National Estuaries Week 2026: NERRS Guidance

September 19–27, 2026

Every September, the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association (NERRA) joins with Restore America's Estuaries (RAE), the Association of National Estuary Programs (ANEP), NOAA's Office for Coastal Management (NOAA OCM), the Coastal States Organization (CSO), the Ocean Conservancy, and others to celebrate **National Estuaries Week (NEW)**.

This year, we are excited to team up with the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) to cross promote NEW and National Public Lands Day (NPLD). *(We know, it's more acronyms, but the folks at NEEF are worth it!)* NPLD is the nation's largest single-day volunteer effort for public lands. What does this mean for your Reserve? More resources for planning events and a bigger megaphone to promote them! We created this guidance to help you leverage your Reserve's plans for NEW (and NPLD) to help us all tell a cohesive story about the impact and value of estuaries and the NERRS on social media.

NEW 2026 Theme: This year we will continue to use *Wade In!* The intent is to encourage people to visit, enjoy, learn about, and protect our amazing estuaries. If it works for you, you can also weave in the NPLD theme of "Caring for Our Shared America,"into your communications, but please, especially on social media, make #WadeIn your number one message.

New this year: Business Supporter recognition This year, we encourage you to invite local businesses to support your NEW events and to recognize them when they do. When a business sponsors, contributes volunteers, or donates to support your event, you can let them know how "NERR and Dear" they are to all of us by giving them this NEW "We Waded In" graphic to share on their website and the following suggested social media language so they can show their community they care about the local estuary.

- *We are proud to #WadeIn to support #EstuariesWeek by joining [Your Reserve or NERRA or other like NEP/NERR/RAE] at [cleanup/event name]. Healthier estuaries and coasts are vital economic drivers for tourism, fisheries, and resilient infrastructure. We are proud to help contribute efforts to preserve our estuary!*
- *We were proud to #WadeIn this #EstuariesWeek and we'd do it again! Thanks to [X Reserve] for hosting [event] to support the estuary that supports all of us. Healthy coasts mean thriving fisheries, tourism, and communities. That's good for everyone.*

- *Our business exists because of this coast. This week we gave a little back. Proud to #WadeIn with [X Reserve] at [event] for #EstuariesWeek. Healthy estuaries mean healthy communities, and that's worth showing up for.*

If a business wades in with you during Estuaries Week, drop us a line at info@nerra.org so we can keep track. This doesn't have to be a big lift: even one business relationship built or strengthened during NEW helps us tell a broader story about why estuaries—and the programs that support them—matter.

NERRA's Objectives for NEW & NPLD

- Reserves leverage their current NEW plans to participate in NERRA's social campaign.
- Community members of all ages explore their Reserve, learn about estuaries, and discover easy actions they can take to protect their estuary.
- By joining NEW with NPLD, more communities learn about the value of programs that protect, study, and manage estuaries.
- Local and federal decision makers hear how their constituents value estuaries.
- Encourage businesses to participate in, and support, NEW.

NERRA's NEW Strategies

- Create and encourage the use of common graphics and hashtags: #EstuariesWeek, #WadeIn.
- Develop social content that Reserves can use to participate in the social media campaign.
- Partner with our long-standing NGO partners and NEEF to communicate the impact of our programs broadly and within Congress.

How Reserves Can Participate in NEW & NPLD

July/August

- **Plan:** Pick the most engaging, NERRdiest things to discover at your Reserve and plan to share them during NEW events and on social media. These could be recreational activities, unique habitats, wildlife, history—anything that engages people and sparks a sense of discovery and desire to learn more.
    - Consider whether you want to add National Public Lands Day to your outreach about the event. (This would be in addition to labeling it as a National Estuaries Week event.) Your event does not have to fall on September 28 to be thought of as NLPD. Any events in the weeks leading up to it are fine.

      As you decide, please review the resources NEEF has created to help plan, promote, and host an event. You'll find resources like media templates and flyers, most of which can

apply to any volunteer event, not just NPLD-affiliated ones. If you have questions about this, or need help with co-branding, contact us at info@nerra.org.

    - Engage local businesses in your activities.

- **Provide options:** Create a range of options to allow more people to join your events. For example, you could…

    - Promote free online events that anyone could join during NEW or on NPLD.

    - Share resources for self-guided activities people can do at their own pace.

    - Encourage people to share a story, pic, or memory of an exploration or something they learned at the estuary on social media and use #WadeIn #EstuariesWeek.

- **Post NEW teasers:** Start some NEW buzz this summer by posting content on your website or social media accounts. **You can use these sample social media posts from NERRA and graphics (including NEW logos and NEW branded images sized for Facebook, X, and Instagram).**

- **Participate in NOAA OCM's NEW Photo Contest: Detailed guidance will be posted here in late July**. These photos are used during NEW and year round to support Reserves, so please submit your photos! Share the guidance with friends, partners, local businesses, communities—anyone who might participate. Winners will be announced during National Estuaries Week.

- **Submit your event** to be included on **RAE's national map**. NERRA, RAE, ANEP, and NOAA will use this map to highlight NEW activities, so please take a few minutes to submit your events. If your events are virtual, be sure to add a location or it won't show up on the map! This year, the sign up form will give you the option to have your event added to the NPLD map—it has a much larger reach!

- **Invite VIPs to visit**—this includes your state/university partners, as well as local, state, and federal elected officials, many of whom are on a break from their legislative work. Need help planning? Contact Rebecca Roth**.**

September

- Continue to promote your NEW activities on social media, websites, etc.

- Participate in NEW!

- During or just after NEW: Send a letter or email to your congressional representatives. NERRA will provide a template for this in August. Use the legislative tracker to find staff email addresses.