

## ST. JOSEPH BAY

**Black's Island** (7 acres; 2.8 ha), **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site** (500 acres; 200 ha), Palm Point (100 acres; 40 ha), **St. Joseph Bay Buffer CARL–FF Project** (5378 acres [2151 ha], with 2115 acres [846 ha] acquired as **St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve**), and **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park** (2516 acres; 1006 ha)

Gulf County

8500 acres (3400 ha), with 4468 acres (1787 ha) acquired

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**LOCATION:** at the “elbow” of the Florida Panhandle in southwestern Gulf County, surrounding the town of Port St. Joe.

**DESCRIPTION:** This IBA surrounds and forms St. Joseph Bay, which is a State-designated Aquatic Preserve. It consists of several public land ownerships, as well as other sites sought for public acquisition. **Black's Island** is a small privately-owned island in southern St. Joseph Bay. **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site**, at the southern end of the St. Joseph Peninsula—and known as **Cape San Blas**—is used by the military for [what type of use?]. It has been proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as Critical Habitat for the Piping Plover. **Palm Point** is private land along the northern shore of St. Joseph Sound, just north of the community of Highland View, extending northwest 2 miles (3.1 km). **St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve** is a State acquisition project designed to protect the entire eastern shore of St. Joseph Bay south of Port St. Joe, as well as a few miles (km) of Gulf coast between Cape San Blas and Indian Peninsula. No other data were provided for the Buffer Preserve. **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park** occupies most of a long, narrow peninsula jutting north from Cape San Blas for more than 15 miles (24 km). It is bounded on the east by St. Joseph Sound and on the west and north by the Gulf of Mexico. At its northernmost point, it is only about 2 miles (3.2 km) from the mainland at St. Joe Beach. Annual visitation is \_\_\_\_ recreationists for the Eglin Air Force Base Test Site, and 142,500 recreationists for T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park.

**OWNERSHIP:** U.S. Air Force (Eglin Air Force Base Test Site), Florida Division of Marine Resources (St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve), Florida Division of Recreation and Parks (T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park), and private owners (Black's Island, other remaining acreage of the St. Joseph Bay Buffer CARL–FF Project, and Palm Point)

**HABITATS:** **Black's Island:** \*temperate hammock, coastal strand, artificial. **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:** \*coastal strand. **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:** \*slash pine flatwoods, \*sand pine scrub, \*coastal strand, temperate hammock, sawgrass marsh, tidal marsh, estuarine, coastal grasslands, artificial

**LAND USE:** **Black's Island:** \*private (planned development). **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:** \*conservation, \*low-impact military use, recreation. **Palm Point:** private. **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:** \*conservation, \*recreation

**IBA CATEGORIES:** **Black's Island:** significant populations of Special Concern species. **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:** significant populations of Threatened species; and significant natural habitats. **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:** significant populations of Threatened and FCREPA species; significant numbers of raptors; and significant natural habitats

**AVIAN DATA:** These five sites that surround and form St. Joseph Bay are regionally important for breeding Brown Pelicans (Black's Island), breeding Snowy Plovers (Palm Point), wintering shorebirds, migrant raptors (state park), Neotropical migrants (state park), and other species. Bird diversity of all sites combined is \_\_\_\_ native species.

**Black's Island:**

SPECIES	DATE	NUMBERS	COMMENTS
Brown Pelican	May 2000	100 pairs	1% (B)
Snowy Egret	May 2000	50 pairs	(B)
Tricolored Herons	May 2000	50 pairs	(B)

Data provided by Tammy Summers (Apalachicola Bay Aquatic Preserve)

**Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:**

SPECIES	DATE	NUMBERS	COMMENTS
Piping Plover	1 Feb 1994	26 birds	4% (W)
	Jan–Feb 2001	0 birds	
Snowy Plover	31 Dec 1993	3 birds	<1% (R)
	31 Aug 1999	3 birds	<1% (R)
	Jan–Feb 2001	0 birds	
Least Tern	16 Jul 1999	23 pairs	<1% (B)

2001 plover data provided by Patty Kelly (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), all other data provided by (\_\_\_\_)

**Palm Point:**

SPECIES	DATE	NUMBERS	COMMENTS
Snowy Plover	1989	6 pairs	3% (R)

Data from +Gore and Chase (1989)

**T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:**

SPECIES	DATE	NUMBERS	COMMENTS
Raptors	fall ____	>3000 birds	
Piping Plover	Jan–Feb 2001	2 birds	<1% (W)
Snowy Plover	1989	6 pairs	3% (R)
	26 Jul 2000	39 birds	9% (R)
	Jan–Feb 2001	19 birds	3% (R)
Overall diversity	Oct 1982 list	179 natives 1 exotics	

Raptor data from +Steadman (1984); 1989 Snowy Plover data from +Gore and Chase (1989); Piping Plover data provided by Patty Kelly (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); other data are observations of Jimmy Butler (\_\_\_\_).

**OTHER RESOURCES: Black's Island:** Pottery shards and shell tools dating from the Fort Walton and Weedon Island cultural periods have been found. **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:** From 1994 to 1997, between 25 and 53 loggerhead sea turtle nested on the beach. **T.H. Stone St. Joseph Peninsula State Park** is the only park in the Florida system that has a “Wilderness Zone” designation, and contains some of the best remaining beach dune habitat in the state. • “Vast numbers” of sea turtles nest along the beach, mostly loggerhead sea turtles with occasional nesting by green turtles and ♦ leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*; +DEP 2000). • The “Wilderness Zone” contains a population of the “St. Andrew” beach mice, a Federally- and State-listed Endangered subspecies. • Gopher tortoises were extirpated from the Park since before acquisition began in 1964; the potential for reintroduction is being explored. • Six cultural sites are known from the State Park, but most are

in fair to poor condition because of erosion and looting +(DEP 2000). • The park is an excellent site to observe migrating dragonflies and butterflies +Sprandel (2001).

**THREATS:** **Black's Island:** \*development, \*human disturbance. **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:** \*human disturbance. **Palm Point:** \*development, \*human disturbance. **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:** \*human disturbance, \*erosion, exotic plants, feral cats, cowbird brood parasitism

**CONSERVATION ISSUES:** **Black's Island** is privately owned and a proposed development includes 14 hosing units and a restaurant. The bird nesting area is proposed as a posted conservation area, but preparation for development already has disturbed the colony. • The island is sought for public acquisition as part of the St. Joseph Bay Buffer CARL–FF Project, and is surrounded by the St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserve. The beach at **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site** is open to public recreation. The site contains 3 miles (4.8 km) of Gulf frontage, but parts are suffering from severe erosion; 30 feet (9 m) were lost in 1993 alone. The main concern at the Test Site is from 4-wheel drive trucks and ATVs that have damaged the dunes, and affected nesting birds and sea turtles. Efforts are underway to manage off-road use, and critical shorebird nesting areas will be posted. • **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:** A Draft Unit Management Plan was prepared in March 2000 +(DEP 2000); most of the information in this section comes from the management plan. • Unauthorized access into the “Wilderness Zone” from boaters disturbs beach-nesting and -roosting species. Other sensitive areas are posted to control or prevent human access. • The northern half of the State Park has been proposed as Critical Habitat for the Piping Plover. • The southern portion of the park has been identified as one of the most critically eroding areas in Florida, due mostly to tropical storm activity. • A large area of sand pine scrub is found in the “Wilderness Zone.” The fire management plan is to allow the area to burn naturally when a fire occurs there, but the site will not be prescribed-burned. Other habitats are burned at varying intervals between 3–25 years. • Coyotes and feral cats are removed when encountered. • Exotic plants are not a serious problem, and are removed as needed.

*Palm Point was identified by +Gore and Chase (1989) as important habitat for Snowy Plovers. No other data are known for the site, and it is not included within the St. Joseph Bay Buffer CARL–FF Project boundaries. If the site continues to support Snowy Plovers, then perhaps it should be considered for public acquisition.*

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**REVIEWED BY:** Jeff Gore, Karen Lamonte, and George Wallace (all of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

**REFERENCES:** +DEP 2000. T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park unit management plan. DEP Advisory Group review draft. Department of Environmental Protection. [Tallahassee, FL]. • +Sprandel, G.L. 2001. Fall dragonfly (Odonata) and butterfly (Lepidoptera) migration at St. Joseph Peninsula, Gulf County, Florida. *Florida Entomologist* 84: 234–248. • +Gore, J.A., and C.A. Chase, III. 1989. Snowy Plover breeding distribution. Final performance report, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Tallahassee, FL. • +Stedman, S.J. 1984. St. Joseph Peninsula hawk migration. Florida Department of Natural Resources. Tallahassee, FL.

**WEBSITE:** <<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/parks/district1/stjoseph>>