



# ON-THE-GROUND PROJECTS

Spotlight on Conservation Boat Mooring Retrofitting, Jamestown, RI

## Project Partners

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife

Jamestown Boat Yard

Conanicut Marine Services Inc.

Clarks Boat Yard

Aquidneck Mooring Company

Town of Jamestown Conservation Commission

Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

Seagrass, a valuable spawning and nursery habitat for many fish and invertebrate species, is declining worldwide, and the waters around Rhode Island are no exception. There has been a 40% decline in seagrass bed area since the 1960's, which were at the time still recovering from the 1930's infection of wasting disease (the slime mold *Labryinthula zosterae*). Currently there are approximately 500 acres of eelgrass in Narragansett bay.

Seagrass is vulnerable to a number of boating related activities, including prop damage and the use of traditional chain moorings. When placed within or adjacent to seagrass beds, traditional chain moorings can drag on the bottom, severely damaging habitat through physical removal of the seagrass shoots, causing a 'haloing' effect. Disturbance to the seafloor also suspends sediment, increasing turbidity and reducing water clarity. This diminishes the amount of light penetration critically important for eelgrass growth and survival.

To restore damaged seagrass and protect healthy beds, the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership worked with partners to install four conservation boat moorings in three Jamestown, Rhode Island, boat yards, replacing four traditional mooring systems. Conservation moorings use a buoyant bungee-like cord to minimize contact with the seafloor, thereby reducing physical damage to seagrass (eelgrass, *Zostera marina*, around Rhode Island). Prior to installing the conservation moorings, the status of eelgrass habitat around each of the existing moorings was documented. The moorings were installed in the summer of 2016, and preliminary monitoring for seagrass recovery has been positive.

The National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration provided the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership with conservation dollars to remove old moorings, purchase and install the conservation moorings, and monitor success. The increase in eelgrass will not only benefit the fish and invertebrate communities, it will benefit all who enjoy Narragansett Bay.



Seagrass haloing caused by traditional moorings in Jamestown, RI.



Project text and photos provided by Chris Powell, ACFHP

For more information on the Partnership visit us at: [www.atlanticfishhabitat.org](http://www.atlanticfishhabitat.org)