



Long-term changes and historical uses of one of the largest French salt-marshes since 1705

Laurent Godet, Laurent Pourinet, and Armelle Decaulne
CNRS LETG Geolittomer, Nantes, France (laurent.godet@univ-nantes.fr)

The salt-marshes of the Baie de l'Aiguillon (Western France) are among the largest of Western Europe. Thanks to exceptional historical data, including old maps, manuscripts and aerial photographs, we propose one of the first long-term accurate cartographies of such a large salt-marsh, dating back to the beginning of the 18th century. Like other salt-marshes in Western Europe, including those of the Mont Saint-Michel Bay (France), we found that they are expanding for the three last decades. However, our historical analysis also reveals that the area of these salt-marshes shrunk by two thirds over the last three centuries, due to massive land-reclamations starting from the mid-17th century. As revealed by historical testimonies and archeological remains, we also demonstrated that these salt-marshes were actively mowed as soon as the 1700s. In consequence, the oldest and the non-used parts of such salt-marshes correspond to very restricted patches that may present a high conservation stake. In the context of massive land-use and land-cover changes along the European coastal zones, historical analyses exploring long-term changes and historical uses of coastal habitats may help to identify old and natural patches of coastal habitats. Salt-marshes, that are easy to map and monitor, are good candidates for such investigations.