

**EELGRASS WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**December 7, 2023
3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Zoom Remote Meeting**

Attendance: Jamie Vaudrey (Chair), Craig Tobias, Larry Dunn, Kelly Streich, Zach Gordon, David Carey, Kelly Streich, Griffin Harris, Brad Towson (LCO), Alan Banister, Hillary Desideraggio (Lopes LA), Bill Lucey, Lukas Houle (administrator)

1. (2 min) Welcoming Remarks
 - a. Link to this document:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/16a5ocRvraUrMIYGPFJT2xOcUzx4f1t-TCJnmLzkl8co/edit?usp=sharing>
2. (3 min) Follow up on Establishing a Recurring Meeting Time.
 - a. Meet every 2 weeks; 3pm-4:30pm. For 2023 / 2024:
 - i. Review the remaining meeting dates, swap out the 21st meeting date as many members will not be available.
3. (1 min) Outline of document is now available - please sign up for sections by adding your name as a comment: [2024-Feb CGA Eelgrass WG Report](#)
 - a. Dec 7 (Thu)
 - i. *Preservation and Expansion of Eelgrass - Policy, Legislation, and Recommendations in Neighboring Regions and Programs* - presentation & discussion (Jamie - but all review & discuss)
 - b. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ATHKc0YjVr100wTadC0ZjO4iXVHpIDxt/edit?usp=sharing&oid=111748038879777406810&rtpof=true&sd=true>
 - i. Members reviewed the document; reporting out an assigned section
 1. New York - *New York State Law and Regulations (From [Report of the New York State Seagrass Task Force](#) p. 20-21)*
 - a. New York State does not currently have any regulations or laws specifically protecting seagrass, however many laws, mandates and regulations apply to areas where seagrass may be found. These regulations either indirectly or directly affect seagrass

beds, but do not adequately protect seagrass or seagrass habitat.

2. RI Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan w/ regulations*: [Rhode Island Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan](#)
 - a. Title 650 Coastal Resources Management Council: Chapter 20-Coastal Management Program*: https://risos-apa-production-public.s3.amazonaws.com/CRMC/REG_12984_20230713145031502.pdf
 - b. **Exact wording** “Proposed aquaculture leases may not be sited where eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) or widgeon grass (*Ruppia maritima*) exists.”
 - c. *From RI Coastal Resources Management Council page on [Submerged Aquatic Vegetation](#)* - The goal of CRMC is to preserve, protect, and where possible, restore SAV habitat. The following activities under CRMC jurisdiction are required to avoid and minimize impacts to SAV habitat under Section 300.18 of the RI Coastal Resources Management Program (RICRMP):
 - i. Residential, Commercial, Industrial, and Public Recreational Structures, Section 300.3
 - ii. Recreational Boating Facilities, Section 300.4
 - iii. Sewage Treatment and Stormwater, Section 300.6
 - iv. Dredging and Dredged Materials Disposal, Section 300.9
 - v. Filling in Tidal Waters, Section 300.10
 - vi. Aquaculture, Section 300.11
 - vii. Activities undertaken in accordance with municipal harbor regulations, Section 300.15
3. *From [Title 650 – Coastal Resources Management Council Chapter 20: Coastal Management Program](#)*
 - a. The Council's goal is to preserve, protect and where possible, restore SAV habitat. In cases where the Council determines that SAV may be altered or grants a special exception to a prohibition listed in §

1.3.1(R)(2) of this Part, the Council shall require the mitigation of all impacts to SAV. Such activities requiring mitigation include, but are not limited to, marina expansions, dredging, filling in tidal waters, construction of commercial docks and/or structures and any other activity determined by CRMC that has not significantly or appropriately avoided impacts to SAV. Permanently lost or significantly altered SAV shall be replaced through the restoration of an historical SAV habitat or the creation of a new SAV habitat at a site approved by the Council. The ratio of restoration to loss shall be 2:1.

- b. Activities under CRMC jurisdiction, including residential, commercial, industrial, and public recreational structures (§ 1.3.1(A) of this Part), recreational boating facilities (§ 1.3.1(D) of this Part), sewage treatment and stormwater (§ 1.3.1(F) of this Part), dredging and dredged materials disposal (§ 1.3.1(I) of this Part), filling in tidal waters (§ 1.3.1(J) of this Part), aquaculture (§ 1.3.1(K) of this Part), and activities undertaken in accordance with municipal harbor regulations (§ 1.3.1(O) of this Part), shall avoid and minimize impacts to SAV habitat.
- c. Floats, and float and platform lifts (including grate-type structures) associated with residential docks are prohibited over SAV as defined herein (See § 1.1.2(A)(157) of this Part).
- d. Boat lifts having the capacity to service vessels larger than a tender (vessels greater than twelve (12) feet long and greater than one thousand two hundred (1,200) lbs) are prohibited over SAV.
- e. The long-term docking of vessels at a recreational boating facility shall be prohibited over SAV.

4. Long Island Sound Blue Plan (ALAN)

- a. The LIS Blue Plan provides an inventory of the natural resources and uses of Connecticut's LIS and establishes a spatial plan to guide future use of the Sound's waters and submerged lands, including eelgrass habitat. The purpose of the Blue Plan is to facilitate a transparent, science-based decision-making process for the preservation of Long Island Sound's ecosystems and resources and the

protection of traditional uses, while maximizing their compatibility and minimizing conflicts between them now and in the future. Organizational teams and working groups were developed to create and identify criteria for Ecologically Significant Areas (ESAs), which include areas where Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) is or has been found in the past. The Blue Plan identifies policies that regulatory agencies use in decision making under their existing authority.

- ii. Discussed neighboring states efforts,
- iii. Continue discussion of barriers & pathways to success; start to develop policy/ruling recommendations informed by activities in neighboring regions
 - 1. AB - concern with establishing eelgrass in existing leases - this could impact the aquacultureists livelihood - once they have established a business - need to protect that
 - 2. Madison - for example, if allow eelgrass to grow in a small section of the lease, would be good to stay 25 feet away, to let eelgrass get established in that region
 - 3. we need some protections as eelgrass extends into previously uncolonized areas, but more relaxed regulations when eelgrass is healthy, abundant, and thriving. We ended flexibility (if-then type statements)

c. Jan 10 (Wed)

- i. *Monitoring and Change Analysis of Eelgrass in Southern New England, Long Island Sound, and Long Island* - presentation & discussion (lead person/people - Jamie, Bill(?))
- ii. *Engaging the Community* - presentation & discussion (lead person/people?)
- iii. Discuss *Working Group Recommendations* - funding, policy and legislative rulings

d. Jan 24 (Wed)

- i. discuss final draft of recommendations

- 4. (40 min) *Policy, Legislation, and Recommendations in Neighboring Regions and Programs* - presentation & discussion (lead Jamie)

5. (35 min) Group Discussion of Potential Recommendations

- a. What do we need to review? Is anything not currently in our plan?
- b. Review the [Current Outline](#)