



SOUTH WALTON

find your perfect beach

Natural Elements

Recognition:

- [Topsail Hill Preserve State Park](#) is a three-mile span of undeveloped beachfront property that *Attaché* magazine named one of the "**Great Wilderness Beaches,**" and the Travel Channel named this prestigious preserve as one of the "**Nation's Top Secret Beaches**" and **Dr. Beach** himself has repeatedly named [Grayton Beach State Park](#) as one of the nation's best beaches.

Geography:

- The sands along South Walton's shores are sugar-white because they are composed mainly of **pure quartz crystal**. These particles of quartz, once part of the southern Appalachian Mountains, were washed south over millions of years before being deposited in the Gulf of Mexico. The tumbling of the water over this long distance broke down the quartz crystals and buffed the edges, making them as fine as sugar.
- The **turquoise appearance of the water comes from** the clarity of the Gulf of Mexico coupled with the high reflectivity of light off the sugar-white sand. The waters are so clear because no large, sediment-heavy rivers directly influence the water.
- **Approximately 40 percent of South Walton's 56,000 acres** is in conservation, protected from future development – 25,000 acres of untouched property where native wildlife thrive.
- Dunes are formed by the wind and sea oats (and other coastal vegetation) and are a function of the vast amount of sand that has been deposited along our coast. **Dunes offer the first line of defense against wave action during storms and are a very important part of the livelihood of the beaches.**
- **Sea oats are protected by state law.** Sea oats comprise more than 85 percent of plant life on the dunes. Their extensive root system grows both vertically and horizontally, stabilizing the core of the dune and capturing blown sand to grow the dune over time. Because of the critical role the dunes and the sea oats play to the health of the beaches, it is easy to understand why foot traffic on the dunes is extremely destructive, and harvesting or possession of sea oats is prohibited by law.
- The ecological communities in South Walton include **beach dunes, mesic flatwoods, scrub, scrub flatwoods, depression marshes, wet flatwoods, coastal dune lakes and estuarine marshes.** Each of these natural communities is home to an abundance of native animal and plant species.

Walton County is **home to two of the highest points in Florida**. Located in the northern part of the county, Britton Hill is recorded as the highest point in the state of Florida, while the community of Blue Mountain Beach has the highest elevation along the Gulf Coast.

Fifteen fresh and saltwater coastal dune lakes are found throughout South Walton. These geological gems can be found in very few places worldwide. South Walton has the largest concentration of coastal dune lakes in the world.

Native Species:

- Five unique plants native to South Walton:
 - Large-Leafed Jointwood
 - Godfrey's Golden Aster
 - Cruise's Golden Aster
 - Gulf Coast Lupine
 - Long-Leaf Pine
- Threatened animals found in Beaches of South Walton:
 - American Alligator
 - 5 species of Sea Turtles: Atlantic Loggerhead, Leatherback, Green, Kemp's Ridley and Hawksbill sea turtles.
 - Snowy Plover
 - Piping Plover
 - Southeastern Kestrel
 - Least Tern
 - Choctawhatchee Beach Mouse

Preservation:

- **South Walton Turtle Watch**, an organization that locates turtle nests, protects them until hatching and, if necessary, helps baby turtles make it safely to the water. Posters, signs and brochures can be found throughout South Walton educating residents and visitors on ways to protect the native wildlife and vegetation. Protecting endangered species such as the Loggerhead Sea Turtle and the Green Sea Turtle that nest along South Walton's beaches from May through August is top priority among residents.
- **The South Walton Conservation and Development Trust**, comprised of a 12-member panel, was established by the State Legislature in 1994 and charged with preparing an overall environmental survey of South Walton's 56,000 acres and recommending development plans that will economically and environmentally enhance South Walton. This produced a blueprint for thoughtful future development through 2025. Walton County adopted a Comprehensive Plan for future development, which includes:
 - Striking a balance between on-going growth and development, and careful preservation of the natural resources
 - Stringent building codes - including a four story height restriction
 - Sea oat plantings and other restorative programs
- Beach restoration is of vital importance in South Walton for storm protection, habitat recreation and recreation. The American Shore and Beach Preservation Association

recognized the with a 2008 Best Restored Beach Award for its successful nourishment program.

- The health South Walton's wildlife is dependent on the health of each ecological community. Local environmental groups, such as [Beach to Bay Connection](#) and [South Walton Community Council](#), are working with state agencies and Walton County to ensure the continued health of these natural areas.

About South Walton:

Located along a 26-mile stretch of white sandy beaches in Northwest Florida, South Walton encompasses 16 distinct beach neighborhoods, each with its own visual style, amenities and charm. South Walton is home to four state parks, one state forest, and more than 200 miles of hiking and biking trails. Renowned for natural scenic beauty, turquoise waters and sugar sand beaches, South Walton was named one of the "Secret Florida Beaches" by Travel + Leisure, but is easily accessible as a drive to destination or by flying to nearby airports Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) or the Destin – Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS). An upscale, yet casual place to unwind, South Walton is the place to recharge and build lasting memories. Learn more at VisitSouthWalton.com or follow Visit South Walton on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).