

= Nueces Bay =

Nueces Bay is a northwestern extension of Corpus Christi Bay in the San Patricio and Nueces counties of Texas . The bay is fed by the Nueces River , forming a natural estuary , which renders it ecologically and economically vital to the surrounding area . It serves as a habitat for the propagation of fish and shellfish , which sustain diverse species of birds and other wildlife . The bay is threatened by pollution from the heavy industry on its southern shore , which prevents oyster farming . Petrochemical production and oil are important to the surrounding economies of the major settlements of Corpus Christi and Portland , found on the eastern shore and connected by the Nueces Bay Causeway at the bay 's confluence with Corpus Christi Bay .

Agriculture dominates the northern shore , where many plots of land are still owned by the descendants of early settlers . The largely abandoned historical communities of Rosita and West Portland are also located in this area . To the west , the Odem Bay extension is formed , and is fed by Rincon Bayou and a large complex of marsh formed by the Nueces River delta . Just south of the mouth , are the remains of the abandoned Nuecestown settlement , which is now included in the Corpus Christi city limits .

= = History = =

Nueces Bay formed approximately 9 @, @ 000 years ago , as the sea level rose at the conclusion of the last ice age . The sea level stabilized 6 @, @ 000 years later , shaping the present @-@ day Nueces Bay . The first human inhabitants were the nomadic Aransas Indians , who settled between the Copano and Baffin bays about 8 @, @ 000 years ago , until 1300 CE . In the next century , the Karankawa Indians arrived , and were present when Europeans came ashore .

Nueces is Spanish for " nuts " , and refers to the pecan trees that grew along the banks of the Nueces River , noted by Spanish explorer Alonso De León in 1689 . It is unclear when the name was given to the bay ; it was called San Miguel Arcángel by Spanish captain Joaquín de Orobio y Basterra in 1747 , and an 1835 map of Texas identified it as Papelote or " wastepaper " Bay . It appears to have been first noted on a Spanish map in 1527 as the mouth of the Río Escondido or hidden river , which is believed to be the Nueces . French explorer René Robert Cavelier , Sieur de La Salle sailed into the bay in 1685 , mistakenly believing it was the Mississippi River . Spanish colonial governor José de Escandón planned a villa on the mouth of the Nueces River named Villa de Vedoya . Fifty families were sent the site in 1749 , but failed to establish a settlement , due to a lack of sufficient supplies . Later that century , missionaries discussed the possibility of moving Nuestra Señora del Refugio Mission to the site , but decided against the idea due to conflict with the Lipan Apaches . Germans attempted to settle the same area , but were turned away by the French during the Pastry War in the 1830s . The next decade , a colony for freed slaves was proposed by abolitionist Benjamin Lundy , who had to cancel after the outbreak of the Texas Revolution .

Corpus Christi , which was founded as a trading post on the southeastern shore in 1839 , is believed to be the first permanent settlement on the bay . It soon grew into a major Texas port with a population of 277 @, @ 454 at the time of the 2000 census . In 1852 , a settlement was finally established at the confluence of the Nueces River and Nueces Bay by Henry Kinney , who also founded Corpus Christi . The community was referred to as The Motts by German and English settlers for nearby tree clusters , but was officially known as Nuecestown . It was raided by Mexican bandits in 1875 , but recovered and grew to a population of 200 by 1896 . After the railroad passed on the town in 1905 , it declined , and is today included in the city limits of Corpus Christi . To the north of the bay , the Coleman @-@ Fulton Pasture Company controlled a large segment of San Patricio County for ranching during the aftermath of the Texas Revolution . David Sinton and later Charles Phelps Taft , whose names are immortalized by the nearby towns of Sinton and Taft , were involved with the company . They sold a plot of land on the northeast of Nueces Bay to George H. Paul , who hired Mexican immigrants to clear the land of mesquite trees and founded a ranching community later named West Portland . The plots of land in this community are still mostly held by the descendants of the original owners . The town of Portland ? on the extreme northeast of the bay

? was also established from land purchased from the Coleman @-@ Fulton Pasture Company by future State Senator John G. Willacy with help from a New England company . The town steadily grew and reached a population of 14 @,@ 827 by 2000 . To the northwest of the bay , on the Whites Point peninsula , a settlement was established around 1866 by cattledriver Darius Rachal , who had purchased land on the point from the cattle @-@ driving White family . Soon after his purchase , many of the Whites died of yellow fever as an epidemic swept the area and killed 14 people . Rachal used his land to raise cattle , grow cotton and sell real estate to new settlers . A post office was established at the site in 1892 , and was given the name Rosita or " little flower " after the names " White Point " and " Rachal " were rejected by United States Postal Service . After a 1915 gas explosion and two massive hurricanes , including a 1919 storm that killed 26 residents (approximately 50 were killed in Portland and 47 in Corpus Christi) , the post office was abolished in 1919 and by the next year most residents had relocated to Odem .

= = Features = =

Nueces Bay covers an area of 28 @.@ 9 square miles (75 km²) and drains the 16 @,@ 950 square miles (43 @,@ 900 km²) of the Nueces River basin . It has an average depth of 2 @.@ 3 metres (7 ft 7 in) , and a volume of 39 @,@ 700 acre feet (49 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 m³) . The bay is considered the southern extreme of the Texas Coastal Plain , which stretches northeast to Galveston Bay , and is part of the geographic transition from the grasslands of the coastal plain to the dry brush region of South Texas . It forms at the base of the Nueces River , which enters at the southwesternmost point of the bay . North of the Nueces entrance is the extension of Odem Bay , named for the nearby settlement of Odem . This extension includes shallow marsh fed by an extensive system of tidal streams including Rincon Bayou , and is headed by Whites Point to the east . Due south of Whites Point at the mouth of Odem Bay , is an oil field , situated against the backdrop of heavy industry on the shore to the southwest . The southern shore , which continues toward Rincon Point , is slender due to the industrial canal dredged to the south to the Port of Corpus Christi . The mouth of Nueces Bay on Corpus Christi Bay from Rincon Point to Indian Point , is crossed by the mile @-@ long (1 @.@ 6 km) Nueces Bay Causeway , which leads to Portland . West Portland is found on the shoreline of the bay as it curves north and west , which is lined with piers and residences . The bay leads back west to Whites Point on the north shore , which is largely used for agriculture .

= = Ecosystem = =

The Nueces estuary provides an ecosystem for a wide variety of wildlife . However , since the construction of Choke Canyon Reservoir in 1985 , freshwater inflows have decreased from the Nueces River , increasing the bay 's salinity , and hurting the natural oyster and shrimp habitat . In response , the City of Corpus Christi , Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and two additional state agencies have worked to restore the natural freshwater inflows into the bay . The Odem Bay extension is low in salinity and serves as a nursery for shrimp , which migrate to Nueces Bay in spring . Oyster beds are common throughout the bay and are known to be hiding spots for such fish as trout , black drum , flounder and redfish . Such finfish must be protected from excessive freshwater introduction for survival .

A diverse collection of birds sustained by the water life , such as the black skimmer , brown pelican , great blue heron , egret , laughing gull , roseate spoonbill , tern , and the white ibis , can be found in the bay , especially near the mouth of Rincon Bayou . Local efforts by the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries program have benefited bird populations by adding crushed oyster shells to the bay 's small islands for improved nesting conditions , and the restoration of marsh near the Nueces Bay Causeway to increase fish populations to satisfy the birds ' dietary requirements . At the nearby Nueces Delta Preserve , countless birds have been observed , as well as bobcats , coyotes , feral hogs , mountain lions , rattlesnakes , Texas spiny lizards , western diamondbacks and white @-@ tailed deer .

= = Industry = =

Oil has been pumped from the bay since 1912 , but fishing has been a mainstay since humans have inhabited the area . In the early 1970s , recreational fishing accounted for a yearly input of \$ 17 million to the local economy , while commercial fishermen contributed \$ 27 @. @ 3 million . Commercial oyster farming was common in the bay until 1995 , when the Texas Department of State Health Services suspended the practice , due to an unhealthy annual average zinc level of nearly 2500 mg / kg in oysters , which as filter feeders , are affected by high levels of zinc in the water . The excessive zinc is believed to have been dumped into the bay by the American Smelting and Refining Company 's Encycle Texas Incorporated subsidiary , which operated a zinc refinery at the site from 1942 to 1985 . The Nueces Bay Power Station is also believed to have discharged zinc used for coolant until December 2002 . Since that time , zinc levels in the bay have been reduced to slightly under 1000 mg / kg , which remains above the healthy levels of 700 mg / kg . The power station has since come under the control of the Topaz Power Group . The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has established the Total Maximum Daily Load Program to measure the level of pollutants throughout the Nueces watershed , in an effort to restore the bay to safe levels of contaminants . Pesticides that seep into the bay from the heavy agricultural activity on the north shore can also spur adverse environmental effects .

Several oil spills have occurred as a result of the heavy petroleum industry on the south shore of Nueces Bay . In 1984 , approximately 20 @, @ 000 US gallons (76 @, @ 000 L) of oil leaked from a busted pipeline , which blackened 5 miles (8 @. @ 0 km) of the shore . Ten years later , Koch Industries , which owns a refinery on the bay , was responsible for a major spill that resulted in the release of 100 @, @ 000 US gallons (380 @, @ 000 L) of oil , leaving a 12 @- @ mile (19 km) slick that seeped into Corpus Christi Bay . The Environmental Protection Agency fined the company \$ 30 million for the spill in 2000 , and \$ 2 @. @ 5 million was later given by the company to the state of Texas to improve the bay 's water quality .