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Packery Flats Improvements Welcome Visitors

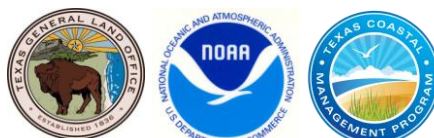


Kate's Hole access at Packery Flats.

Nestled on the backside of Mustang Island adjacent to Packery Channel, Packery Flats Coastal Habitat is a little known gem with lots to offer in terms of public access to our coastal areas. The one thousand acre protected area boasts extensive intertidal habitats that are heavily utilized by fish and wildlife, and also have many features that are appealing to passive recreation. Previous efforts by the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program have constructed parking lots for public access, but a recent increase in the popularity of the Packery Channel area prompted the CBBEP's Human Uses Implementation Team to prioritize additional improvements.

Costing a total of \$115,000, the improvements were funded by the CBBEP, NOAA, and the Texas General Land Office's Coastal Management Program. They include interpretive signage, improved road access and parking at two locations along Highway 361, and expanded bollard and cable systems to protect the sensitive habitats. Using bollard and cable systems are a good way to limit vehicular access to an area while still promoting pedestrian access.

"The main goal of the project was to offer public access while protecting sensitive habitats," said Jake Herring, Director of Land Conservation for the CBBEP, "and Packery Flats Coastal Habitat is a great example of how, with proper controls installed, both wildlife and passive human recreation activity can coexist."



Visiting Packery Flats you will get a taste of every coastal barrier island habitat type, from uplands and high marsh, down through the *Spartina alterniflora* marsh, and into the tidal flats and submerged seagrass meadows. These areas are used extensively by a variety of shorebirds, wading birds, and other species, as well as their prey, and the productivity has not gone unnoticed. In 1996 the area was originally preserved in honor of the late Mollie Beattie, the first woman director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and in 2001 it was included in the area federally designated by USFWS as critical habitat for the Piping Plover.



The two public access points at Packery Flats offer different experiences. The main parking lot (1) on Highway 361 contains interpretive signage and entrance to a 1/3 mile long pedestrian trail that ends at the tidal flats adjacent to Packery Channel - where you can stop, or continue on exploring and wading in the shallows. It is a great little hike that will expose you to all types of marsh vegetation and the tidal flats. The second access point (2) takes you from Highway 361, a quarter of mile through high marsh, to a parking area with direct access to the shallow waters of the backside of the island and Kate's Hole, a known fishing spot. The parking area is surrounded by *Spartina alterniflora* which immediately gives way to submerged seagrass meadows and open water. Here you can fish and bird watch from the shore, kayak, stand-up paddleboard, or wade out into the flats and fish.

Packery Flats Coastal Habitat is managed by the General Land Office with the assistance of several other agencies and non-profit groups, including the CBBEP and the Coastal Bend Bays Foundation, USFWS, and Texas Parks and Wildlife. You can join the effort to preserve the Packery Flats Coastal Habitat by leaving only footprints and respecting the surrounding habitat and wildlife. Packery Flats is waiting for you!

To learn more about CBBEP projects visit www.cbbep.org.



The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring bays and estuaries in the 12-county region of the Texas Coastal Bend. CBBEP is partially funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

For more information about the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, contact Kathryn Tunnell at (361) 336-0304 or ktunnell@cbbep.org.

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