Protecting eelgrass habitat through the use of conservation moorings

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has partnered with the Town of Tisbury, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the Nature Conservancy to protect fish habitat within the Town of Tisbury. Through this partnership, the Town of Tisbury is in the process of replacing traditional boat moorings with alternative moorings in order minimize adverse impacts to important eelgrass habitat.



Importance of eelgrass habitat

Eelgrass serves as an extremely valuable spawning and nursery habitat for a variety of fish and shellfish species, including winter flounder, summer flounder and bay scallop. It also is an important primary producer supporting the base of the food chain. Throughout Massachusetts and the Northeast, eelgrass meadows have been declining over the past 20 years. The decline is primarily from deteriorating water quality, but also as a result of a wide range of physical alterations such as dredging and filling, as well as boating related impacts.

Impacts to eelgrass habitat from moorings

Eelgrass habitat is vulnerable from a number of boating related activities, including the use of traditional chain moorings. Traditional chain moorings, when placed within or adjacent to eelgrass beds, can severely damage habitat through scour. Furthermore, the disturbance to the seafloor by mooring chains can suspends sediment and decrease water clarity, which diminishes the level of light penetration critically important to eelgrass growth and survival.





What are conservation moorings?

A conservation mooring system can be described as any mooring system that is designed to avoid contact with the seafloor, generally through the use of flexible, floatable lines. Depending on the substrate, helical anchors may be used in place of traditional concrete mooring block in order to reduce the footprint within eelgrass or shellfish habitat.

