



## INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# GALVESTON ISLAND STATE PARK



## GALVESTON ISLAND

Help us protect the plants and animals that live here by planning activities to minimize your impact on the environment. Please stay on designated footpaths to avoid stepping on native plants. All trash should be removed before you leave. Finally, visit other coastal parks such as Goose Island, Sea Rim, and Mustang Island state parks. Your visits will help us preserve the natural resources of the Texas coastline.

Please join us for interpretive programs presented at many locations throughout the park. The park offers programs year-round. Check at the office and visit our nature center for information. We also encourage you to discover the park's natural wonders firsthand by hiking our trails.

Galveston Island State Park  
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**GALVESTON ISLAND STATE PARK FEATURES 2,000 ACRES OF AN UPPER GULF COAST BARRIER ISLAND ECOSYSTEM. BARRIER ISLANDS MOVE AND CHANGE CONSTANTLY THROUGH THE ACTION OF WAVES, WINDS AND TIDES. BECAUSE BARRIER ISLANDS LIKE GALVESTON SERVE AS TRANSITION ZONES BETWEEN LAND AND OCEAN, THEY SUPPORT A VARIETY OF DISTINCT HABITATS, INCLUDING BEACHES, PRAIRIES AND WETLANDS.**



## STEWARDSHIP

Each habitat supports a diverse array of life. Beaches are much more than sand and water. They support and depend on a community of plants and animals. The park's lagoons, bay and salt marshes also serve critical functions in the life cycles of many ocean species.

Maintaining this ecological diversity depends on what we do. How can you help? Explore the park and tell others about your discoveries. Post them on social media. You can even volunteer to help plant native species at the park.



## BEACHES AND DUNES



**B**eaches change constantly. Wind and water continually reshape the island's shores.

At Galveston Island State Park, beach plants and animals must be well adapted to survive in the harsh conditions that result from these changes.

Beach life includes the laughing gulls, piping plovers, sanderlings, and willets that eagerly feed along the shoreline. Nearby panicum, morning glory, and primrose plants decorate the beach while helping to stabilize the dunes. The dunes, in turn, shield the rest of the island from wind and waves. Sargassum seaweed plays a key role in building and maintaining the dunes while sustaining other plants and animals that breathe life into the beach every day.

To help the beach all you have to do is to pick up litter. If it's not litter, then leave it.



**Prairies** define the land lying between the beach and dunes and the bay. Once prairie habitat dominated Galveston Island's landscape, which had very few trees. Today very little prairie remains.

Despite the loss of habitat, birds, coyotes, opossums, rabbits, and snakes still find homes in the Galveston Island prairie. These animals depend on the small, rain-filled ponds that dot the prairie along the high points of the island.

The native grasses that prairie birds depend on have largely disappeared under assault from invasive plants that carpet much of the island today. However, you can help restore and protect the prairies. Go birding or hiking and share the pictures you take with others. If you live nearby, plant native prairie grasses or talk to a ranger about helping with habitat restoration here at the park.



Sandhill Cranes in the prairie



◀ Sargassum seaweed plays a vital role in maintaining the island's ability to shield the mainland by preserving the beach.



Great Blue Heron

**Salt Marsh Wetlands** lie beyond the prairie's edge, on the bay side of the island, and form a transition zone where land gradually gives way to water. In this murky world, many fish and marine animals begin their lives. Spotted seatrout, red drum, flounder, blue crab, and shrimp all depend on the shallow waters and tangles of seagrasses for refuge. Great blue herons, snowy egrets, and roseate spoonbills gather in the salt marshes to feed on fish and crustaceans. The wetlands also offer sunset views, fishing, crabbing, and ten miles of paddling trails.

Wetlands protect the environment by filtering impurities from the water and soaking up excess water from storms. The park is building new wetlands and protecting them with a rock breakwater. Here are some things you can do to protect the wetlands. Staying on the trails helps preserve habitat and control erosion. To protect submerged seagrass beds, lift your engine and let your boat drift or move it solely by a pole or trolling motor.



Reddish Egret

## THE ISLAND'S PAST

People came to Galveston Island for its natural resources. Han Akokisa and Karankawa people hunted and fished on Galveston Island for generations before European explorers discovered the island in the sixteenth century. Spaniard Cabeza de Vaca found himself shipwrecked on Galveston Island in 1528. His journals provide our earliest record of the native people who lived on the island at the time. In 1817, pirate Jean Lafitte built outposts on Galveston Island. At the end of its flight from the Mexican army in 1836, the first government of the Republic of Texas found refuge on Galveston Island. Later in the nineteenth century, Galveston became increasingly important as a port and entry point for immigrants from many countries. In 1890 land speculators tried but failed to develop what is now Galveston Island State Park into a town site: South Galveston. The prominent Stewart family then acquired the land that is now the park and used it for ranching and as a gathering place for the politically powerful during the first half of the twentieth century.

One way you can help preserve this legacy is by staying in the restored, historic residences once used by the Stewarts and their guests. Another way is by leaving any artifacts you find where you found them and telling a ranger. Please don't pocket the past.



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