

= Copano Bay =

Copano Bay is a northwestern extension of Aransas Bay , west of Rockport , Texas in Refugio and Aransas counties . It is supplied with seawater from the Gulf of Mexico via Aransas Bay , and fed freshwater from the Aransas River , Mission River and Copano Creek . As an estuary , the bay is home to a diverse ecosystem consisting of various birds including the endangered whooping crane , and numerous finfish including the redfish as well as shellfish such as oysters . It is classified as a nursery for shrimp , which prohibits production from the bay . Copano Bay is also a historic location for human usage and settlement that dates back to the 18th century , beginning with the historic port of El Copano and the 19th century settlements of St. Mary 's of Aransas and Copano . The present @-@ day towns of Bayside , Copano Village and Holiday Beach were all founded in the 20th century . Oil and natural gas are pumped from below the bay 's surface , and contribute to the livelihood of the local economies .

= History =

Copano Bay was inhabited by the nomadic Aransas Indians , who constructed camps along the shore , 4 @,@ 000 years ago . The Aransas people left the area approximately 700 years ago , and were replaced around 1400 CE by the Copane Indians , for whom the bay is named . The Copane were one of five groups making up the Karankawas , hunter @-@ gatherers who occupied the mid @-@ Texas coast .

Cabeza de Vaca is thought to have been the first European to sight the bay in the early 16th century , evidenced by the descriptions in his logs that match the detail of the area . In 1766 , Spaniard Diego Ortiz Parrilla is believed to be the first European to explore the bay . He named it Santo Domingo (Saint Dominic) , but it was later changed to Copano , after the port of Copano was officially opened in 1785 on the northwestern shore . The port later served as a strategically important locale during the Texas Revolution and the American Civil War , and was the site of a settlement that is now completely abandoned . The town of St. Mary 's of Aransas was founded southwest of Copano and thrived as a port and wood mart , until numerous shipwrecks caused by the bay 's hidden reefs concluded its use in 1875 . Like Copano , it is now abandoned .

Further to the southwest , at the mouth of the Aransas River , the town of Black Point was established in the 1840s . The site was attacked by Indians several times before the settlement was abandoned . However , it was reestablished in the early 20th century as the present @-@ day city of Bayside . Bayside developers aimed to attract fruit and vegetable growers to the plots made available and advertised nationwide , but large amounts of land were purchased by speculators , raising demand and forcing further annexation . The 2000 census reported that 360 people lived in the city . The cities of Fulton and Rockport were established on Aransas Bay in the late 19th century , and later expanded development along most of the eastern shore of Copano Bay . Such developments include Copano Village , which registered 210 residents in 2000 , and the 1 @,@ 000 resident Holiday Beach community just west of Goose Island State Park on Lamar Peninsula .

= Features =

Copano Bay is approximately twelve @-@ by @-@ six @-@ miles , oriented from the southwest to the northeast . It is found mainly on undeveloped land , though ranches are located on parts of the west , south and north shores . The main extensions include Mission Bay , which stretches to the north to the mouth of the Mission River , and Port Bay to the west , which forms the southern boundary of the Live Oak peninsula . The peninsula is located on the eastern shore of Copano Bay and is lined with beach homes and residences , which begin just west of the inlet Salt Lake to the head of Live Oak peninsula at the confluence of Copano and Aransas Bay . This opening is spanned by the Copano Bay Causeway and the Copano Bay Fishing Pier , which once served as the main crossing to the Lamar peninsula . Holiday Beach is found on the northeastern shore of Copano Bay on the Lamar Peninsula . Just north of the community is the mouth of Copano Creek ,

which marks the bay 's northernmost point . From here , the shoreline turns to the southwest past the Copano Bay Oil and Gas Field and four sloughs before reaching the ruins of the ghost town Copano at Copano Point , marked by white cliffs . At the point , the Copano Reef juts out almost halfway across the bay . Further southwest , past the mouth of Mission Bay , Bayside stretches along the coast to the mouth of the Aransas River . The shoreline turns to the southeast from this point , past the Egery Flats and Egery Island through Swan Lake and to the mouth of Port Bay .

The bay 's maximum deapth is 3 metres (9 @. @ 8 ft) , and in contrast to the Laguna Madre (aprx . 80 miles downcoast to the south) , is not hypersaline . The Mission and Aransas Rivers are the main freshwater sources : small rivers with deep banks that carve through a landscape lined with hardwood trees . Their inflows increase during significant rainfall and reach their seasonal highs during the autumn . These rivers have not been dammed and thus flow free . At both mouths , marshes covering several square miles stretch from the confluences with Copano Bay and forming several saline lakes .

= = Ecosystem = =

Copano Bay serves as a nursery for shrimp , which attracts a large number of redfish . Abundant collections of black drum , flounder and trout , can also be found in the bay . Oysters grow in large numbers to form elongated reefs " oriented perpendicular to tidal flow " in the estuary . The reefs provide habitat for fish and sustenance for a wide variety of birds including the black @- @ bellied whistling @- @ duck , black @- @ necked stilt , brown pelican , gull @- @ billed tern , reddish egret , roseate spoonbill , seaside sparrow , white @- @ faced ibis and the whooping crane . The dominant species of gastropod in the bay is *Eulimastoma harbisonae* .

In 2003 , the United States Department of the Interior granted \$ 574 @, @ 000 to Texas Parks and Wildlife to purchase over 900 acres (3 @. @ 6 km²) of prime birding habitat at Egery Flats and the mouth of the Aransas River , to prevent further development .

= = Industry = =

Oil and natural gas wells are located both onshore and offshore of Copano Bay . Three oil and natural gas fields are found on the bay , including the Copano Bay Oil and Gas Field , just west of Holiday Beach , the South Copano Bay Oil Field , just offshore from Bayside , and the West Fulton Beach Gas and Oil Field to the west of the Live Oak peninsula . In 1997 , a pipeline owned by Koch Industries burst in the marsh in Refugio County , two miles (3 km) west of Copano Bay near the Aransas River , spilling 1 @, @ 000 gallons of oil over a 10 @- @ acre (40 @, @ 000 m²) area . The oil did not seep into Copano Bay , preventing a minor environmental disaster . Copano Bay is off limits to shrimping due to its designation as a nursery bay .