

= Aransas Bay =

Aransas Bay is a bay on the Texas gulf coast , approximately 30 miles (48 km) northeast of Corpus Christi , and 173 miles (278 km) south of San Antonio . It is separated from the Gulf of Mexico by San José Island (also referred to as St. Joseph Island) . Aransas Pass is the most direct navigable outlet into the Gulf of Mexico from the bay . The cities of Aransas Pass and Port Aransas are located at the southern end , and Rockport is found on the central western shore . The bay is oriented laterally northeast @-@ southwest , and is extended by Redfish Bay to the southwest , Copano Bay to the west , Saint Charles Bay to the north , and Mesquite Bay to the northeast . Aransas Bay is part of the Mission @-@ Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve .

There is a rich history of settlements on the bay , including : ancient Native American campgrounds dating back millennia ; 19th @-@ century European immigrant towns such as Lamar and Aransas ; and the present day cities of Rockport , Fulton and Aransas Pass . Resources such as shrimp , fish , oysters and oil are found in or near the bay , and contribute to the local economies .

= History =

Humans first inhabited the area surrounding Aransas Bay approximately 6 @, @ 000 to 8 @, @ 000 years ago . The name derives from a group of indigenous people called the Aransas Indians , whose 4 @, @ 000 @-@ year @-@ old campsites have been found near the bay . The nomadic Aransas , left the area circa 1200 to 1300 CE . According to archeologists , the Karankawa and Coahuiltecan had coalesced as people and migrated into the area by 1400 . They had severe losses and were much reduced by the 1800s due to new infectious diseases contracted from European explorers . Alonso Álvarez de Pineda of Spain is believed to be the first European to sail the bay , circa 1519 . For over a century later , the Spanish had little interest in the area until the French established a colony in Texas in the late 17th century . At this time , Alonso De León was ordered to found a settlement in the area , but no permanent colony on the bay was ever established .

During the years of Mexican control , the bay was put off limits to settlement by the authorities . An empresario granted in 1828 allowed Irish and Mexican immigration . In 1832 , the settlement of Aransas City on the bay , was founded by James Power . After the development of the nearby port Lamar in 1840 , Aransas City was deserted by 1846 . But Lamar soon met a similar fate , after being burnt to the ground during the American Civil War . The city of Aransas , which was founded on San Jose Island around the same time as Lamar , was also destroyed in the fighting . During the war , the bay was a strategically significant waterway for the transfer of freight , due to its protection from Gulf seas by barrier islands .

As a result of the destruction from the war , the new ports of Fulton and Rockport were developed in the later 1860s . At first , Rockport was intended as a deep @-@ water port , but after a series of mishaps , Aransas Pass was selected when deepening was approved in 1879 . By 1912 , a 100 feet wide and 8 ½ feet deep channel was operational . After hurricanes ransacked the port in 1916 and 1919 , the United States Army Corps of Engineers chose Corpus Christi as the preferred deepwater port for the lower Gulf coast .

Later twentieth @-@ century development has been based on the area 's natural beauty . In the 1960s , the affluent resort of Key Allegro , located between Rockport and Fulton , was founded . By 2000 , 24 @, @ 615 people lived in the surrounding Aransas County , including the cities of Rockport , Fulton , Aransas Pass and the unincorporated Key Allegro , Holiday Beach and Estes . The outer Refugio County located on the shore of Copano Bay , had 7 @, @ 828 residents .

= Features =

On average , the Aransas Bay system is 3 meters deep , and covers approximately 539 square kilometers . The system is made up of the bay itself and its extensions . The main extensions include : Saint Charles Bay , to the east of the Lamar peninsula ; Copano Bay , to the west of both the Live Oak and Lamar peninsulas , Mesquite Bay to the bay 's northeast , and Redfish Bay to the

southwest . Redfish Bay is sometimes considered an extension of Corpus Christi Bay .

Every second , approximately 28 cubed meters of water flows into the bay . The exchange with the Gulf of Mexico occurs at Cedar Bayou and Aransas Pass . As a result of the seawater exchange , the bay 's salinity is 15 parts per thousand , compared to the seawater average of 35 ppt . This discrepancy is brought about by the volume of fresh water that empties into the bay and its extensions , from Copano Creek , Mission River and Aransas River , forming the Mission @-@ Aransas estuary . Fresh water flows also arrive from the impact of the Guadalupe River on San Antonio Bay . Combined , the fresh water influence is 60 to 70 percent of the system 's volume , which is judged to be minimal .

Texas State Highway 35 runs parallel to the shore of Aransas Bay on its route from Corpus Christi to Houston . The highway includes the 1 @.@ 5 mile long Copano Bay causeway , which connects the Live Oak and Lamar peninsulas at the confluence of Copano and Aransas Bays . The first causeway was constructed in 1933 , but was replaced in 1966 with the Lyndon Baines Johnson causeway . The former causeway was transformed into a fishing pier in later years . In 1981 , nearly 10 @,@ 000 vehicles passed over the bridge on a daily basis .

= = Ecosystem = =

A wide variety of wildlife can be found in and around Aransas Bay . According to Texas Parks and Wildlife , the following fish have been caught in the bay : catfish , black drum , red drum , eel , southern flounder , crevalle jack , yellowtail amberjack , ladyfish , silver perch , pigfish , pinfish , sea trout , blacktip shark , bull shark , sheepshead , mangrove snapper , common snook and toadfish . Shrimp , Oysters and crabs also reside in the waters . The sea grass carpets found at numerous locations , provide a habitat and an ideal place for fish to spawn . The grasses also act as a filter , clearing the bay of environmental contaminants .

Many birds migrate to the area around Aransas Bay , most notably to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge . Year @-@ round residents include least grebe , brown pelican , neotropic cormorant , white @-@ faced ibis , roseate spoonbill , black @-@ bellied whistling @-@ duck , mottled duck , white @-@ tailed hawk , crested caracara , pauraque , golden @-@ fronted woodpecker , great kiskadee , green jay , long @-@ billed thrasher , olive sparrow , seaside sparrow , and bronzed cowbird . The endangered whooping crane has also been spotted near the bay . Despite the fact that there were only 15 in 1900 , over 180 are found in the wild today . The whooping crane 's and other birds ' survival depends on the availability of blue crab . Thousands of crab traps have been removed to preserve the population .

= = Industry = =

Given the location of Aransas bay , shipping has always been a major industry . Following the Civil War , the meatpacking industry became a major source of income for ports on the bay , especially Rockport and Fulton , where numerous slaughterhouses were constructed . In the early years of meatpacking , cattle were slaughtered strictly for their hide since there was no way to refrigerate the meat . As a result , most of the left over cow parts not used as pig feed , were disposed in the bay . This changed in 1871 , when an ice machine was installed in a packing plant . By this time , the meatpacking industry near Aransas Bay reached its prime . Prior to the decline of the industry in the area , in 1880 , 93 % of the beef from Texas slaughterhouses were processed in Rockport @-@ Fulton . Along with fishing , oyster farming and most notably shrimping became major industries on the bay in the early 20th century . Shipbuilding also developed and reached its prime following the first World War . During World War II , the United States Navy took over several shipyards . In 1936 , oil was discovered on the bay . By 1946 , 13 wells were in operation . In 1990 , 498 @,@ 703 barrels were produced , part of the 77 million barrels produced between 1936 and 1990 . Today , tourism is a prosperous industry . Numerous hotels are set up along the bay for individuals wanting to fish , bird or sight @-@ see . A large concentration of hotels are located in Rockport , where the bay 's only beach (Rockport Beach) is located .

