

# Nature's Giant Recycling Center

## Why We Need Healthy Coastal Wetlands

### Coastal wetlands are dynamic, ever-changing systems.

Wetlands function as nature's giant recycling centers—a complex "mixing bowl" of elements. Plant matter continually breaks down into detritus, which produces food for filter feeders, omnivores and scavengers. The nitrogen-rich excrement of birds, fish and invertebrates enriches mudflats with organic compounds. In such a robust system, streamflows, tidal circulation, and even the busy burrowing activities of clams and shrimp all play key roles in keeping things moving.

### Coastal wetlands provide a vital link between land and open sea.

Coastal wetlands buffer the effects of storms, reduce shoreline erosion and improve water quality by filtering and assimilating many pollutants from sewage outfalls and agricultural runoff. A healthy salt marsh produces lots of oxygen and stores large amounts of carbon, so preserving wetlands is good for the whole planet.

### Coastal wetlands are dynamic, interesting and important places.



phytoplankton  
(magnified/not true colors)

It's a party down there! Proliferating phytoplankton form the basis of a vibrant food chain.



bay shrimp

California horn snail

turban snail



clam



ragworm



cockles



ghost shrimp



lugworm

