

= Lavaca Bay =

Lavaca Bay ( / ləˈvɑːkə / ) is a northwestern extension of the Matagorda Bay system found mostly in Calhoun County , Texas , United States . The ports of Port Lavaca and Point Comfort have been established on the bay , and are the main areas of human habitation . Linnville was located on the bay until its abandonment after the Great Raid of 1840 , and the major port of Indianola was found near the confluence with the main Matagorda Bay , until the town 's final destruction following the massive hurricane of 1886 . Smaller communities include Olivia , Alamo Beach and Magnolia Beach . Lavaca Bay is approximately 82 miles ( 130 km ) northeast of Corpus Christi , about 121 miles ( 190 km ) southwest of Houston , and 145 miles ( 230 km ) southeast of San Antonio .

The bay is noted for its superfund site , caused by mercury pollution from the heavy industry in Point Comfort ( specifically Alcoa ) , across the bay from the largest settlement of Port Lavaca . Although fishing has declined in recent years due to fears of contamination , the bay supports a large finfish population , and the efforts of environmental organizations and the federal government have pressured Alcoa to reduce the polluted areas .

= = History = =

Lavaca Bay was formed when the sea level rose following the last ice age , flooding the Lavaca River @-@ Garcitas Creek basin . The name comes from the Spanish adaptation of the French vache or cow , given to the area by French explorer René @-@ Robert Cavelier , Sieur de La Salle for the sightings of Plains Bison , which were once common near the bay and the creeks that feed it . It is believed La Salle established his Fort St. Louis colony near the bay on Garcitas Creek . The first sizable human settlement on the bay shore was at the town of New Port , established in 1831 by Irish merchant John J. Linn as part of De León 's colony . The site was later renamed Linnville , and grew to a population of 200 by 1839 . It was described as " a place of considerable business " in Sketches of Texas in 1840 , and was used extensively during the early years of the Republic of Texas . Future San Antonio Mayor Samuel Maverick owned a warehouse in the town , along with many other prominent Texans . The town was destroyed during the Great Raid of 1840 , orchestrated by the Comanche Indians , and was later abandoned .

Port Lavaca or Labaca , developed after the abandonment of Linnville . It grew substantially following the destruction of Indianola , and became a prominent shipping location and national leader in shrimp production . Across the bay and currently connected by Texas State Highway 35 , the town of Point Comfort is found . It was incorporated in 1953 at a citywide vote and is known for its large aluminium and petrochemical plants built in the 1960s . The small town of Olivia , which was founded in 1892 as a Swedish Lutheran community , is located on the shores of Keller Bay . The unincorporated towns of Alamo Beach , established around 1900 , and Magnolia Beach , founded sometime thereafter , and named for the Magnolia figs produced in the area , are found north of the remains of the ghost town of Indianola .

= = Features = =

Lavaca Bay is the largest extension of the Matagorda Bay system , and includes its own extensions of Chocolate Bay to the southwest , Cox Bay to the east , and Keller Bay to the southeast . The Lavaca River as well as Garcitas Creek and Venado Creek supply the bay with freshwater from the north . Channels have been dredged to connect the bay to the Intracoastal Waterway , which runs to the south . On average , the bay is about 4 feet ( 1 m ) in depth .

Unlike most of the Matagorda Bay system , Lavaca Bay has a mostly muddy bottom with large amounts of oyster reefs and spoils islands formed by the dredging of several canals . The shores are lined with grassy bluffs and a thick cover of trees . The Lavaca River enters near the Port Lavaca Causeway as it traverses Lavaca Bay from Port Lavaca to Point Comfort at the center of the bay , which is also its narrowest width . The river flows 115 miles ( 190 km ) southeast from its source in northeast Gonzales County , draining approximately 2 @, @ 280 square miles ( 5 @, @

900 km<sup>2</sup> ) into Lavaca Bay . South of the Port Lavaca Causeway in Point Comfort , on the bay 's eastern shore , a heavy industrial sector is located , which lines the coast to Cox Bay , which extends to the east . South of Cox Bay is the larger Keller Bay extension , which extends the bay to its easternmost point near Olivia . Below the extension , is a narrow peninsula , bounded by Matagorda Bay to the south , which extends west to mouth of Lavaca Bay . Across the mouth on the western shore , past the Matagorda Ship Channel , which runs through the middle of the bay to Point Comfort , the town of Magnolia Beach is found . To the northwest is the town of Alamo Beach , located on Gailinipper Point , from which a major oyster reef begins across the bay to Point Comfort . The point is located on the northeastern extreme of a headland that juts to the north , forming Chocolate Bay to the west . Port Lavaca is found north of Chocolate Bay , back at the Port Lavaca Causeway . North of the causeway is a large circular extension , forming the northern boundary of the Lavaca Bay . The northwestern extreme is formed by Garcitas Cove , fed by Garcitas Creek , which flows 48 miles ( 77 km ) from its source in DeWitt County . To the east is Venado Creek , which converges with the bay , northwest of the mouth of the Lavaca River .

= = Ecosystem = =

Lavaca Bay hosts a wide range of finfish including Black drum , Flounder , Redfish , Sheepshead and Speckled trout , however it suffers from mercury pollution . An Alcoa plant in Point Comfort dumped an estimated 67 pounds ( 30 kg ) of mercury into the bay per day in the 1960s , affecting 64 square miles ( 170 km<sup>2</sup> ) . A mercury superfund was established at the site , and the processing of oysters and blue crab in certain locations was prohibited . A study revealed that the bay 's detritus is more than ten times as contaminated as nearby Keller Bay .

The pollution issue is a main concern of citizens of Calhoun County , and has attracted demonstrations against industry in Point Comfort . However , Alcoa has worked with state and federal officials , spending \$ 110 million to reduce the size of the superfund site , as part of a 2005 settlement . Cooperation aims to create 70 additional acres of salt marsh and 11 acres of oyster reef habitat .

Locals have estimated that the only area still affected by contamination is just offshore from the Alcoa plant . Signs warning boaters of the water 's toxicity are found at the site . The stigma attached to the bay due to reports of pollution has discouraged fishing , enabling a healthy population to develop .

= = Industry = =

Industry is heavy along the bay , with an abundance of natural gas and oil wells at all corners . Natural gas was discovered at the site in 1934 , and oil was discovered the next year . Point Comfort is home to several industrial plants along the shore , including Alcoa , Union Carbide , Du Pont , and Formosa , which contribute to the local economies . Despite the restrictions on the bay that prevent the production of fish and shellfish along the superfund site , seafood harvesting is a major industry . However , it is not as prominent as it was in the 1920s , when Port Lavaca led the nation in shrimp production , leading to the construction of a quick @-@ freezing plant . Today , shrimping is only allowed south of the Port Lavaca Causeway , due to the north 's classification as a nursery location . Shellfish production is allowed in Keller Bay and Lavaca Bay south of Point Comfort , but is restricted along the eastern and northern coast and Chocolate Bay , and is conditionally approved in the remaining locations , including along the shore of Port Lavaca . A small tourism industry also fuels economic growth , spurred by the Port Lavaca State Fishing Pier found alongside the Port Lavaca Causeway . The pier once served as the causeway across the bay but was replaced in the 1960s and converted into a fishing pier of 3 @, @ 200 feet ( 980 m ) , billed as the longest in the world .