
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Eelgrass: New Hampshire's Most Common Seagrass

Seagrasses are rooted plants found in shallow areas in coastal waters and estuaries. They grow under water to a depth at which sunlight can penetrate. Seagrass is found in brackish, freshwater, and seawater environments. The floating leaves of seagrass extend into the water column altering current circulation, thereby trapping sediments and larval organisms. The most common seagrass in New Hampshire is eelgrass (*Zostera marina*), which forms dense beds that are essential habitat for fish and invertebrates. These plants require muddy to sandy sediment and are associated with moderate water currents.

What Are The Functions and Values of a Seagrass Bed?

The roots and blades of Eelgrass trap, filter and recycle nutrients, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, transforming them into matter consumable by other organisms. Eelgrass provides protective cover for fish, shellfish, invertebrates and detritivores (organisms which consume dead organic material) and acts as an important nursery area for many commercial and recreational fisheries species, including bay scallops, cod, winter flounder, and lobsters. Eelgrass also provides food and shelter for ducks and geese, whose migratory paths often include coastal areas with seagrass.

Eelgrass is an indicator of good water quality because it declines rapidly in the presence of pollutants and excess nutrients. It reduces property damage in coastal areas by decreasing wave action and water movement that can cause erosion. It also provides recreational opportunities such as hunting and bird watching. It also improves water quality by absorbing excess nutrients.

How Do Humans Threaten This Environment?

When Land is Developed: Dredging in channels and harbors may bury or remove seagrass.

Sedimentation from development sites that do not use best management practices to reduce erosion can reduce water clarity necessary for healthy seagrass. Contaminants, such as heavy metals, hydrocarbons, wastewater, and stormwater, also add to water quality degradation.

Boating Activity Can Also Affect Seagrass. Outboard motors and fishing gear, as well as hook and anchor lines, can destroy seagrass. Construction of docks and piers that shade seagrass beds inhibit its growth.