

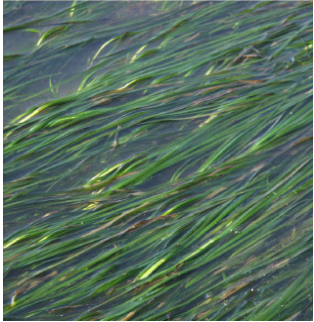
HABITAT PROTECTION: VOLUNTARY NO ANCHOR ZONE IN PORT TOWNSEND

PROTECTING EELGRASS BEDS TO SUPPORT YOUNG SALMON AND BUFFER THE EFFECTS OF OCEAN ACIDIFICATION

Protecting and Restoring Puget Sound

EFFECTIVE ACTION

A LOOK AT SUCCESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED



Port Townsend is one of the more popular destinations for pleasure boaters in Washington's inland waters. During boating season, the nearshore area off the downtown waterfront is heavily used as an anchorage. The eelgrass beds below support multiple Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed and distressed stocks of Pacific salmon and many other priority juvenile fishes. Eelgrass beds are ranked as Priority Habitat by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The number of boats anchoring in the eelgrass dropped from 20% to <1% annually since the buoys were installed.

WHAT WORKED

- ▶ Early public scoping period with boaters, local businesses and the community, as well as project trial period during the Wooden Boat Festival for the first year of the project.
- ▶ Create a non-regulatory marine protected area by placing special marker buoys in the water along the outer edge of the eelgrass bed.
- ▶ Conduct regular outreach to vessel operators about the importance of eelgrass, and requesting voluntary compliance with the no anchor zone.
- ▶ Interpretive signage placed along the shore to inform boaters and the public.
- ▶ Project information booth at marina offices and the annual Wooden Boat Festival.



AN OVERVIEW OF HABITAT PROTECTION AT PORT TOWNSEND BAY

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EFFECTIVE ACTION

PROJECT GOAL	ACTIONS	RESULTS	CHALLENGES
Boater education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informational signage at seven locations along the shore Yacht club presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boaters are consistently anchoring outside of the designated zones, with few exceptions. More boaters understand the importance of eelgrass habitats. It has become the norm in Port Townsend to anchor outside the eelgrass bed, and boaters are now educating other boaters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued outreach to boaters is key to the success of the project, and requires ongoing effort. Physical buoys are the most effective communication tool, but require maintenance.
Public outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project information booth at annual Wooden Boat Festival Newspaper, visitor guide and regional boating magazine articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships with the Port of Port Townsend, fire department and other agencies is very good. Community support for the project is excellent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community support has been excellent, and is key to its success.
Buoy installation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installed 7 buoys delineating no anchor zone Boater compliance monitored annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 52 acres of eelgrass habitat in Port Townsend is protected from damage by boat anchors. Monitoring is conducted by observing boater behavior during Wooden Boat Festival, which brings hundreds of boats into the Bay. In 2016, there were no boats anchored in the area during the festival. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buoys require regular maintenance (checking lines, removing tangled debris, and replacing buoys and worn hardware)
Project expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional 4 buoys installed No anchor zone added to Active Captain, a navigational mapping program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements to deployment and outreach are made annually. Increased area of voluntary no anchor zone in 2015 Eelgrass videography surveys of the Port Townsend waterfront comparing beds in 2007 to 2014 indicate the beds are stable or expanding slightly. Total cost of all actions is estimated at under \$200,000 since 2004 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permitting for new projects in marine habitat areas is complex, especially for something that doesn't fit into standard project parameters. Expiration dates for permits need to be tracked for ongoing compliance.

Protection of eelgrass in Port Townsend addresses the eelgrass habitat Vital Sign in the Action Agenda, The 2015 Puget Sound Eelgrass Recovery Strategy identifies expansion of voluntary no anchor zones as a strategy to reduce damage to existing eelgrass beds.



INSIGHTS FROM PORT TOWNSEND PROTECTION

- Boats and eelgrass are both at risk every time a vessel drops anchor in the soft sediment, which increases the risk of going adrift or aground.
- Lessons learned in Port Townsend have been applied in Port Hadlock and Mystery Bay, protecting an additional 92.5 acres of eelgrass habitat.
- Port Hadlock and Mystery Bay voluntary no anchor zones also reduce the risk to shellfish harvest areas from accidental contamination by visiting or transient boats.