

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly of Seagrass Protection in the Northeastern US



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- Any and all disparaging remarks reflect the position of the speaker and do not represent EPA official position or policy. The speaker apologizes for the use of expletives and in advance for any derogatory remarks directed at individuals or other agencies (no matter how deserving they may be).

Clean Water Act

- Fishable, Swimmable
- Water body classifications/designated uses
- Water quality standards to protect those designated uses
- Section 404 – “Wetlands Protection Act”

Section 404 Regs.

- Vegetated shallows – “....areas that under normal circumstances support communities of rooted aquatic vegetation, such as turtle grass and eelgrass...”
- Physical disruption (dredging/filling)
- Significant degradation
- “No Net Loss” wetlands policy

Highlights/lowlights of eelgrass conservation in New England

- 1912 Mass. Shellfish report states “Plymouth has 120 acres of excellent shellfish habitat, but several hundred more acres of habitat are being covered by thick tangles of seagrass”
- 1918 Red Sox win World Series
- 1930s Wasting disease epidemic; Ralph Dexter begins his 50 year study of eelgrass in the Annisquam River

Highlights/Lowlights

- 1970s Clean Water Act is passed; Woman removes eelgrass meadow with a rake, because she doesn't like the feel of it on her legs as she swims.
- 1983 Fred Short arrives at UNH
- Early 1990s Portsmouth Port Expansion; Statewide mapping efforts are expanding
- 1993 EPA holds first eelgrass summit

Highlights/Lowlights

- 1995/6 State of Maine withdraws Sears Island; Swampscott dredging
- 2000 Little Harbor, New Hampshire
- 2003 Hubline natural gas pipeline built
- 2004 Red Sox win World series
- 2006 Gloucester stormwater pipe
- 2007/8 NMFS berthing project
- 2008 EPA holds 15th eelgrass summit
- 2009 This workshop