

## Organizational Profile

The Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (GNDNERR) is operated by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s Office for Coastal Management as part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS). The NERRS is authorized under Section 315 of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (CZMA), which recognizes the significance of coastal resources and established the Coastal Zone Management Program and the NERRS to manage these resources for long-term conservation in partnership with the states. The GNDNERR was designated in 1999 as the 24<sup>th</sup> reserve in the NERRS. In 1973 the Mississippi Legislature also recognized the importance of Mississippi's coastal resources and passed the Coastal Wetlands Protection Act.

The state lead for the reserve is the MDMR, which was created in 1994 by the Mississippi Legislature, with the mission to enhance, protect and conserve the state's marine interests. ***The mission of the GNDNERR is to be a leader in science and outreach, in service to our community.*** This mission reflects our vision of inspiring our community to value, support, and practice ecosystem conservation. Our mission and vision are stated in our draft 2022-2026 Grand Bay NERR Management Plan, currently (as of October 25, 2021) in review with NOAA and slated for public comments in the coming months. The final, official GNDNERR Management Plan will be available online ASAP on [www.grandbaynerr.org](http://www.grandbaynerr.org).

The GNDNERR is located on the Mississippi-Alabama state line in Jackson County, MS, about 30 miles east of Biloxi, MS and 30 miles southwest of Mobile, AL, and is part of the Grand Bay Savanna Complex, which is the largest area of intact coastal habitats in the state of Mississippi. The GNDNERR is co-located with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge (GNDNWR) and the Grand Bay Coastal Preserve. The main functions of the GNDNERR include habitat and nursery areas for fish and shellfish, areas for recreational and commercial fishing and hunting, protection of water quality, and flood protection. Primary reserve facilities, referred to as the Grand Bay Coastal Resources Center (CRC), are located on Bayou Heron Road, Moss Point, MS. The Grand Bay CRC houses staff for the GNDNERR, GNDNWR, USFWS' Coastal Program and Ecological Services, and Wildlife Mississippi. The Grand Bay CRC is also the public visitor and interpretive center, which is open Monday-Friday from 9 am – 3 pm for approximately 248 days a year. Visitors traveling through the Gulf Coast often stop at the Grand Bay CRC to explore our exhibits and small trails. Additionally, we serve the local community through outreach and education programming, utilizing our classroom space, outdoor education spaces, and the interpretive center.

According to U.S. census data, the human population in the zip code of the reserve (39562) was 13,350 on July 1, 2019. The median age is 42.7, and the median household income was \$42,173 with 22.2% of the population living at or below the poverty level, compared to the national average of 12.3%. The median home value is \$90,800, and 72.1% of homes are owner occupied. Median gross rent (2015-2019) was \$867. There were 1,075 businesses in the area code in 2012. Our service area is comprised of families living on a vulnerable coast, from the coastal counties in Mississippi to Mobile County in Alabama. As such, admission to the Grand Bay CRC and all outreach and education programming at GNDNERR is free for everyone.

The GNDNERR has a wide array of programs within each sector to address our local coastal management priorities and serve our community. Through our Outreach (Education and Coastal Training Program), we offer a variety of community education programs for all ages, from classroom and field experiences, art workshops, kayaking for veterans, and large-scale community events. The Administration and Outreach staff will primarily be involved in carrying out the work for this project.

## Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

There are currently 19 staff employed at GNDNERR. The breakdown of staff members is as follows: Administration- 3, Outreach- 4, and Science- 12, for a total of approximately 749 work hours per week. At least 2 staff members are engaged in the care of the public exhibits.

The GNDNERR operating budget for fiscal year 2021 (July 1, 2021- June 30, 2022) is \$1,091,307.00. Seventy percent (70%) of the operating budget is a federal share through NOAA. The remaining 30% is matched through funds from the State of Mississippi.

### Grand Bay Coastal Resources Center

The location of the Grand Bay CRC is 6005 Bayou Heron Road, Moss Point, MS 39562. In 2004, initial funding was secured through a NOAA construction award to design and build permanent GNDNERR facilities. Over time, additional state and federal funds were obtained to meet total facility costs. Construction of the Grand Bay CRC began in November 2007. Prior to that time, from 2000 until facilities were completed, the reserve offices and labs were housed in on-site modular office space. Today, of the nearly 16,000-square-foot facility that houses various agencies and staff offices, approximately 2,000 square feet make up the interpretive center, which is the main public education space with permanent exhibits.

The Grand Bay CRC has an average of 2,000 visitors per year. Seventy-five percent (75%) of our audiences live within 100 miles of the GNDNERR, with most of our audience concentrated within a 30-mile radius of the Reserve, reaching cities such as Ocean Springs and Hurley, MS, and across the state line into Mobile, AL. The target audiences for the reserve education programming include the public, K-12 students, teachers, and non-traditional audiences (i.e., artists, veterans, seniors, pre-K, people with disabilities, and other non-traditional groups). The 'On the Road' program is focused on the K-12 student audience. By engaging with non-traditional audiences, the reach of our conservation and sense of place work is broadened outside of the community generally served by environmental education programming.

Typical visitors to the Grand Bay CRC vary seasonally and by visitor type. In the spring, we have many school field trip groups. Summertime draws in families and children, as well as larger summer camp groups. We see less students at the Grand Bay CRC in the fall, but our staff sees students by going to schools instead, encouraging schools to visit in the springtime. In late fall and throughout winter, we have "snowbirders," or visitors escaping the northern United States for more warmth in the south. Throughout the year, we may have occasional photography hobbyists stopping in to see what plants and birds are around. Most of our visitors come in pulses during large events, such as National Estuaries Day and Star Party. These visitors are typically family groups with children averaging four people per group.

Similar small museums and learning institutions in our geographic region include: Pascagoula River Audubon Center (Moss Point, MS) with three staff; the University of Southern Mississippi's Marine Education Center (Ocean Springs, MS) with five full time education staff; the Walter Anderson Museum of Art (Ocean Springs, MS) with two education staff; and the Dauphin Island Sea Lab Estuarium (Dauphin Island, AL) with one full-time education staff and five aquarists that assist in programs.

Over the next five years, new non-traditional audiences will be added with programs that focus on pre-K audiences, people with disabilities, additional programs for seniors, and other groups. Developing programs and updating our exhibits for these and existing school audiences require creativity and forethought to consider the special needs, extra safety requirements and precautions, and information that is appropriate, but adding non-traditional audiences will give everyone in the community a sense of place at the GNDNERR.