

## eelgrass protection

Eelgrass is protected through land use bylaws in some local jurisdictions. Contact your local planning department and Official Community Plan for information. If you are planning a project that may impact fish habitat, including docks and shoreline protection, contact your municipality or FrontCounter BC and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

If you would like to volunteer to help conserve eelgrass, please contact:

**conserve@seagrassconservation.org**

## resources

Green shoreline development  
[www.greenshores.ca](http://www.greenshores.ca)

Eelgrass in the Salish Sea  
[www.seagrassconservation.org](http://www.seagrassconservation.org)

Stewardship information  
[www.stewardshipcentre.bc.ca](http://www.stewardshipcentre.bc.ca)

Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
[www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca](http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca)

Green boating practices  
[www.georgiastrait.org](http://www.georgiastrait.org)

Living by Water Project  
[www.bcnature.ca](http://www.bcnature.ca)

### contributors to this pamphlet:

Seagrass Conservation Working Group  
SeaChange Marine Conservation Society  
The Living By Water Project  
Parks Canada

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## everyone can help

- ✓ Let your neighbours know what eelgrass is and where it lives. Spread the word about the importance of eelgrass to our oceans and to us.

## what can beachcombers do?

- ✓ Walk carefully through eelgrass at low tide. If walking in a group, spread out to avoid creating a path.

## what can residents do?

- ✓ Grow trees, shrubs and grasses along the water's edge to stabilize the shoreline to help maintain natural coastal currents and processes.
- ✓ Use nature-friendly products for fertilizing and for pest and weed control. Keep your storm drain free of toxic chemicals.
- ✓ Be mindful of inland activities like construction or landscaping that may cause sediments to enter streams. These sediments can flow hundreds of kilometres to the ocean, smothering eelgrass and blocking out light needed for its growth.
- ✓ Share a dock among several neighbours. Avoid placing a dock where it will shade out eelgrass.
- ✓ Refer to [www.greenshoresforhomes.org](http://www.greenshoresforhomes.org) for ideas on how to minimize impacts of residential development and shoreline protection on nearshore habitats.

## what can boaters and kayakers do?

- ✓ Learn to recognize eelgrass and where it grows. If there's eelgrass along the beach at low tide, then there's probably a meadow beneath your boat.
- ✓ Tie up to a mooring buoy rather than anchoring. If anchoring, avoid eelgrass meadows, which will grow as deep as 10 m or 30 ft below zero tide.
- ✓ If your anchor brings up eelgrass, avoid the area next time—and let others know too.
- ✓ Choose an eelgrass-free zone to drag your dinghy or kayak up on the beach. If you must alight on eelgrass, use different routes back and forth to minimize trampling.
- ✓ Refer to <http://georgiastrait.org/work/cleanmarinebc/pumpouts> to find shore-based sewage pumpout stations in B.C.
- ✓ Raise your propeller and slow down when travelling in shallow water to reduce contact between your boat and eelgrass.

For information on known locations of eelgrass meadows in coastal areas of BC check out the Eelgrass Mapping Atlas at [www.cmnbc.ca](http://www.cmnbc.ca)

# protecting eelgrass



TD Friends of the Environment Foundation



Parks Canada  
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# eelgrass meadows

## what is eelgrass?

Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) is a flowering seagrass. This bright green ribbon-like grass produces roots, flowers, and seeds, and grows near the low tide line. Eelgrass meadows are among the world's richest and most productive habitats, and just like a magnet, they attract an amazing diversity of marine life.

Eelgrass often grows in the muddy sediments of sheltered bays along 25-35% of BC's coast. Good examples of expansive eelgrass meadows are found at Roberts Bank near Tsawwassen, Sidney Island in the southern Gulf Islands, southern Clayoquot Sound on western Vancouver Island and Massett Inlet on the Queen Charlotte Islands/Haida Gwaii. But eelgrass also grows in small coves and in narrow bands along shorelines with soft sediment.

## why is eelgrass Important?

- ✓ Seagrasses like eelgrass help to produce the oxygen we breathe, and play a critical role in global climate and ocean cycles.
- ✓ Eelgrass meadows are vital feeding and nursery areas for many species of invertebrates (animals without backbones), fish and birds. More than 100 species of microscopic algae grow on eelgrass blades. Crabs, snails and shrimp feed on the algae. Young fish feed on the small animals (zooplankton) that are attracted to the algae.
- ✓ Eelgrass enhances the health of the coastal waters by filtering some pollutants, and by allowing sediments in the water to settle.
- ✓ Eelgrass plants protect the coastline from erosion by slowing waves and currents.
- ✓ Eelgrass meadows attract more than 70 fish species. Some—like Pacific Herring, Rockfish and Salmon—are important to fishers. Other species such as Shiner Perch and Pacific Sand Lance are important to coastal food webs. Where eelgrass meadows have been reduced in size or density or disappeared, the number of fish species and diversity of marine life diminishes.
- ✓ Brant Geese are one of the few species that eat eelgrass. Great Blue Herons and Bald Eagles prey on small fish in the eelgrass exposed at low tide. Gulls and other shorebirds probe the mud among the roots for snails, sea slugs, crabs and sand fleas.
- ✓ Excess nutrients from land (fertilizers, sewage) and boat discharges can cause blooms of plant plankton and algae. Algae blooms block out the sunlight needed for the growth of young eelgrass shoots. Eighty percent of the pollution load in the ocean originates from land-based activities.
- ✓ Anchors and propellers can uproot and shred eelgrass. So too does dragging dinghies and kayaks across these marine meadows.
- ✓ Beachcombers walking the shoreline over the same pathways can trample eelgrass at low tide.
- ✓ Over-fishing of adult fish near eelgrass can reduce the number and variety of young fish.
- ✓ Climate change may threaten eelgrass as ocean levels and water temperatures rise and as droughts increase.



## threats

World-wide, seagrasses—including eelgrass—are among the most threatened of coastal habitats. The coastal areas where we live, work and play are the only places where eelgrass can thrive. The effects of residential, recreational and industrial development are placing eelgrass meadows at risk.

