

# Estuaries in Central Florida

An estuary is a body of water along the coast that is formed when freshwater from rivers and streams flows into and mixes with salt water from the ocean. Estuaries are one of the most productive habitats on earth and are home to many plants and animals. Examples of estuaries found in west-central Florida include Crystal River/Kings Bay, Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay and Charlotte Harbor. Here's a glimpse into what you might find in our amazing estuaries!

## Red Mangroves

Mangroves are tropical trees that thrive in salty environments along the water's edge. These important species help to cycle nutrients, protect shorelines, serve as nesting sites for birds, and provide food and cover for many small fish and animals.

## Roseate Spoonbill

This large-bodied bird can be recognized by its beautiful pink feathers and flattened spoon-like bill.

## Sand/Beachy area

## Great Blue Heron

This is the largest heron species in North America. They are blue-gray in color with a horizontal black band above their eye and a neck that curls into "S" shape during flight.

## Snowy Egret

This wading bird has white feathers, a yellow beak, black legs and yellow feet.

## Fiddler Crab

These small crabs dig burrows in the sand close to the water's edge, where they retreat when the tide comes in.

## Red Drum

Also known as redfish, spottail, red bass or channel bass, these fish are bronze or copper in color and have one or more black spots on the base of their tails.

## Eastern Oyster

This oyster species is gray, purple or dark brown, and often encrusted with other organisms.

## Kings Crown Conch

This conch has a flattened spire and pointy white spines that look like a crown.

## Common Bottle-Nose Dolphin

This is the most common dolphin species found in Florida's coastal waters. Their powerful bodies are blue-gray on top with lighter sides and bellies.

## Bull Shark

Bull sharks have a gray backside, white belly and bluntly rounded snout. They are the only shark species that can tolerate long periods of fresh water.

## Mullet

This silvery fish grows up to two feet long, has a rounded snout and a mouth towards its underside.

## Florida Manatee

Commonly up to 10 feet long, Florida manatees are gray-brown with a large paddle tail and small eyes.

## Horse Conch

This conch is the largest marine snail in Florida. It has a knobbed spire and bright red flesh.

## Southern Stingray

Traveling alone or in a cluster, this stingray commonly hangs out near shore grasses and mud flats.

## Macroalgae

Often called seaweed, macroalgae can be found drifting in the water or attached to the bottom of an estuary. Macroalgae are commonly labeled as green, red or brown algae.