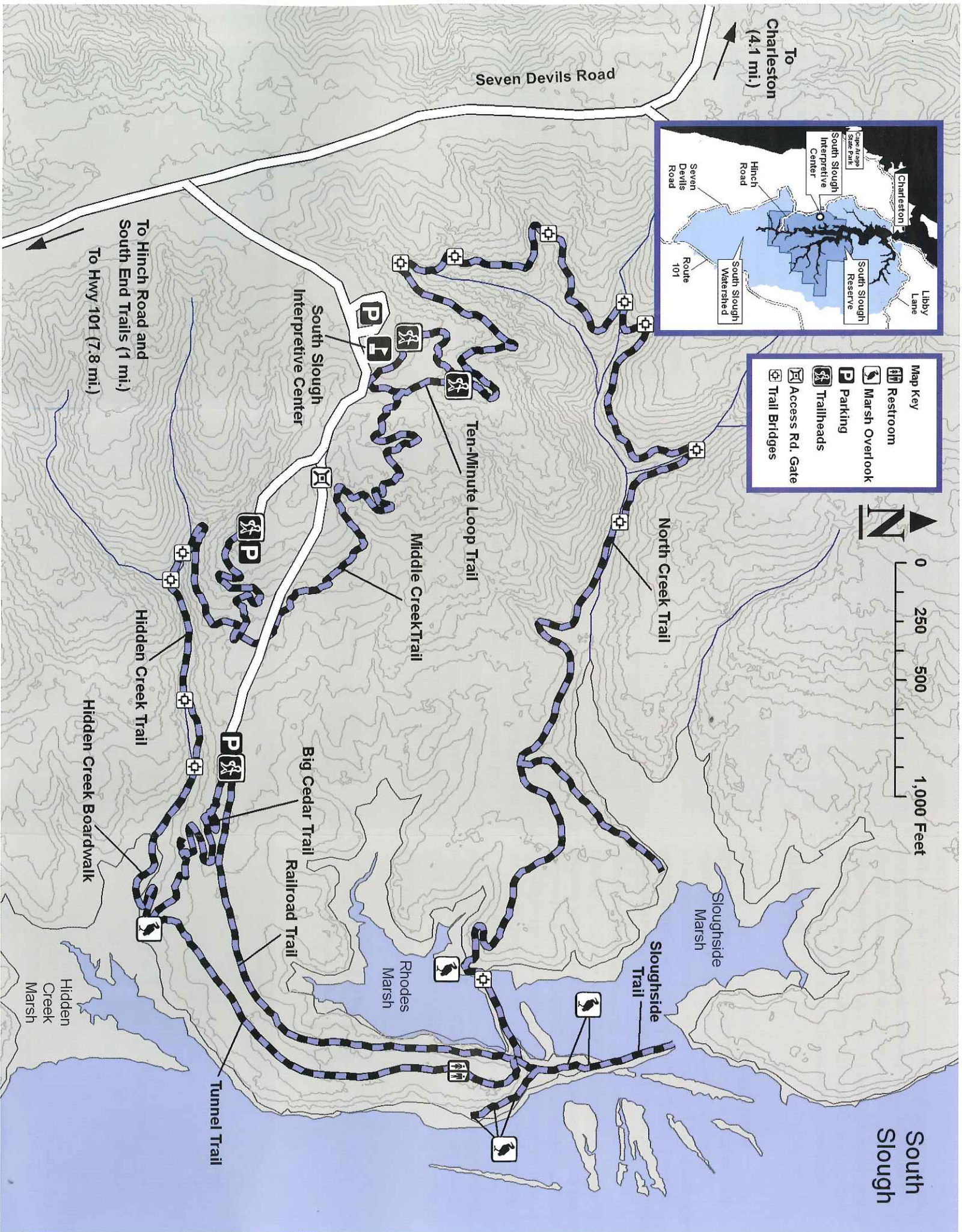
From North Bend and Coos Bay:

- Take the Cape Arago Highway to Charleston
- Turn left onto Seven Devils Road
- Drive four miles to the South Slough Interpretive Center

From Bandon:

- Drive north on Highway 101
- Turn left onto West Beaver Hill Road (which becomes Seven Devils Road)
- Drive 8.5 miles to the South Slough Interpretive Center





Let the Trail Draw You Down to the Water

Trails are open daily from dawn until dusk



From the Interpretive Center

Ten Minute Loop Trail (.17 mi.) Short loop trail begins and ends at the Interpretive Center.

North Creek Trail (1.5 mi.) Wildlife viewing trail leads to Sloughside Marsh. Dogs are not permitted on the North Creek Trail.

North Creek Spur (0.15 mi)

Middle Creek Trail (.47 mi.) Connects the Ten Minute Loop Trail with the access road and Hidden Creek Trail.

Hidden Creek Trail (.75 mi.) Follows Hidden Creek to the Skunk Cabbage boardwalk and the marsh observation deck.

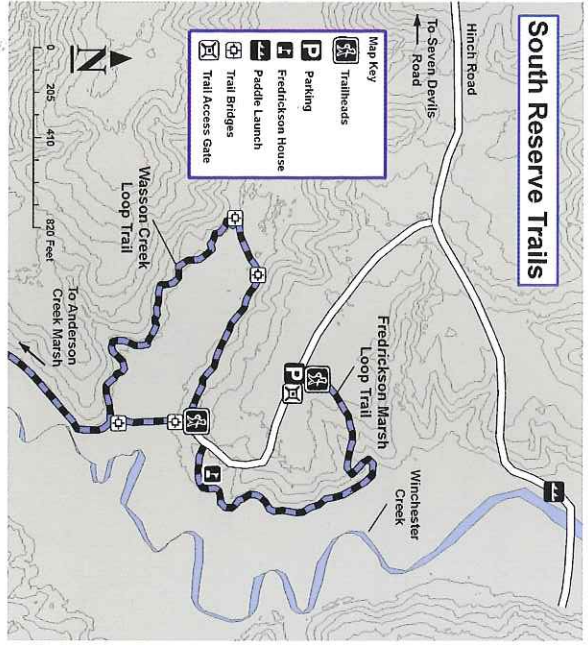
Big Cedar Trail (0.25 mi.) Wheelchair-accessible trail leads from the lower parking lot to the marsh observation deck. Request a gate key at the Interpretive Center.

Railroad Trail (0.4 mi.) Follows the grade of an old logging railroad.

Tunnel Trail (0.4 mile) Parallels the Railroad Trail.

Sloughside Spur (0.1 mi.)

Marshside Spur (0.07 mi.)



South Reserve Trails

Wasson Creek and Fredrickson Marsh loop trails (each 0.5 mi.) Two loop trails highlight forests and marshes. Wasson Creek trail may be closed occasionally due to high water. Access is by way of Hinch Road.

Please remember: Dogs are allowed on leashes and not on the North Creek Trail. Pack out your trash and pet's waste. Trash collection is not available.

Water Trails

Kayaks and canoes can be launched at Hinch Bridge or in Charleston. Check tides and weather. A paddler's brochure is available at the Interpretive Center.

www.southsloughestuary.org

What You'll Find Exploring South Slough

Forests

Much of the South Slough is forested. In winter, rains saturate the Coast Range soil. All year long, fresh water emerges in streams flowing into the slough, carrying particles of rock and sediment with it. Many animals live in the forest – small mammals, bats, many species of birds, amphibians and reptiles. The forest is also home to elk, black bear and bobcats. Salmon spawn in forest streams.

Salt Marshes

Water slows as it encounters the salt marsh and heavier particles of sediment begin to settle. As a result, the salt marsh slowly builds. Salt marsh plants evolved amazing ways to thrive in salt water. Saltgrass excretes salt through its leaves. Pickleweed stores fresh water in its leaves to dilute the salt. When the marsh dries back in fall, its decay releases basic nutrients that sustain estuarine food webs, feeding many animals.

Mudflats

At low tide, the estuary is exposed as mudflats. Tides constantly spread the lightest particles in layers throughout the estuary. Blades of eelgrass slow the water, allowing silt to settle. Over time, the accumulation of mud grows hundreds of feet deep. Though mudflats appear empty, millions of clams, shrimp and worms live just below its surface. Birds, mammals – and people – enjoy prowling the mudflats for food.

Channels

In an estuary, water comes and goes with the tide. A few channels are deep enough to hold water no matter how low the tide. These deeper channels provide habitat for birds, river otters, beaver, marine mammals and fish. Tidal channels fill and drain with each turn of the tide, while the salt marsh builds up around them. Tidal channels provide many kinds of fish with access to and from the salt marsh at high tide.