

= Matagorda Bay =

Matagorda Bay (/ ˈmætəˈɡɔːr.də /) is a large Gulf of Mexico estuary bay on the Texas coast , lying in Calhoun and Matagorda counties and located approximately 80 miles (130 km) northeast of Corpus Christi , 143 miles (230 km) east @-@ southeast of San Antonio , 108 miles (174 km) south @-@ southwest of Houston , and 167 miles (269 km) south @-@ southeast of Austin . It is separated from the Gulf of Mexico by Matagorda Peninsula and serves as the mouth of numerous streams , most notably the Lavaca and Colorado Rivers . The major Texas seaport of Port Lavaca is located on the system 's northwestern extension of Lavaca Bay . The city of Palacios is found on northeastern extension of Tres Palacios Bay , and Port O 'Connor is located on the southwestern tip of the main bay 's shore . The ghost town of Indianola , which was a major port before it was destroyed by two hurricanes in the late 19th Century , is also found on the bay .

The bay 's shore , especially near the Colorado River delta , provides a habitat for a wide variety of wildlife . The wildlife serves as a basis for the birding and fishing tourism , and is an essential component of the production of seafood , specifically shrimp and blue crab , which are the specialties of the area . The fertile land near the bay is ideal for farming , especially for the propagation of rice .

= = History = =

Early European records suggest that the bay and the surrounding area went by the names Espíritu Santo and Costa y Bahía de San Bernardo . Spanish explorer Alonso Álvarez de Pineda 's map from the late 1510s appears to be the first documentation of the bay . In 1685 , French explorer René @-@ Robert Cavelier , Sieur de La Salle established the colony of Fort St. Louis along the bay 's shore after missing the entrance to the Mississippi River . Half of the colonists were killed by disease , and the other half , save for five children , were killed by Karankawa Indians . It was afterward referred to as a " lost colony . " The Indians kept the children until they were rescued by the Spanish during the Alonso De León and Domingo Terán de los Ríos expeditions near the bay . In 1722 Spanish built a fort , Presidio La Bahia , and Mission Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga on the site of Fort Saint Louis .

The port of Linnville was established on Matagorda Bay in 1831 , and served as a main port for the Republic of Texas . The Great Comanche Raid of 1840 destroyed the town and forced the inhabitants to flee to the nearby Labbacca , which would later become known as Port Lavaca . Lavaca or la vaca , Spanish for cow , was founded in the wake of the Comanche Raid in 1841 . It replaced Linnville as the main port on Matagorda Bay . However , the sandbar @-@ heavy Lavaca Bay caused some navigational problems for ships . As a result , Lavaca was surpassed by Indianola as the main port on Matagorda Bay in the 1850s , even though the sandbars were dredged later in the decade . Indianola had been founded in 1846 as a landing place for German immigrants . It rapidly developed into a major seaport , and became the second largest in the state (after Galveston) by the 1860s . The two ports , and strategic control of Matagorda Bay in particular , became important during the American Civil War . Control of the bay shifted between the Union and Confederate forces several times . The Union presence in the area ended in June 1864 . After the war , Indianola continued its growth , and had a population of 5 @, @ 000 in the 1870s . A hurricane in 1875 caused massive damage to the city . It was rebuilt on a smaller scale shortly thereafter , but a second and more intense hurricane made landfall in 1886 (the fifth most intense in U.S. history) , causing even greater destruction . The following year , Indianola was completely abandoned . Although Lavaca was also significantly affected by the hurricanes , it survived as a port , and again became the largest on the bay . It continues to hold this distinction today . It was renamed Port Lavaca in the late 19th Century . Palacios was established around 1901 , and Port O 'Connor was founded on the bay in 1909 .

Before 1900 , East Matagorda Bay was a free flowing extension , which formed the eastern segment of Matagorda Bay . Flooding and drainage issues caused by the Colorado River , which at the time emptied into the bay , precipitated a massive dredging campaign in the 1920s . Flooding

was not remedied by the dredging , as sediment deposited in the bay and formed a tidal marsh that grew at 500 acres (2 @. @ 0 km²) a year . As a result , local citizens decided to change the course of the Colorado River in 1934 to bypass Matagorda Bay into the Gulf of Mexico , the dredging from this project causing the split and forming the isolated East Matagorda Bay . In 1992 , the river was diverted back to the bay .

= = Features = =

The shoreline of the bay is included in the Texas Coastal Plain . At the eastern end , near the Colorado River delta , there is a swampy terrain , with an abundance of wetlands and tidal marshes . Extended coastal prairies supporting native grasses , can be found throughout the area . On average , the Matagorda Bay system is 2 meters (6 @. @ 6 ft) deep , and covers approximately 1 @, @ 093 square kilometers (422 sq mi) . It is the third largest estuarine system in Texas behind Galveston Bay and Laguna Madre . The main extensions include : Lavaca Bay , which extends westward to the mouth of the Lavaca River ; Tres Palacios Bay , which extends northeast to the mouth of the Tres Palacios River and East Matagorda Bay , which is nearly isolated from the system by the Colorado River delta . Other inlets include Turtle Bay , Carancahua Bay , Keller Bay , and Cox Bay .

Every second , approximately 150 cubic meters (40 @, @ 000 U.S. gal) of water flows into the bay . The exchange with the Gulf of Mexico occurs at Pass Cavallo , Matagorda Ship Channel , Greens Bayou , the Colorado River Delta Complex and Brown Cedar Cut . As a result of the seawater exchange , the bay 's salinity is 19 parts per thousand (ppt) , which is lower than the seawater average of 35 ppt . This difference is caused by the large number of creeks and rivers that flow into the system , largely from the drainage basins of the Colorado and Lavaca Rivers .

= = Ecosystem = =

A wide variety of wildlife can be found in and around Matagorda Bay . The Mad Island @-@ Oyster Lake conservation area , located on the eastern shore of Matagorda Bay , is a habitat for over 300 species of birds including songbirds , shorebirds and waterfowl . More species of birds were found in the area than any other in the nation during the National Audubon Society 's annual Christmas Bird Count from 2000 to 2002 . Other fauna located along the bay include bobcats , white @-@ tailed deer , river otters , Texas horned lizards , reddish egret , white @-@ tailed hawk , peregrine falcon , the piping plover and alligators .

According to Texas Parks and Wildlife , the following fish have been caught in the bay : striped bass , gafftopsail catfish , Atlantic croaker , black drum , red drum , southern flounder , barred grunt , hake , skipjack herring , crevalle jack , ladyfish , Gulf menhaden , pigfish , smooth puffer , sand seatrout , spotted seatrout , blacktip shark , gray snapper , southern stingray , Gulf toadfish and tripletail . The bay serves as a nursery for finfish , shrimp and crabs .

= = Industry = =

The Matagorda Bay system is a renowned fishing location in the region , due to its status as a nutrient @-@ rich estuary . The mainstays of the settlements on the bay include seafood processing , manufacturing , agriculture and tourism . Commercial fishermen specialize in oyster , blue crab , and shrimp . Port Lavaca is the national leader in the processing of shrimp , and passed four million tons of seafood through its port in 1985 alone . Palacios houses the largest blue crab processing plant in the United States , and is home to the only individually quick frozen shrimp plant in Texas . Recreational fishing also contributes to the local economies , via tourism . Tourists often flock to the Port Lavaca State Fishing Pier , which is a major point of interest for fishermen . Other activities for visitors include hunting , oyster roasts , beach combing and birding .

Several manufacturing complexes have been erected along the bay , which employ local residents . The Aluminum Company of America , Union Carbide , Du Pont , and Formosa Plastics all

established plants in Point Comfort . The South Texas Nuclear Generating Station is found in nearby Bay City . Petroleum and natural gas were discovered in the bay in the 1930s . Maize , cotton , soybeans , turf , and rice grow well around the bay , especially in the fertile delta region .