Oak Bay Eelgrass Inventory

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Executive Summary

The importance of seagrass to nearshore health and ecology is comparable to that of tropical coral reefs, but its decline is more drastic. In British Columbia, the major species of seagrass is *Zostera marina*, commonly known as eelgrass, which grows in estuaries and quiet bays. Four percent of the province's coast is suitable for eelgrass growth, making it vital to protect existing meadows. Eelgrass meadows serve as nurseries for young salmon emerging from streams and rivers. As well, rockfish, crabs, starfish and a myriad of other invertebrate and fish species spend part of their lifecycle in eelgrass. Great Blue Heron and Brant geese depend on eelgrass meadows for foraging. In 2014 the SeaChange Marine Conservation Society, with the support of the District of Oak Bay's Environmental Advisory Committee, applied to the municipality for a Grant-in-Aid to help cover the costs of a survey of existing eelgrass habitats along the coastline of the municipality. A grant was awarded and used to leverage further funding from the Pacific Salmon Foundation. The survey was initiated in August 2014.

Oak Bay supports a healthy population of eelgrass meadows. Seventy-eight percent of the eelgrass is continuous meadows and 22% is patchy habitat. In some areas the plant grows to over 9m below the low tide line. The maximum depth to which eelgrass can grow depends upon the clarity of the water. The average depth in the Salish Sea is approximately 0m to -7m. The depth of eelgrass growth in the waters surrounding Oak Bay, then, may indicate good water quality.

Eelgrass habitat surrounding the Oak Bay marina is most impacted where moorings scour the bottom and prevent growth. Recovery in suitable substrate is possible if the cause of the damage is eliminated, but natural recovery is slow and would be assisted by replanting, perhaps with the participation of community diving groups and volunteers.

It is recommended that educational outreach addresses issues such as boat anchoring and mooring in eelgrass beds and scouring by boat anchors. The reduction or elimination of detergents, chemicals and microplastics entering the marine waters through stormwater outlets would benefit all marine life.

This report summarizes work done between 2014 and 2015 to map eelgrass beds in Oak Bay. The Study Area is delineated in Appendix A (**see Study Area Map 1, pg. 26**). The methodology is described under Appendix B. A set of recommendations is included in this report to support land use decisions and policy that may protect and enhance eelgrass meadows and the diversity of associated species within the Oak Bay municipality.

1.0. Introduction

1.1. A Case for Conservation of Seagrasses

Seagrasses are rooted aquatic plants that grow in estuaries and along low wave energy shorelines throughout the world. They have important influences on biogeochemical cycling, sediment stability, and food web support (McGlathery et al. 2007; Orth et al., 2006). Seagrasses can form extensive meadows supporting high biodiversity. The global species diversity of seagrasses is low (~60 species). Across the globe, however, seagrass meadows cover about 177,000 square kilometers of coastal waters – larger than the combined area of the Maritime Provinces (Short et al, 2007).

Land use developments within watersheds have led to a loss of estuarine and nearshore marine habitats in British Columbia - the receiving waters of land based activities. Agricultural and forestry practices, dredging for commercial and residential development and stormwater pollution have contributed to the loss of estuarine habitat, including eelgrass (Durance 2002). These practices reduce eelgrass habitat through shading, smothering, physical disturbance and reduction of light availability from algal blooms caused by excess nutrients. The pressure to modify natural marine features and habitat for the development of commercial facilities and residential units within coastal areas is intensifying as population increases along the coast. It is possible for local governments to meet both shoreline development and ecological resiliency goals and has been demonstrated using soft armoring techniques at a cost savings of 30-70% compared to hard shoreline armoring (Lamont et al. 2014).

Coupled with the consequences of climate change—rising sea level, ocean acidification, rising sea surface temperatures—it is critical to conserve and protect the resiliency of nearshore habitats like eelgrass. Eelgrass is expected to experience both positive and negative affects of climate change (Björk et al. 2008). Studies of the effects of climate change on ecological interactions within seagrass meadows are ongoing (Alsterberg et al. 2013, Zimmerman, et al. 2015). Mapping the location and extent of eelgrass meadows are important steps towards conservation and establishing a baseline for monitoring health over time.

1.2. Ecology and Biodiversity

Two species of eelgrass occur in British Columbia—the more productive, native species, *Zostera marina,* and the introduced *Zostera japonica,* or Japanese eelgrass (pictured right: the smaller *Z. japonica* mixes with *Z. marina*). Both species

Photo credit: Alison Prentice

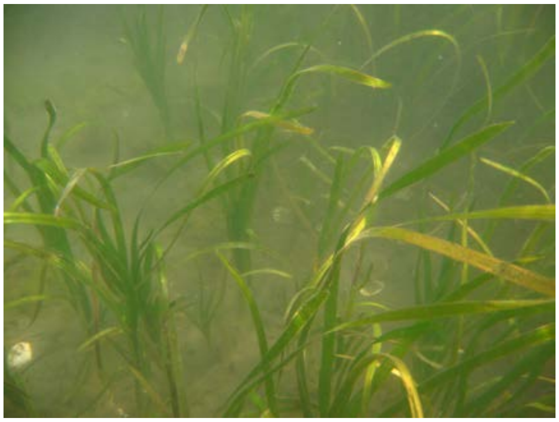
are vascular plants that grow in relatively shallow and protected marine areas, but *Z. japonica* typically grows higher in the intertidal zone than *Z. marina*. The two species are not considered competitive for the same space. The eelgrass inventory reported here, focuses on the native species (although no *Z. japonica* was observed in the study area).

The complex and intricate food webs of an eelgrass meadow provide food and shelter for numerous fish and invertebrates. The productivity of native seagrasses rivals the world's richest farmlands and tropical rainforests. From an unstructured muddy/sandy bottom grows a myriad pattern of leaves that supply nutrients to salmonids and other fish, shellfish, waterfowl and about 124 species of invertebrates.

The plants offer surface area for over 350 species of macroalgae (large algae) and 91 species of epiphytic microalgae (small algae living on the surface of the eelgrass blades) – the basis of the food web for juvenile salmon in marine waters (Phillips 1984). Often referred to as "salmon highways", nearshore marine environments containing eelgrass beds are home to over 80% of commercially important fish and shellfish species, including all species of salmon, at some point in their life histories (Durance 2002).

Photo credit: Tavish Campbell

1.3. Ecosystem Services



Ecosystem services are the benefits provided by the land, air, water and subsurface materials of the earth. Eelgrass habitats within the lower reaches of the Salish Sea provide carbon sequestration and storage, habitat refugia and nursery and nutrient cycling benefits to an approximated natural capital cost of $81,000 per hectare per year (Molnar et al. 2012).

Photo credit: Jamie Smith

Another ecosystem service eelgrass habitats provide is shoreline stability. Established eelgrass beds reduce currents, leading to increased sediment and organic detritus deposition (Durance 2002). Seventy-eight percent of the eelgrass beds surrounding Oak Bay are continuous, providing a buffer for incoming wave energy.

The more eelgrass beds are fragmented by physical structures (e.g. boats, wharves, docks and overwater play structures), the less they serve as erosion buffers. Where shorelines are constrained by development or structures to prevent erosion (e.g. rip rap, sea walls), natural coastal features will be squeezed out. Maintaining shoreline infrastructure and development will require increasingly expensive engineering measures (Mumford 2007). Pre-emptive planning for these changing conditions is necessary to protect settlement areas and shore features recognized for their natural and ecosystem services.

1.4. Blue Carbon

Eelgrass meadows capture and store large amounts of carbon like terrestrial forests, but at much more efficient rates - up to ninety times the uptake provided by equivalent areas of forest. This “Blue Carbon” is stored in sediments where it is stable for thousands of years. In B.C., roughly 400 km^2 of salt marsh and seagrass meadows sequester as much carbon as B.C.’s portion of the boreal forest, and the equivalent of the emissions of some 200,000 passenger cars (Campbell 2010).

When eelgrass beds are restored, the rate of carbon sequestration appears to be rapid over the first few years and up to 40 years following restoration. The natural transport of eelgrass by currents and wave action to deeper waters in estuaries and the coastal ocean may further sequester more carbon (Thom et al. 2011).

As ocean waters warm as a result of climate change (up to 5 C° during the spring), greater flowering as well as faster growth of eelgrass shoots has been observed. Both of these changes result in greater biomass, or living matter. Like marshes, much of the eelgrass biomass is under the substrate, indicating that a warming environment may result in greater carbon accumulation rates (Thom et al. 2011).

2.0. Eelgrass Habitat Characteristics

Eelgrass meadows are found in most of the world's coastal temperate regions except at extremely high latitudes. Physical and chemical factors affecting *Zostera marina* include temperature, light availability, elevation, substratum, wave action, salinity and pH. Worldwide, the plants survive under a wide range of water temperatures, from 0° to greater than 30°C. The optimum temperature for growth lies between 10° - 20° C in most areas (Phillips 1984). Eelgrass grows best within the Salish Sea in salinity ranges of 20 ppt - 32 ppt. It can tolerate periods of freshwater inundation on a seasonal or daily basis (Durance 2002). Eelgrass prefers calm bays with sandy and/or muddy bottoms but is also found in higher current areas and coarser substrates with a mix of sand or mud.

Of all the above factors, light availability and elevation may be the most crucial. Light availability seems to be the primary factor limiting depth, distribution, density, and productivity of eelgrass meadows within their salinity and temperature ranges. In the Pacific region eelgrass grows from the intertidal zone to -10m (below zero, chart datum). The lowest depth range for eelgrass in the Salish Sea is typically between -5 and -7m. Although subtidal (below zero chart datum) eelgrass is more common than intertidal, there is anecdotal evidence that intertidal eelgrass is in decline.

3.0. Human Impacts

Human impacts on eelgrass and other seagrasses include:

• Dredging and filling associated with marina construction, which is one of the primary reasons for loss of eelgrass beds (Levings and Thom 1994)
• Turbidity, smothering and anoxia (lack of oxygen) from woody debris generated by forestry activities such as log dumps and log booms (Phillips 1984, BC/Washington Marine Science Panel 1994)
• Pollution, which is of particular concern in sheltered areas with poor water circulation. This includes:

- Eutrophication (excessive nutrient enrichment) in streams that provide needed freshwater and sediment input to eelgrass beds. This can result in reduced oxygen input for the beds (BC /Washington Science Panel 1994)
- Chemical pollution and road runoff which can affect sediment health (BC /Washington Science Panel 1994)
- Toxins such as heavy metals which can be taken up by eelgrass and have cascading effects through the food web (Lyngby and Brix 1989)
- Oil pollution, especially in late summer or winter when it can be retained and enter into the intertidal zone by mats of drifting eelgrass blades. In spring this oil pollution can affect eelgrass seed production and viability (Beak Consultants 1975)

• Shading, physical damage and disruption of water movement by overwater structures such as docks (Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2003)
• Effects of boating, including damage by propellers, anchoring and bottom dragging by chains and poorly-affixed moorings


Photo credit: Friends of Semihamoo Bay

Climate change can be expected to change the extent and densities of eelgrass habitats. One of the expected effects of climate change is landward movement of nearshore habitats as sea level rises (Nicholls et al. 2007). Shoreline alterations that remove nearshore habitats will impede this landward movement. Erosion and resulting sedimentation is an expected result of sea level rise. Depending on the extent and rate of sedimentation this could either create eelgrass habitat or smother the beds. Erosion and scouring of the nearshore are exacerbated by shoreline developments such as seawalls and other hard structures. Wave energy strikes these structures and reflects back onto the beach, accelerating the transport of sand and small gravel into the water and exposing coarser sediment, unsuitable substrate for vegetation such as eelgrass.

Conservation of continuous eelgrass beds and the integrity of adjacent habitats will both protect the beds themselves over time and limit the overall effects of climate change.

4.0. Methodology

Photo: SeaChange research boat with towed underwater camera

A standardized methodology was used for mapping eelgrass in Oak Bay which has been utilized province-wide since 2002 (Appendix E, pg. 37). The eelgrass inventory for this project entailed determining the extent (area) of *Z. marina* with an underwater towed camera, GPS and a motorized boat. Eelgrass was located by following a 0 to -3m depth contour (using a fish finder), the depth at which most eelgrass grows. The edges of the eelgrass bed were mapped by running transects perpendicular and parallel to shore. Characteristics of the habitats were recorded along these transects. To geographically delineate the eelgrass beds a Trimble Pathfinder ProXR GPS was used which achieved an average horizontal precision of +/- 0.691 metres.

4.1. Habitat Attributes

The following characteristics were recorded during the survey:

Distribution

The distribution of eelgrass within the bed is described for this inventory as either patchy or continuous. Patchy beds are those that contain isolated groups or patches of plants. Beds that are not patchy are classified as continuous; a bed that contains bare patches surrounded by eelgrass is classified as continuous (Appendix E). The boundary of a bed is determined by a shoot density of less than 1 shoot per square meter.

Form

There are two basic forms of eelgrass beds in the Pacific Northwest: fringing beds that occur as relatively narrow bands usually on gentle slopes, and more expansive beds that cover large areas such as tidal flats known as “flat” beds (Durance 2002). Inter-annual variation within a bed is not well known, but appears to be less than ten percent (Dowty et al. 2005). Fringing beds are generally linear. Flat beds are areas of large eelgrass beds in embayments that extend deeper than fringing and more linear beds found along shorelines (Dowty et al. 2005).

Sediment Types

When possible, field observers rated the primary, secondary and tertiary occurrence of substrate types: sand, mud, pebble and cobble. A subtidal environment dominated by cobble might indicate a habitat more suitable for large kelps, which would shade any eelgrass shoots growing between the cobble during the summer months. A predominately sandy muddy bottom would support continuous eelgrass meadows in most cases, unless other factors are present, such as exposure to strong waves or the interruption of habitat by boat mooring buoys. In some cases substrate characteristics change with increasing depth (e.g. cobble to sand or mud to cobble).

Percent of Cover

Percent cover was estimated in broad categories to increase accuracy of observation (<25%, 26-75%, >75%). After the field data were collected, percent cover was rated as primary and secondary within each polygon. If secondary cover was not reported it was not present. The coverage of an eelgrass meadow reflects both the substrate and the flow of water through it. A calm environment with a sandy mud substrate generally supports a dense, continuous eelgrass bed with virtually 100% cover. The cover of eelgrass in areas subjected to strong currents is typically patchy. Areas with heterogeneous substrate (mixture of fine and coarse) also tend to be patchy (Durance 2002). The percent of cover data collected from this inventory is based on subjective approximations as observed through the lens of an underwater camera. The approximate percent of cover offers important information on the density and productivity of a bed.

Tidal Fluctuations

It was important to note whether the tide was running or slack at the time of the inventory. Eelgrass shoots will tend to bend towards the substrate during running tides; the accuracy of percent of cover is then very approximate.

Presence of Other Vegetation

Other types of algae were documented as broad or tuft. Broad algae, such as kelps (*Laminaria saccharina* is common*)*, sea lettuce and *Sargassum muticum* (Japanese weed) can blanket the ocean floor and make it difficult to characterize substrate.

These plants can also shade eelgrass in mixed substrates as they anchor to hard surfaces. The presence of kelps, predominately large brown kelps, was noted.

Presence of other vegetation can also explain a decrease in eelgrass density or increase in patchiness. Tuft algae, such as brown and red algae do not shade eelgrass; they indicate presence of hard surfaces for attachment.

Visibility

Visibility of eelgrass is a subjective observation and was rated low, medium and high. In some instances, visibility could impact the accuracy of the observations, namely characterization of substrate. Low visibility can be caused by winds, sediment flows from the lower reaches of watersheds, inputs from nearby streams and tidal/current movements. Observations during low tide periods make for the best visibility.

Comments

Other details were recorded at each waypoint or for each eelgrass bed as applicable, including photograph number; potential threats to eelgrass in the area; backshore characteristics including shoreline developments; observations of Canada geese, which are a threat to eelgrass, and other wildlife; whether the site is suitable but eelgrass was not observed; and whether the site has potential for restoration.

4.2. Survey Limitations

The average horizontal precision for the GPS unit used for the 2014 and 2015 eelgrass inventories was +/- 0.691 metres.

Percent of cover of eelgrass shoots is difficult to assess accurately with an underwater camera but was deemed important to characterize. The visibility during the survey was either medium or high, making characterization more accurate. Areas of particular interest, such as those impacted by shoreline modifications and those with potential for restoration can be further refined from surveys by SCUBA divers.

5.0. Inventory Findings

The shoreline between Gonzales Beach and Cattle Point (**Map 1**) was surveyed between August 29, 2014 and during the eelgrass growing seasons (May to September) between August 29, 2014 and September 11, 2015. Surveyors noted that the main portion of Gonzales Beach (West of Oak Bay border) was devoid of eelgrass but other seaweeds were observed that appeared to be floating. Further investigation would be required to find out why there was an absence of eelgrass habitat outside the Oak Bay boundary.

The eelgrass meadows surrounding Oak Bay make up 174,604 square metres of nearshore habitat for fish, birds, mammals and invertebrates. Seventy-eight percent of the eelgrass was continuous and 22% was patchy. The dominance of continuous eelgrass indicates that the underwater marine environment of Oak Bay supports a healthy population of eelgrass. These findings are based on the absence of historical data, therefore, the extent of habitat loss due to nearshore construction and other impacts is unknown.

5.1. Gonzales Beach

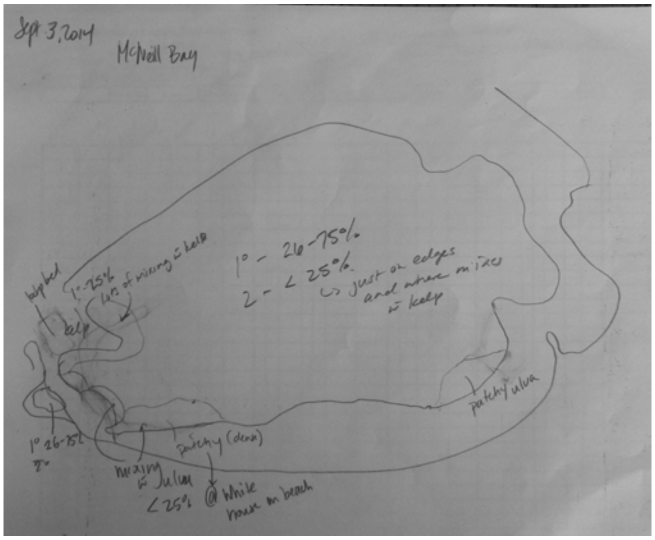
A small portion of Gonzales Beach that is within the Oak Bay municipal border was surveyed on August 29, 2014 (**see Map 2, pg. 27**). Four polygons were mapped in a cove bound by rocky outcroppings on the eastern shore. All polygons were continuous and fringing and had a primary percent cover of 1-25%. The beds were shallow and flanked by rocky outcroppings. The depth range for each polygon was as follows: Polygon 1 [+0.2m to -3.2m]; Polygon 2 [+0.3m to -0.7m]; Polygon 3 [-0.8m to -2.1m]; Polygon 4 [-0.6m to -4.0m]. There was a mooring buoy anchored in Polygon 2.

5.2. Trafalgar Park

The eelgrass bed located in the cove adjacent to (West) Trafalgar Park was surveyed on August 29, 2014. This bed was continuous and flat with a primary percent cover of 26-75%, with the exception of a small patchy area on the East side of the cove. The minimum depth of the bed was -1.2m and therefore did not extend into the intertidal zone. The maximum depth was between -6.5m and -7.8m, an indication of good water quality.

5.3. McNeill Bay

McNeill Bay was surveyed on September 3rd and 4th 2014. Overall McNeill Bay supported a healthy continuous and flat eelgrass bed with primary cover being 26-75%. Secondary cover of 1-25% was observed where mixing with other algae species occurred. Some bare patches in the bed were observed with no obvious cause.



The field drawing to the left (North is down) illustrates where the rocky substrate was located on the East side and supported kelp growth (rocky) and where mixing of eelgrass occurred. Shoreward areas on the East and West were patchy due to mixing with sea lettuce. It was difficult to ascertain with the underwater camera whether the sea lettuce was attached or drifting.

The average minimum depth of the eelgrass was 0m (at chart datum), therefore the bed did not extend into the intertidal zone. The maximum depth of eelgrass ranged from -5.5m to -9.6m, an indication of good water quality.

Photo credit: Sharon Jeffery

A large school of forage fish (small fish upon which other marine life depend) was observed along with yellow egg masses deposited by the hooded nudibranch (pictured on the left).

5.4. Golf Course

On a small sandy beach in front of the golf course was a small, dense, continuous bed grew from -0.1m on the shallow edge to -2.4m on the deep edge (**see Map 2 inset**). The primary percent cover was 26-75% and the substrate sand. Bottom kelp intermingled with the eelgrass.

5.5. Oak Bay Marina

The eelgrass bed between the Oak Bay Marina and Mary Tod Island was surveyed on May 18^{th} and 19^{th}, 2015 (**see Map 3, pg. 28**). The continuous portion of the bed had a primary percent cover of 1-25% and a secondary cover of 26-75%. The patchy portions were exclusively 1-25% cover. The substrate was mud or a mud/sand combination, typical of estuarine habitat at the foot of a stream, in this case Bowker Creek.

The average maximum depth of eelgrass facing the marina was -6.0m. The average minimum depth of eelgrass facing Bowker Creek was -1.9m. The eelgrass bed facing Mary Tod Island extended into the intertidal zone and terminated where algae species grew on rocky substrate.

The patchy portions flanking the bed, facing Mary Tod and Bowker Creek, had a significant amount of mixing with bottom kelp (most likely *Laminaria spp*.). Although only the mud/sand substrate was visible, the kelp would have been attached to cobble or rock. The patchy part of the bed facing the marina was intermingled with moored boats (**see Map 4, pg. 29**).

5.6. Mary Tod Island East

Photo shows the area between Mary Tod Island and Oak Bay proper

Eelgrass growing on the North and East side of Mary Tod Island was surveyed on May 19th and July 3rd. It extended East to Emily Islet and North towards Willows Beach. The continuous portion of the bed had a primary percent cover of 1-25% and a secondary cover of 26-75% and a sandy substrate. Eelgrass mixed with bottom kelp throughout most of the bed. The circled area in **Map 5 (pg. 30)** shows where bed terminated despite the continuance of suitable substrate (sand/mud) and depth (-2.5 to -4.8m) for eelgrass growth. This area should be considered for restoration (see section 6.0, pg. 17). The maximum depth of the Eastern edge of the bed ranged from -5.5m to -7.6m.

The Southern edge of the bed between Mary Tod Island and Emily Islet grew at a maximum depth of -3.8m to -5.5m. The shallower depth of this eelgrass could be explained by exposure from southerly storms and high currents (which were experienced during the survey). The eelgrass that extended towards the shores of Mary Tod Island and Emily Islet terminated at rocky substrate.

A school of tube snout fish (example pictured on the right) was observed during the July 3rd survey. Several crab trap floats were also observed in the bed.

5.7. Willows Beach

The Willows Beach eelgrass meadow was surveyed on July 3rd and September 11th, 2015 (**Map 3**). The bed was a continuous and flat bed with a primary percent cover of 1-25% and secondary cover of 26-75%. Sea lettuce (*Ulva sp.*) was seen throughout the bed and increased in the southern half where the eelgrass was sparser. The southern part of the bed tapered off with a maximum depth of -1.4m at the tip and -5.4m at the widest point. From the widest point toward the northern end, the bed narrowed again with a maximum depth range of -4.5m to -1.9m. The northern tip of the bed also had several bare patches (although it was still considered continuous). The minimum depth of the bed was between -0.6m and +0.3m; however, most of the bed did not extend into the intertidal zone.

Photo credit: Jan Kocian

Within the gap between the Willows Beach meadow and the Mary Tod Islet meadow, a field of sea pens (*Ptilosarcus gurneyi*) was observed (example pictured on left).

5.8. Cattle Point

A fringing eelgrass bed growing around the tip of Cattle Point was surveyed on September 11, 2015 (**Map 3**). The bed had patchy and continuous portions with a primary percent cover of 1-25%. East of the boat ramp the eelgrass was noticeably sparser (5-10% cover) and large schools of forage fish and perch were observed. The maximum depth ranged from -5.4m to -7.2m, an indication of good water quality.

6.0. Opportunities for Eelgrass Restoration

Map 5 illustrates a circled area where eelgrass restoration could be considered. As described in the inventory observations, the substrate at this location was mud/sand, suitable substrate for eelgrass, yet it ceased to grow between -2.5m and -4.8m. In optimal light, pH, substrate and water velocity conditions eelgrass can regrow at a rate of 0.5m a year. However, once an eelgrass bed becomes patchy and fragmented, as it was at this site, it can further destabilize rather than regrow (Holt et al. 1997). It is not recommended that restoration be initiated where there is unrestricted boat moorage or active dredging.

6.1. History of Eelgrass Restoration

In the Pacific Northwest, the history of success for *Z. marina* transplanting projects was dismal prior to 1985. Initially transplant techniques were developed and successful on the Atlantic coast. However, these techniques were not well suited to the Pacific north coast environment and eelgrass. Many of the early transplants were conducted without a thorough understanding of eelgrass physiology and ecology; the donor stock was not always well suited to the area where it was transplanted, and the biophysical conditions of the transplant sites were not always appropriate for the species (Durance 2001).

Since 1985, knowledge and experience from adaptive management practices have resulted in a higher success rate for focused mitigation and enhancement projects along the Pacific coast (Thom et al. 2001). Factors that led to a higher success rate include the correct selection of physical attributes for the restoration area, including elevation, substrate composition and light and current regime. The selection of the most suitable ecotype or genotype increased the likelihood for success and rate of production. The criteria for success included shoot density and area re-vegetated (Durance 2001).

6.2. Criteria for Successful Restoration

In British Columbia, the criterion for transplant success is based upon the mean shoot density being equal or greater than in the area of adjacent natural beds and the area coverage. Projects are thus considered successful if the habitat that was created provided habitat equal in eelgrass productivity (shoot density) to that which it was designed to replace (Durance 2001).

Site selection with the appropriate biophysical characteristics (salinity, sediment type, current velocity, light/depth, temperature, and pH), using suitable plant donor stock (ecotype), using an appropriate transplanting technique and handling the donor plants with care are necessary for successful transplants. Several restoration transplants have occurred in Maple Bay, Cowichan estuary, Saanich Inlet, Pender Island the Sunshine Coast and other areas. Most of the locations have been impacted by historical log storage practices. The majority of these transplants are considered successful based on monitoring of shoot densities and area coverage post-transplant. Monitoring of each site continues for a minimum of 5 years. Restoration work is carried out by an experienced SCUBA dive team in partnership with local community coordinators and volunteers.

7.0. Recommendations

Globally, eelgrass has been used as an indicator of water quality (Neckles 1994). Often, a bed will decrease or increase in width and length dependent on light availability. The lower depth distribution of eelgrass is related to overall water clarity. Water quality, including water clarity, is affected by land practices and water uses. If, for example, a large scale development occurs on shore near an eelgrass bed, the bed may decrease in size because the water quality in the nearshore is consistently compromised by the increased pollution load, known as non-point source pollution, frequently delivered by the storm water system. When the amount of light reaching the plants is limited by shading from increased sediment or plankton blooms associated with increased nutrients from land activities, eelgrass meadows adapt to the poor light availability through dieback, decreases in density or width and migration to shallower depths.

The population of Oak Bay is approximately 18,000 people (2011 Census). However, non-point source pollution inputs affecting the municipal shoreline include Bowker Creek watershed boundaries (including Victoria and Saanich) and Hobbs Creek watershed boundaries (including Saanich). Although, stormwater collection systems for the District of Oak Bay consist almost entirely of piped systems, CRD's 2014 Stormwater Monitoring Report cited 9 stormwater discharges along the coastline that were rated high for public health concern. Pollutants include high fecal coliform counts, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH's) and heavy metals. A discharge near the Oak Bay marina had PAH concentrations that were 12 times higher than the marine guideline for protection of aquatic life. This discharge was also rated high in 2010, but due to elevated mercury and lead (Capital Regional District 2014; p. 19). Improving stormwater quality would be an important step in protecting and conserving marine habitats.

The District of Oak Bay has a number of policies and bylaws that benefit eelgrass: the prohibition of private docks, regulation of pesticide use and designated Shoreline Development Permit Areas. The Bowker Creek Urban Watershed Renewal Initiative and the Provincial Riparian Area Regulation also benefit eelgrass by improving vegetative buffer zones along creeks and reducing sediment entering the bays surrounding Oak Bay. These provisions reflect the high value Oak Bay residents place on the health of the natural environment, as indicated by responses to the Official Community Plan community survey. "In general, Oak Bay residents want to live as harmoniously as possible within the natural world that encompasses Oak Bay and nurture and enjoy desirable plants and animals of the built environment" (District of Oak Bay 2014; p. 45).

There are protected nearshore areas within the District of Oak Bay; however none are within the eelgrass inventory study area. The Oak Bay Islands Ecological Reserve protects eelgrass communities that are known to exist within its boundaries (Trial Island and Discovery Islands). Rockfish Conservation Areas in the same locations confer some protection.

A set of recommendations is listed below to contribute to the conservation work of the District of Oak Bay.

7.1. Education

- Educate boaters, coastal residents and visitors about the presence and importance of eelgrass beds.
- Encourage signage at boat ramps reminding boaters to avoid eelgrass beds in shallow water.

- Oak Bay's storm sewer system includes direct outfalls to creeks and the ocean, and combined storm/sanitary sewers. Increase public awareness about the importance of reducing household use of detergents, chemicals and microplastics that flow directly onto marine nearshores through sewer and storm water systems.
- Develop long-term public outreach nearshore marine education strategies that include new shoreline property owners.
- Promote Green Shores for Homes, a program designed to reduce the impact of residential development on shoreline ecosystems, and help waterfront homeowners restore natural shorelines (Green Shores for Homes).

7.2. Regulatory and Enforcement

- Limit the impact of boating and marina related activities with adverse marine impacts by adopting policies that employ protective measures (Clean Marine BC: Eco-certification Program).
- Create protected marine zones and establish "No anchoring/mooring" zones where eelgrass grows and in suitable eelgrass areas (based on substrate, depth and observed presence of eelgrass); restrict boat moorings to areas too deep for eelgrass growth.
- Establish marked navigation channels for boat safety and protection of eelgrass. See collaborative initiative in Cowichan Bay (Cowichan Valley Regional District 2012).
- Maintain a coastal riparian zone that will enable inland shift of eelgrass beds.
- Create and implement appropriate setbacks for built structures from the nearshore, considering predicted sea level rise (AECOM 2015).
- Require removal of illegal shoreline modifications; require restoration or removal of aged derelict structures and boats.

7.3. Opportunities for collaboration with other agencies

- Regularly monitor sensitive or vulnerable shorelines and keep monitoring data readily accessible to the public.
- Promote management strategies to mitigate impacts from nearshore activities such as oyster and clam harvesting, boating, anchoring in meadows and near-shore development requiring dredging.
- Promote restoration of natural hydrology (streams and creeks) when opportunities arise.
- Promote restoration of eelgrass habitats where possible.

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Appendix A: Maps

Map 1: Study Area

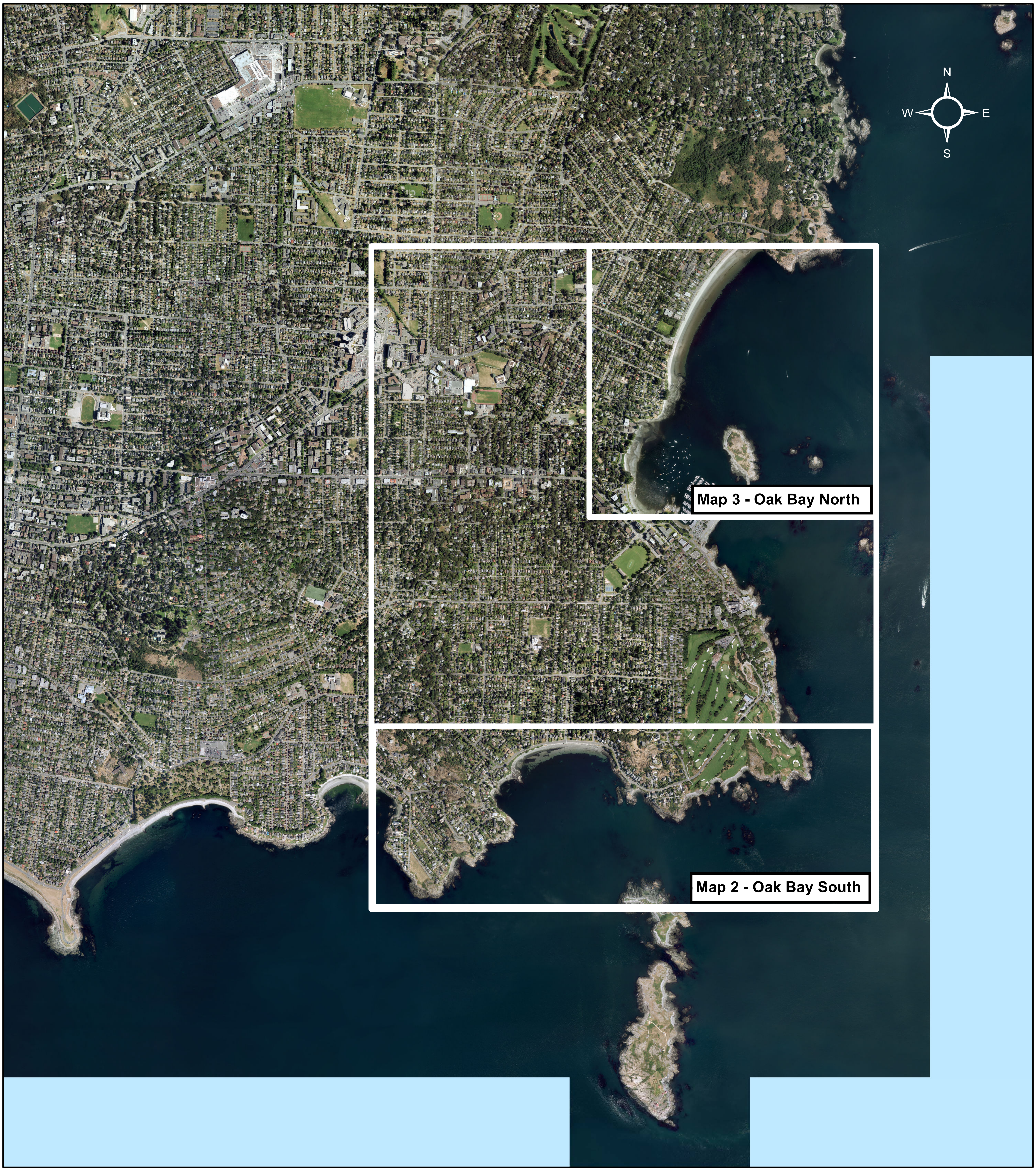
Map 2: Oak Bay South

Map 3: Oak Bay North

Map 4: Oak Bay North: Moorages in Eelgrass

Map 5: Oak Bay North: Restoration Potential

Map 1 - Eelgrass Study Area



Eelgrass inventory was completed by SeaChange Marine Conservation Society for the District of Oak Bay. The survey was conducted between August 2014 and September 2015 using towed underwater camera and Trimble Pathfinder Pro XR GPS.

Map Produced by: SeaChange Marine Conservation Society
Map Date: January 12, 2016
Orthophoto Date: July and August 2015
Map Scale: 1 : 15,000
Map Projection: UTM Zone 10, NAD 83

Map 2 - Oak Bay South

Continuous Eelgrass Polygons

150 75 0 150 Meters

Eelgrass inventory was completed by SeaChange Marine Conservation Society for the Districe of Oak Bay. The survey was conducted between August 2014 and September 2015 using towed underwater camera and Trimble Pathfinder Pro XR GPS.

Map Produced by: SeaChange Marine Conservation Society
Map Date: March 7, 2016
Orthophoto Date: July and August 2013
Map Scale: 1 : 3,200
Map Projection: UTM Zone 10, NAD83

Map 3 - Oak Bay North

Continuous Eelgrass

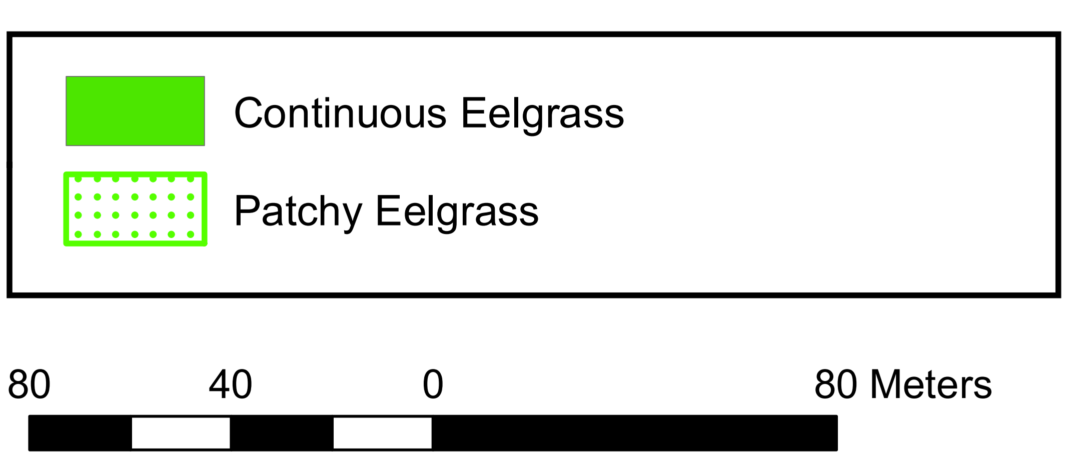
Patchy Eelgrass

150 75 0 150 Meters

Eelgrass inventory was completed by SeaChange Marine Conservation Society for the District of Oak Bay. The survey was conducted between August 2014 and September 2015 using towed underwater camera and Trimble Pathfinder Pro XR GPS.

Map Produced by: SeaChange Marine Conservation Society
Map Date: March 7, 2016
Orthophoto Date: July and August, 2015
Map Scale: 1 : 3,000
Map Projection: UTM Zone 10, NAD83

Map 4 - Oak Bay North: Moorages in Eelgrass



Eelgrass inventory was completed by SeaChange Marine Conservation Society for the District of Oak Bay. The survey was conducted between August 2014 and September 2015 using towed underwater camera and Trimble Pathfinder Pro XR GPS.

Map Produced by: SeaChange Marine Conservation Society
Map Date: March 12, 2016
Orthophoto Date: July and August, 2015
Map Scale: 1 : 1,500
Map Projection: UTM Zone 10, NAD83

Map 5 - Oak Bay North: Restoration Potential

Continuous Eelgrass
Patchy Eelgrass

100 50 0 100 Meters

Eelgrass inventory was completed by SeaChange Marine Conservation Society for the District of Oak Bay. The survey was conducted between August 2014 and September 2015 using towed underwater camera and Trimble Pathfinder Pro XR GPS.

Map Produced by: SeaChange Marine Conservation Society
Map Date: March 7, 2016
Orthophoto Date: July and August, 2015
Map Scale: 1 : 2,000
Map Projection: UTM Zone 10, NAD83

Appendix B: Methodology for *Zostera marina* Mapping with a Towed Underwater Camera

The methodology reported here is an addendum to Appendix C: "Methods for Mapping and Monitoring Eelgrass Habitat in British Columbia" ("Methods") authored by Precision Identification Biological Consultants and peer reviewed by experts in the field. This addendum was created by the Seagrass Conservation Working Group with input and review by Precision Identification. Global Positioning System Specifications (Appendix D: Schedule G) used by the Islands Trust Fund were adopted. Average accuracy was 0.814m and was the combined result of the built-in accuracy of the GPS unit, lag time between sighting eelgrass and the unit gathering enough satellite data to create a waypoint, in combination with boat drift.

Polygon Mapping

An underwater camera was towed along transects perpendicular or parallel to shore to map all edges of the bed. Mapping of polygons according to standard methodology was limited due to safe boat operation in wind, current and tidal movements, as well as navigation around boats and swimmers.

General habitat characteristics outlined in "Methods" are also recorded: Form (flat/fringing), Distribution (continuous/patchy), Percent Cover (<25%, 26-75%, >75%), and Substrate type (sand/mud/pebble/cobble). The state of the tide was recorded as "slack or "running" in order to indicate the level of confidence in the percent cover estimate. A slack tide yields a higher level of confidence than a running tide, which causes the eelgrass to lie across the ocean floor.

The majority of the eelgrass beds in the Southern Salish Sea are found between 1 and 3m chart datum. This depth contour was followed and eelgrass presence within this depth range was recorded. If eelgrass was not found in this depth range where bathymetry and substrate characteristics were suitable for eelgrass growth, a perpendicular transect was followed ranging from +1m to -6m which is the typical range of eelgrass in the Salish Sea.

GPS waypoints and the following parameters were recorded at roughly 10m intervals with intervals no longer than 20m: depth, eelgrass presence, form, distribution, substrate, percent cover, tide state, presence of broad or tuft algae, visibility.

Appendix C: Global Position System Specifications

1. General Application

1.01
The target horizontal accuracy is 1 metre. The lowest acceptable horizontal accuracy is 5 metres, at the 95% confidence level. This applies to final map data after averaging (for point features), approximating (for line features), and any editing.
1.02
Only receiver models which have been tested and proven to be capable of meeting the above accuracy specification in field conditions will be approved.
1.03
At least one person, who is responsible for the quality of the data, must act as a supervisor and have completed GPS-specific training acceptable to SeaChange GIS staff.
1.04
Field operators must be trained to the satisfaction of the supervisor, including GPS training and other training as required.

2. Field Parameters and Procedures

2.01
All position fixes must use at least four satellites. No height constraints can be applied.
2.02
The minimum elevation angle to satellites is 15 degrees above the horizon.
2.03
The maximum Dilution of Precision (DoP) is: HDOP 5 (preferred in most cases)
PDOP 8
GDOP 10
VDOP 5 (only if elevations are required)
2.04
For standard static point features occupation time must be at least 60 seconds AND there must be at least 30 individual position fixes for each feature.
For boat-based, eelgrass surveys, occupation time for static point features must be less than 5 seconds with a target of 1 position fix and never more than 3 position fixes for each feature. Line and polygon features may be interpreted from successive static point features. The majority of the static point features must be no more than 15 metres apart. The maximum distance between successive static point features is 20 metres.
2.05
The maximum distance for point offsets is 25 metres. Directions must be accurate to 2 degrees and distances accurate to 1 metre. If the slope is over 10 percent and over

10 metres long, slope measurements (accurate to 5 percent or 3 degrees) must be made.
2.06
For all line (and polygon) features, all significant deflections and meanders of the feature must be mapped.
2.07
For line (and polygon) features surveyed in dynamic mode, the majority of the individual position fixes must be no more than 2.5 metres apart. The maximum distance between successive position fixes is 10 metres.
2.08
The maximum distance for constant line offsets is 5 metres.
2.09
For line (and area) features surveyed in station-to-station mode, the maximum distance between stations is 10 metres.
2.10
Supplementary traverses (using compass and chain) must begin (Point of Commencement) and end (Point of Termination) on static GPS point features or on survey control monuments of 1 metre or better accuracy.
2.11
Directions for supplementary traverses must be accurate to 2 degrees and distances accurate to 1 metre. If the slope is greater than 10 percent, slope measurements accurate to 5 percent or 2.5 degrees must be made. The maximum length of an individual traverse leg is 50 metres. There is no limit on the total length of a supplementary traverse.

3. Data Processing and Mapping

3.01
All position fixes must be differentially corrected in real-time or post-processed. If position corrections are used, the same set of satellites must be used at the reference station as at the field receiver.
3.02
Reference stations (real-time or post-processed) must be approved by SeaChange GIS staff.
3.03
The maximum age of real-time corrections is 20 seconds from the time the observations are made at the reference station to the time the computed corrections are applied at the field receiver.
3.04
All directions from compass observations must be corrected for declination before offset or traverse computations. If applicable, correction for grid convergence must be made.
3.05
Supplemental traverses must close to better than 1 percent (1/100) of the total traverse distance plus 2.5 metres. Traverse misclosures over 2.5 metres total must be adjusted ("balanced") using the standard compass rule method.
3.06

If true NAD 27 coordinates are required, NAD 83 coordinates must be converted using the Canadian National Transformation, version 2 (NT v2).

3.07

If elevations are required, they must be converted from ellipsoidal to orthometric using the CRD Geoid model HT 2.0.

3.08

If data in any other coordinate system (e.g. ground coordinates) are required, procedures acceptable to Islands Trust GIS staff and the owner of the mapping must be used.

3.09

Any discrepancies between the GPS survey and existing mapping used as base maps must be resolved to the satisfaction of SeaChange GIS staff and the local agency(s) considered responsible for the mapping.

Appendix D: 2014-2015 Oak Bay Eelgrass Inventory Meta Data

1. File Identification Information:
   Continuous Eelgrass Polygons.dbf
   Continuous Eelgrass Polygons.prj
   Continuous Eelgrass Polygons.sbn
   Continuous Eelgrass Polygons.sbx
   Continuous Eelgrass Polygons.shp
   Continuous Eelgrass Polygons.shx

   Patchy Eelgrass Polygons.dbf
   Patchy Eelgrass Polygons.prj
   Patchy Eelgrass Polygons.sbn
   Patchy Eelgrass Polygons.sbx
   Patchy Eelgrass Polygons.shp
   Patchy Eelgrass Polygons.shx

2. Standard: GPS survey was conducted in accordance with "Methods for Mapping and Monitoring Eelgrass Habitat in British Columbia (MMEHBC: *Appendix E*)" and the addendum included below as *Appendix B*. GPS data was collected in accordance with 'Ammended Schedule G: Global Positioning System Specifications' included as *Appendix C*.

3. GPS Receiver Type: Trimble Pathfinder ProXR.

4. Correction Type: Post Processed (Trimble Pathfinder Office Pro)

5. Accuracy: GPS data was exported to ESRI shape file format and brought into an ArcMap project. GPS polygons were interpreted and edited to improve accuracy in accordance with MMEHBC standards. The following tables summarize reported GPS accuracy:

Data:

Total Point Features	2027
Best Reported Horizontal Precision	0.4 m
Worst Reported Horizontal Precision	24.1 m
Average Horizontal Precision	0.691 m
Standard Deviation of Horizontal Precision	1.558 m
% Point Features with Reported Horizontal Precision < 1.0m	96.60%
% Point Features with Reported Horizontal Precision < 5.0m	98.91% *
% Point Features with Maximum HDOP < 3	99.95%
% Point Features with Maximum HDOP < 5	99.95%

*All point features with reported horizontal precision over 5.0m were duly noted and assessed on a case by case basis for their utility as guides for interpretation of line / polygon / point placement.

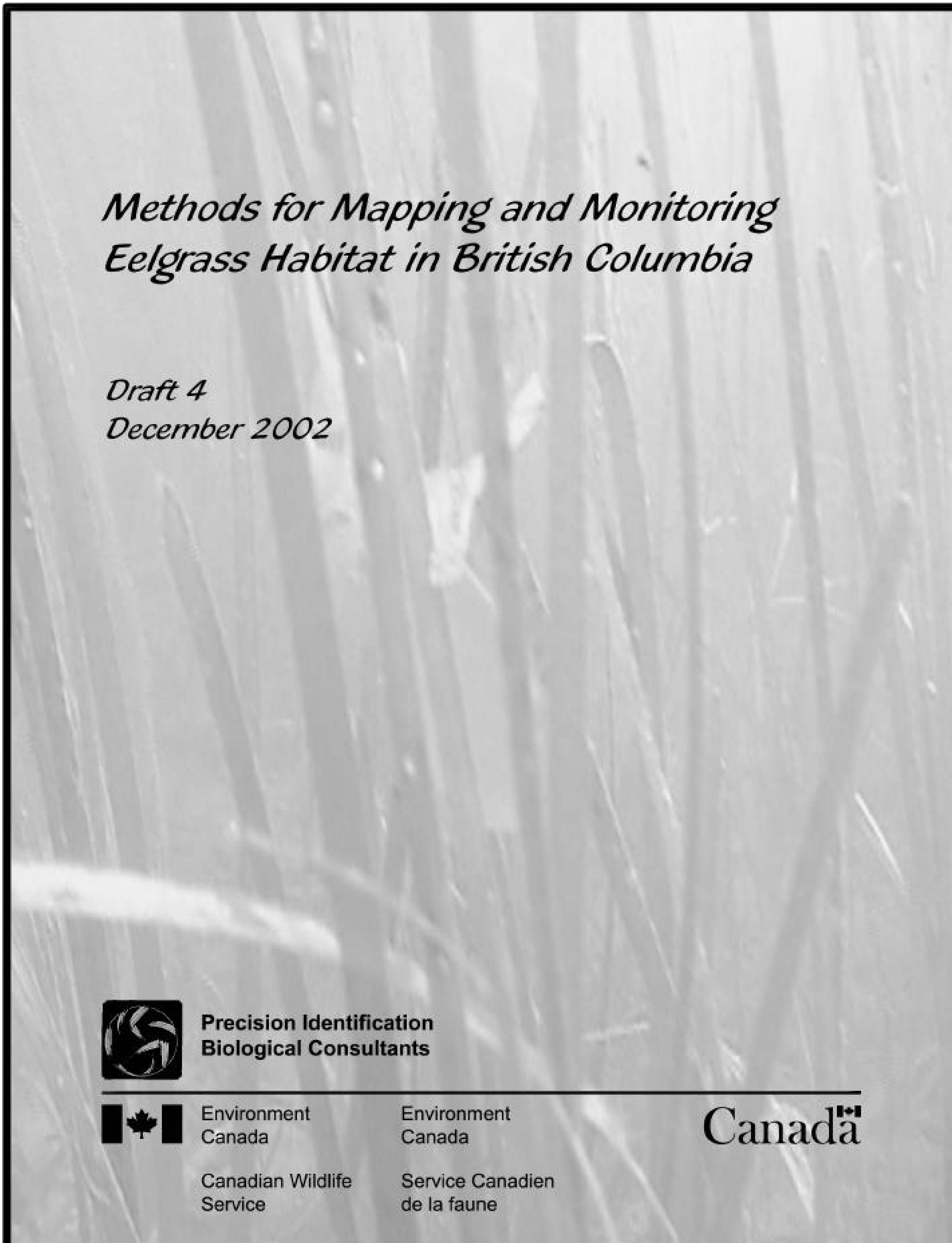
6. Geographic Extent: Oak Bay
West Bounding Coordinate: 475863
East Bounding Coordinate: 478392
North Bounding Coordinate: 5365016
South Bounding Coordinate: 5361476

7. Contact Information
Leanna Boyer
SeaChange Marine Conservation Society
Box Brentwood Bay BC
Canada

8. Data Projection: UTM, Zone 10, NAD 83

9. Definitions of Attributes in Database Fields:

Field	Description
ObjectID	Unique number ID for labeling purposes
ID	Code used to match up records with GPS data
Form	Describes the shape of an eelgrass bed as either flat (fl) or fringe (fr)
Distrib	Indicates the distribution of eelgrass as either continuous (c) or patchy (p)
Sub_sand	Indicates proportion of sand substrate as primary (1), secondary (2) or tertiary (3)
Sub_mud	Indicates proportion of mud substrate as primary (1), secondary (2) or tertiary (3)
Sub_shell	Indicates proportion of shell substrate as primary (1), secondary (2) or tertiary (3)
Sub_pebble	Indicates proportion of pebble substrate as primary (1), secondary (2) or tertiary (3)
Sub_cobble	Indicates proportion of cobble substrate as primary (1), secondary (2) or tertiary (3)
Sub_boulder	Indicates proportion of boulder substrate as primary (1), secondary (2) or tertiary (3)
Cover	Estimate of percent cover of eelgrass; <25% (1), 26-75% (2), >75% (3)
Tide	Describes whether the tide is running (r) or slack (s). A running tide increases error of percent cover estimate.
Algae	Describes presence of broad (b) and/or tufty (t) algal species. Presence of broad algae can impair surveyor's ability to characterize the substrate.
Comments	Comments on backshore and eelgrass limiting factors such as presence of docks, wharves, mooring buoys, anchoring boats, shoreline erosion, point source pollution.
Area	Area of polygon in square meters



Methods for Mapping and Monitoring Eelgrass Habitat in British Columbia

Draft 4
December 2002

Precision Identification Biological Consultants

Environment Canada | Environnement Canada

Canadian Wildlife Service | Service Canadien de la faune

Canada

Preface

Field Methods for Mapping and Monitoring Eelgrass Habitat in British Columbia was designed to provide readers with a basic understanding of eelgrass (*Zostera marina* L.) ecology and to provide a standardized set of methods to map, classify, and monitor eelgrass habitat on a local level. The mapping and monitoring system described herein enables community groups and other agencies to contribute consistent and reliable data to a central database.

The manual will be expanded to include a series of monitoring protocols to study various faunal assemblages within eelgrass beds (e.g. fish, zooplankton, and invertebrates). All contributions and comments will be welcomed and acknowledged.

Acknowledgements

The development of this manual was funded by the Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Pacific & Yukon Region, Delta; B.C. Jacqueline Booth (Jacqueline Booth and Associates, Salt Spring Island, B.C.) developed the database structure and user interface for storing and retrieving field data on eelgrass beds. She also provided advice based on her experience working with community mapping. Brad Mason (Fisheries & Oceans Canada, Vancouver, B.C.) and Don Chamberlain (Project Watershed, Comox, B.C.) contributed information and guidance relating to the use and limitations of GPS technology. Brad Mason (Fisheries & Oceans Canada, Vancouver, B.C.), Suzanne Richer (Community Mapping Network), and the Community Mapping Network created the internet application and assisted with development of the database structure and functions for providing the online base maps and digitizing tools.

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Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction

Land use changes and developments have led to a loss of natural estuarine habitat in British Columbia. Agriculture, forestry, and dredging for commercial and residential development have all contributed to the loss. It is anticipated that the pressure to modify natural estuarine habitat for the development of commercial facilities and residential units within coastal areas will intensify in the near future. It is therefore necessary to identify, classify, quantify, and develop a scientifically defensible management strategy for estuarine habitat in order to protect and maintain these valuable areas.

Eelgrass (*Zostera marina* L.) meadows represent one of the habitat types that are threatened by estuarine development. Various types of disturbance in coastal and estuarine environments have led to a decline in seagrass abundance around the world (Short & Wyllie-Echeverria, 1996). Losses in Chesapeake Bay, United States, have resulted from impaired water quality caused by upland development, agriculture, and shoreline development (Orth & Moore, 1983, Dennison et al. 1993). Pollution induced seagrass declines have been documented in the Mediterranean and along the Atlantic coast of Europe (Nienhuis 1983; Hanekom & Baird 1988; Giesen et al. 1990; Short et al. 1991; DeJong & DeJong 1992; den Hartog 1994).

Seagrasses, including eelgrass, have been used as indicators of nearshore ecosystem health in many areas of the world (Sewell et al., 2002). In Chesapeake Bay, a submerged vegetation monitoring program (eelgrass & freshwater vascular plants) identified a link between decreased productivity within the Bay and degraded water quality from upland watershed activities (Orth & Moore, 1983). The data was used to enact legislation to restrict the activities responsible for the impairment of water quality, which was successful in reversing the trend of vegetation loss (Dennison et al., 1983).

Eelgrass provides critical habitat for numerous species including; outmigrating juvenile salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.), Pacific herring (*Clupea harengus*), Dungeness crab (*Cancer magister*), and black brant (*Branta bernicla*) (Norris & Wyllie-Echeverria, 2001). The productivity of eelgrass meadows rivals that of cultivated tropical agriculture (Zieman & Wetzel, 1998). Research in Denmark discovered that detritus, primarily derived from eelgrass, was the basic source of nutrition for animals in Danish coastal waters, and that the historic abundance of fish in Denmark was mainly due to eelgrass (Phillips, 1984). The leaves of eelgrass baffle currents, reducing water velocity and promoting sedimentation. The root-rhizome network forms an interlocking matrix, which binds sediment and restricts erosion (Phillips, 1984).

A study by Helfferich and McRoy in 1978 calculated the U.S. dollar value of eelgrass meadows to be $12,325.00 per acre per year based on its contribution to commercial and recreational fisheries and hunting.

The governments of many countries including the United States, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Britain have recognized the value of seagrass habitat and have implemented seagrass mapping and monitoring programs. These programs involve locating and mapping seagrass communities, usually through analysis of aerial photographs, followed by detailed monitoring of specific sites on the ground. The costs associated with these types of inventories are prohibitive in British Columbia at this time.

Eelgrass has been mapped in several areas of British Columbia, by various groups, using various methods. The majority of the eelgrass mapping information (e.g. herring spawn surveys) was completed in the late 1970s, and may not reflect current conditions.

Environment Canada commissioned the following report to provide the necessary understanding of eelgrass ecology and mapping methodologies to identify, classify, and quantify eelgrass habitat in British Columbia on a local level. The mapping and monitoring system enables local groups and organizations to contribute consistent and reliable data to a central database.

An interactive data entry tool has been developed for this purpose, and is available on the Community Mapping Network website (http://www.shim.bc.ca/eelgrass/main.htm). The data that are collected will be integrated into a larger scale province wide inventory. It is hoped that this information will promote the development of a comprehensive eelgrass mapping and monitoring strategy for British Columbia that may be used to protect eelgrass habitat.

2.0 Eelgrass Ecology

Eelgrass meadows are naturally highly dynamic systems, often changing from year to year or from season to season, reflecting changes in the environment. It is important to understand the natural variability within these ecosystems, in order to avoid false conclusions when assessing changes over time. The following sections were designed to provide an overview of eelgrass ecology and an appreciation for the inherent natural variability both within and between meadows.

Reproduction

Eelgrass reproduces both sexually (seeds) and asexually (branching). The plants flower annually and produce many viable seeds; however very few successfully mature into plants. The flowers are produced on reproductive shoots that develop from vegetative shoots. Once the seeds have developed, the shoot begins to senesce, breaks free from the rhizome, and floats away. Detailed monitoring of eelgrass densities should include enumeration of flowering shoots as well as vegetative shoots, due to the ephemeral nature of the flowering shoots.

Eelgrass reproduces vegetatively by forming new shoots at the base of the parent shoot. The rhizome branches, allowing the new shoot to grow away from the parent shoot. A single plant may have numerous shoots connected via a single branched rhizome. As time passes, older rhizomes decay, so that one plant eventually becomes two or more plants. An eelgrass meadow could, in theory, be composed of many shoots that originated from a single individual.

Species and Ecotypes

There are two species of eelgrass in British Columbia; the native species *Zostera marina* and the introduced species *Zostera japonica*. It is believed that *Z. japonica* was accidentally introduced with oyster spat brought from Japan to aquaculture sites in Washington State (Harrison, 1976). The introduced species is generally smaller and can tolerate exposure (due to its morphology) better than the native species. The introduced species can not compete with the native species due to its smaller size, thus it is not a threat to the native eelgrass. *Z. japonica* is often found adjacent to, or intermixed with, *Z. marina* at higher elevations. The information provided for eelgrass in this document relates specifically to *Z. marina* although it could be easily modified to study populations or meadows of *Z. japonica*.

The leaf length and width of both species varies with depth; as depth increases leaf length and width increases. The leaf length and width of intertidal *Z. marina* is often within the range of *Z. japonica*. Fortunately, the two species have different types of sheaths; this enables one to easily differentiate the species. *Z. marina* has an entire sheath, it is closed to the base; when the lower leaves are slowly pulled in opposite directions the sheath will tear. The sheath of *Z. japonica* is open to the base; thus the sheath parts rather than tears when stress is applied.

It has been proposed that there are races, or ecotypes of *Z. marina* that account for part of the morphological variation (Beckman 1984). It is possible that three of the ecotypes occur in British Columbia. The attributes associated with each ecotype are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The habitat and morphological attributes associated with the three ecotypes of *Zostera marina* common in British Columbia. (adapted from Backman, 1984)

Ecotype	Relative leaf size	Leaf width (mm)	Depth range (m)	Seasonal variation in size	Current tolerance
typica	narrow	2 to 5	primarily intertidal	small variation	low
phillipsi	intermediate	4 to15	0 to - 4	large, plant length reduced in winter	moderate
latifolia	large	12 to 20	-0.5 to -10	minimal variation	strongest

An eelgrass meadow may contain one or more ecotype.

The smaller intertidal plants usually occur at a much greater density, due to their smaller size, than those growing in deeper water. For example, a dense meadow of intertidal eelgrass may have a density of 2000 shoots$\cdot$m^{-2}, while the adjacent subtidal habitat supports 120 shoots$\cdot$m^{-2}. The biomass (g$\cdot$m^{-2}) of the less dense subtidal plants can easily exceed that of the intertidal plants due to the larger size of the individual shoots; a factor that must be taken into consideration when sampling.

Cover

The aerial coverage of an eelgrass meadow reflects both the substrate and the hydrodynamic regime. A quiescent environment with a sandy mud substrate generally supports a dense continuous eelgrass bed with virtually 100% cover. The cover of eelgrass in areas subjected to strong currents is typically patchy. Areas with heterogeneous substrate (mixture of fine and coarse) also tend to be patchy.

Eelgrass meadows are spatially dynamic, the edges expand or recede in response to environmental variables. Severe storms may damage or destroy entire meadows. Severe frost (winter) and intense heat (summer) may also kill shoots exposed at low tide. Shifting sand (active sediment bed movement) can have a significant effect on eelgrass distribution.

Density

The density of shoots within an eelgrass bed may be consistent throughout the bed or it may vary in response to environmental parameters within the bed (currents, sediment type, depth, turbidity). In addition, if several ecotypes are present the density will vary depending on the distribution of each ecotype within the bed. In order to determine the mean density of shoots within a bed, the investigator must first establish whether there is any sort of density zonation within the bed, then design a sampling procedure to assess each zone independently. Permanent transects are not recommended as repeated trampling may alter the density along the transect, unless the site is surveyed at high tide using SCUBA or video. Additionally, permanent transect markers collect floating debris and often result in sediment scour.

Environmental Requirements

The growth and distribution of eelgrass is influenced by salinity, sediment type, current velocity, light availability, temperature, and pH. Temperature and pH are not usually restrictive along coastal British Columbia. A summary of the range and optimal levels for each of these parameters is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Environmental requirements for vegetative growth of eelgrass (Phillips, 1974).

Parameter	Range	Optimum
salinity	freshwater to 42 ppt	10 to 30 ppt
sediment type	firm sand to soft mud	mixed sand and mud
current velocity	waves to stagnant water	little wave action gentle currents to 3.5 knots
light/depth	1.8 m above MLLW to –30 m	MLLW to – 6.6 m
temperature	-6 °C to 40.5 °C	10 °C to 20 °C
pH	7.3 to 9.0	7.3 to 9.0

MLLW- mean low low water ppt – parts per thousand

The literature reports that eelgrass is restricted to soft sediment; however it is often found in areas with significant amounts of gravel and cobble in British Columbia. There are two known areas where eelgrass has adapted to grow over hard substrate, one on rock in Port McNeil (Durance), and one on cement blocks near Victoria (Austin).

The maximum depth to which eelgrass can grow at a specific location depends on the turbidity of the water, since the amount of light that penetrates the water is reduced when turbidity increases.

3.0 Mapping and Monitoring Parameters

Eelgrass meadows possess many attributes that can be mapped and monitored to assess changes over time and track ecosystem health. The parameters that are selected for study depends on the objectives or goals of the study and the resources available. Monitoring specific meadows, using scientific sampling methods, can provide the data required to detect and assess environmental changes. There are many variables that are commonly measured to detect changes in eelgrass populations or meadows and the environment. The following section reviews the parameters that are frequently used to study eelgrass, and the value associated with each.

Location

An inventory that locates and characterizes eelgrass beds provides a valuable tool that can be used by various resource managers and assist with the development of Integrated Coastal Zone Management plans. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has a policy of ‘no net loss’, thus proposed development may not impact known eelgrass habitat unless it can be shown that adequate compensation will be provided. Knowing the location of each eelgrass bed would therefore assist in conservation.

Delineation

The delineation of eelgrass beds enables the detection of increases or decreases in area, or range, over time that can be tracked. Losses may be used to detect environmental change, and develop mitigation plans to prevent further degradation. In addition, any industry or development that can be shown to impact eelgrass habitat may be forced by Fisheries and Oceans to provide mitigation, restoration, or compensation.

Depth Distribution

The distribution of eelgrass across a bathymetric gradient is limited at the upper boundary by the degree of exposure at low tide (desiccation) and by light limitations at the lower boundary. In some cases substrate characteristics change with depth; this may also limit eelgrass distribution. Degradation of water quality that results in increased turbidity (e.g. suspended solids, chlorophyll A increases) leads to a decrease in the maximum depth possible for eelgrass survival. Trends in the maximum depth distribution of eelgrass over time can be used as ‘a predictor of ecosystem health’ (Dennison et al., 1983).

Shoot Density

Eelgrass shoot densities vary over time in response to environmental variables (natural and anthropogenic) and are therefore useful indicators of environmental change (Phillips et al., 1983, Olesen et al., 1994). The number of flowering shoots within the meadow is usually determined as part of the density estimate since it may reflect- environmental change or stress, and because the flowering shoots will senesce after they reach maturity, resulting in a decrease of total shoot density.

Distribution

The maximum coverage of eelgrass at a specific site is strongly influenced by the hydrodynamic setting. Quiescent bays tend to support homogenous eelgrass meadows, whereas areas that experience stronger currents and active seabed movement tend to have a patchy eelgrass distribution. The homogeneity of an eelgrass bed can also be reduced by anthropogenic disturbances (shellfish harvesting, boat anchoring, dredging activity, trampling, etc.).

The integrity of an eelgrass bed may be threatened by fragmentation. The plants within established eelgrass beds reduce currents, leading to increased sediment and organic detritus deposition. The dense rhizome and root matrix of the plants, in conjunction with the enhanced deposition rate assists in stabilization of the substrate. ‘If an established, continuous bed becomes fragmented for any reason, the bed will tend to become less stable and more vulnerable to the normal forces of erosion. Channels may form, the cover may become patchier and if the trend continues, isolated patches will develop which are more likely to be washed away. It would appear that there is a threshold of loss, below which destabilization and further losses of beds can occur ‘(Holt et al., 1997).

Monitoring the homogeneity or patchiness of a meadow over time can help to identify impacts and lead to the implementation of mitigation programs to prevent further loss.

Leaf Area Index (LAI)

Leaf area indices are often used to estimate the productivity of eelgrass and the amount of habitat available for colonization by epifauna. The LAI is calculated according to the following formula:

$$\text{LAI} = \text{mean shoot length} \times \text{mean shoot width} \times \text{mean density of shoot} / m^2$$

LAI is potentially more sensitive to environmental stress than is a parameter such as leaf width since it integrates both density and area (Neckles, 1994).

Shoot Biomass

Mean shoot biomass (dry weight of plant material per unit area) estimates are commonly used to assess the productivity of eelgrass beds and detect changes over time. The technique is universally accepted, however it requires destructive sampling and equipment that may not be available in all regions (ovens and scales).

Water Quality

The physical properties of seawater, especially in estuarine environments, fluctuate constantly in response to tides, currents, and volume of fresh water inflow. Many eelgrass monitoring programs incorporate environmental parameters into their study to provide a 'snapshot' of conditions that may, in turn, provide clues to significant water quality differences (Sewell, 2001).

The environmental parameters that are included in several large scale eelgrass monitoring projects are listed in Table 4. A brief summary of each program is provided in Appendix 1.

Table 4. Environmental variables included in several large scale eelgrass monitoring projects.

Parameter	Puget Sound Submerged Vegetation Monitoring Project	SeagrassNet	European Directorate Special Areas of Conservation Program
Temperature	√	√	-
Salinity	√	√	-
Dissolved oxygen	√		-
Turbidity	√	√	√
Photosynthetically Active Radiation	√	-	-
Light parameters, back scatter, florescence	√	-	-
Surface sediment character	-	√	-
Nutrient Levels	-	-	√

4.0 Strategy

The following strategy integrates four levels of study to enable all interested parties to participate in a large scale mapping effort. The level of detail that is selected to map and/or monitor an eelgrass meadow will be dependant on the specific goal of the study and the resources available. The use of standardized data dictionaries and data sheets ensures that all of the data that are collected are useful and may be integrated into the interactive database and mapping website (www.shim.bc.ca/maps.html).

The goals associated with each of the four levels, and a list of data required to achieve these goals are summarized below. The set parameters that must be assessed in order to meet the data requirements associated with each level are listed in Table 5. Details relating to the requirements are provided in Section 5.

Level 1

Goal: Conservation of intertidal eelgrass habitat

Requirements:
- identify the location of intertidal eelgrass meadows
- characterize the habitat within the intertidal area of the meadow

Level 2

Goal: Conservation of intertidal and subtidal eelgrass habitat

Requirements:
- identify the location and area of all eelgrass meadows
- characterize the habitat within the entire meadow

Level 3

Goal: Conservation of eelgrass meadows and early identification of habitat degradation or loss

Requirements:
- identify the location and area of all eelgrass meadows
- monitor eelgrass meadows to detect changes

Level 4

Goal: Conservation of eelgrass habitat and early identification of habitat degradation or loss and environmental stressors

Requirements:
- identify the location and area of all eelgrass meadows
- monitor eelgrass meadows to detect changes
- monitor changes in the surrounding environment water quality

Table 5. Minimum parameters to be assessed for each Level.

Parameter	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
location of eelgrass meadows	√	√	√	√
overview of intertidal habitat	√	√	√	√
overview of subtidal habitat		√	√	√
delineation of meadow(s)		√	√	√
maximum and minimum depth			√	√
distribution (degree of patchiness)			√	√
shoot density, including sexual status			√	√
Leaf Area Index (LAI)			√	√
turbidity			√	√
salinity				√
Total Suspended Solids (TSS)				√
chlorophyll A				√

5.0 Methods

The following methods are based on protocols that have been employed to map and monitor eelgrass communities. The methods are provided to enable groups or agencies to map eelgrass in a consistent manner, and to contribute to a central database using a standardized data entry form.

Mapping exercises should be completed during the summer, this will minimize the amount of variation between beds that is due to seasonal change. Monitoring should also be conducted during the summer, although the frequency of monitoring will depend on the resources of the study team. Monitoring programs may collect data annually (summer), biannually (summer and winter), or seasonally. Multiyear monitoring programs should be designed to ensure that field surveys are conducted within two weeks of the calendar date (month and day) of the original monitoring.

There are a minimum set of parameters associated with each level, however any of the parameters from higher levels may be included a survey. For example, a group may elect to complete a Level 1 survey but decide to collect shoot density data for the intertidal area with the methods used for a Level 3 & 4 survey.

Strategies may be developed to suit the requirements of each sampling team by using combination of levels. A recommended strategy is to map all eelgrass within a geographical area at Level 2, and then to select several meadows of interest to monitor at Level 3 or 4 on a regular basis. The meadows that are selected for monitoring would be in areas of potential environmental concern and at least one that is in a relatively protected area to use as a reference site.

A list of the equipment required for each level of study is provided in Appendix 2. Safety considerations for working in intertidal and subtidal eelgrass beds are provided in Appendix 3. Appendix 4 provides a suggested list of steps to complete each level of survey. A field datasheet and a draft of the data entry form are included in Appendix 5.

Location of Eelgrass Beds – All Levels

The first step is to identify the location of local eelgrass beds. It may take several years to locate all of the beds within a specific geographical area; depending on the time and resources that a specific group or organization has to dedicate to the project.

There are many sources of information that may assist in identifying the location of eelgrass beds. Sources that should be reviewed include: Herring Spawn Maps, Airphotos, Orthophotos, and the Community Mapping Network website (www.shim.bc.ca/maps.html).

The locations of eelgrass beds may be identified through low tide surveys, community surveys, diver surveys, and/or the use of a towed underwater video camera.

A survey of the low intertidal, conducted during the lowest daytime tides of the year, may be used to identify the location of many local eelgrass meadows. A survey of this type would only detect meadows that extend into the intertidal and would not provide information on the location of meadows that are restricted to subtidal areas.

Information may be solicited from the community. Local residents can provide information on the general locations of beds, which can later be assessed by the study team. The Shorekeepers manual provides many suggestions for gathering information from the community (http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/sci/protocol/shorekeepers/Guide/default.htm).

Diver surveys of the entire coastline are impractical, but may be used in areas where subtidal eelgrass is suspected.

A towed underwater video system can be used effectively to detect eelgrass beds. Underwater cameras that feed information into an above water videorecorder are available for $300 (black & white) and $1000 (colour). It is suggested that the habitat around –2 m to –5 m (chart datum) be investigated, as most subtidal eelgrass beds will extend across this depth.

The boundary of an eelgrass bed may be difficult to establish. In some cases it is very distinct, yet often the density of shoots slowly decreases around the perimeter. In order to be consistent, the Puget Sound study decided that areas that supported a minimum density of one (1) shoot per m^2 would be included in the bed. It is recommended that we adopt the same criteria. The edge of the bed shall be defined as the point at which the density decreases below 1 $shoot \cdot m^{-2}$, beyond which it continues to decrease. In areas that support a patchy distribution of eelgrass, there may be distances of several metres between patches. In these areas the edge of the bed should be located at the outer edges of the first and last patch.

Preliminary testing suggests that a hand held GPS may be as accurate as a differential GPS for mapping eelgrass beds. The results obtained by using a hand held (Garmin GPS 12XL without differential) and a differential (Trimble Pathfinder Pro XR) GPS were compared in an intertidal area of Comox Harbour. The two types of GPSs provided results within 1 metre of each other. Bill Mather (Coast Guard, Bamfield) reports that he has found the accuracy of a hand held GPS to be consistently within 5 metres on the sea, and frequently within 1 metre. Handheld GPSs should only be used with 3D NAV available with the averaging function enabled for capturing point data. Track logs can be used effectively to walk perimeters of beds. The locations may be also be drawn on orthophotos, charts, cadastral maps, or TRIM sheets depending on the scales at which these products are locally available.

Overview of Intertidal Habitat – All Levels

The data form provides a series of fields and categories to describe each bed. The fields include form, distribution, density, and substrate type.

There are two basic forms of eelgrass beds in the Pacific Northwest; fringing beds that occur as relatively narrow bands usually on gentle slopes, and more expansive beds that cover large areas such as tidal flats.

The distribution of eelgrass within the bed will be recorded as either continuous or patchy. Patchy beds are those that contain isolated groups or patches of plants. Beds, which are not patchy, will be classified as continuous; a bed that has a few bare patches would rate the continuous classification. A graphic representation of each distribution type is provided in Appendix 6.

An estimate of the percent cover of eelgrass at low tide, according to the categories supplied on the datasheet, is required. If the cover varies significantly then the primary, secondary, and, if necessary, tertiary densities should be recorded. Similarly, the common substrates should be recorded in order of dominance. If more than one percent cover class or substrate type is present then the percentage that is occupied by each type should be recorded according to the categories provided on the datasheet. Appendix 7 provides additional detail relating to percent cover assessments.

Reference photographs of the exposed bed should be taken during each survey. The photographs should include a site view and several close up photos of the eelgrass. An object, such as a metre-stick or pencil should be included in each close-up photo to provide a scale reference. Photographs should be taken from similar locations during subsequent surveys.

Overview of Subtidal Habitat – Levels 2, 3, and 4

The data required to provide an overview of the subtidal habitat mirrors that required to describe intertidal habitat.

Bed Delineation – Levels 2, 3, and 4

A GPS is used to georeference the boundaries of the eelgrass bed and create a polygon, which may be used to determine the area covered by eelgrass. The boundaries of the bed may be determined using; an aquaviewer, a diver or snorkler with weighted floats (Appendix 8), or a towed underwater camera. The depth to which the aquaviewer may be used successfully would depend on the turbidity of the water and the depth range of the eelgrass at each location.

GPS readings should be recorded at roughly 15 metre intervals around the perimeter of the bed.

The rules for defining boundaries and describing the bed follow those provided for intertidal eelgrass meadows above.

A detailed protocol for using a GPS to map the perimeter of eelgrass beds will be included in a subsequent version of this manual.

Maximum & Minimum Depth – Levels 3 & 4

The maximum and minimum depths should be determined when the bed is submerged. Divers depth gauges may only be used if they are known to be accurate to +/- 0.2 metres. One of the preferred methods is to have a weight attached to the end of a metre tape, which is lowered to a diver at the deepest and most shallow edge of the eelgrass bed. The diver places the weight on the bottom then tugs three times to notify the assistant on the boat that the line is in place. The assistant checks to make sure that the line is taught and vertical then records the measurement.

It is important to record the exact time that the measurement is recorded so that the reading may be adjusted to chart datum. Tidal heights over time may be downloaded from many sources including http://tbone.biol.sc.edu/tide/sites_othernorth.html.

Distribution – Levels 3 & 4

The distribution and zonation of eelgrass within a bed must be assessed in order to select the appropriate method for estimating shoot density.

Distribution

The distribution of eelgrass within the bed may be described as either patchy or continuous. Patchy beds are those that contain isolated groups or patches of plants. Beds, which are not patchy, will be classified as continuous; a bed that contains bare patches surrounded by eelgrass would be classified as continuous. A graphic representation of each distribution is provided in Appendix 6.

Zonation

The density and leaf size of eelgrass may be consistent throughout the bed, or may vary with depth. Typically, there are two or three zones within the bed, each located along a slightly different depth gradient. Each zone blends over several metres into the next; these areas are referred to as transition areas. The density and size of the shoots is significantly different between zones, therefore each zone must be sampled individually. Sampling should be conducted outside of the transition areas. The zones should be classified numerically starting with the uppermost zone. Zones that are less than 4 metres in width do not need to be assessed. The width of each zone does not need to be recorded as the exact boundaries are difficult, if not impossible to determine.

It is necessary to determine the number of zones within a bed in order to establish the number and location of transects to be sampled.

The following hypothetical description of an eelgrass bed is intended to provide the reader with an understanding the zonation typical in British Columbia.

> Zone 1 is a narrow band 8 metres wide, located in the low intertidal and shallow subtidal. The zone is characterized by a sparse population of short eelgrass (length 25 cm, density 32 shoots/m^2). Zone 1 blends into Zone 2, at a slightly lower elevation. The plants in Zone 2 are larger and more dense (80 cm, 112 shoots/m^2) than in those located in Zone 1. Zone 2 is 50 metres in width. The majority of the bed is located in Zone 2. Zone 2 merges into a third zone of sparse but larger plants (160 cm, 20 shoots/m^2) as the depth increases. Zone 3 is 10 metres wide.

Shoot Density

The protocol for density was designed to measure the mean density of shoots within the vegetated areas of the bed. Shoot density needs to be quantified within each zone. A 0.25 m^2 quadrat (50cm x 50 cm) should be used to assess density in most cases. This represents ¼ of a m^2.

Intertidal eelgrass may reach densities in excess of 500 shoots$\cdot$0.25m^{-2}. It is recommended that a smaller quadrat (25cm x 25 cm) be used to monitor density once the number of shoots$\cdot$0.25m^{-2} exceeds 100. A quadrat of this size represents 1/16 of a m^2.

Continuous Eelgrass Meadows

A temporary transect using a metre tape or marked line should be established in each zone, roughly parallel to the shore, along a depth continuum. The length of each transect should be roughly 60% of the bed width, to a maximum of 60 metres. The transects should be centred in the bed to avoid edge effects.

Predetermined random numbers will establish the location along either side of the transect where quadrats should be placed. Initially, thirty quadrats should be assessed for density within each zone. It will be necessary to determine the number of replicates (quadrats) that are required to estimate the mean density of shoots on a site specific basis due to the natural variability within eelgrass communities. The accepted method by which to accomplish this is to plot the running mean. Sample size is adequate once the variation between samples, which decreases as the number of samples increases, is reduced to 5%. It is likely that the number of replicates required will be less, however this number of samples should be sufficient to determine the running mean.

The total number of shoots rooted in each quadrat should be recorded, along with the total number of reproductive shoots in each quadrat. The number of vegetative shoots is calculated by subtracting the number of reproductive shoots from the total number of shoots.

Patchy Eelgrass Beds

It is challenging to design a sampling method for patchy (fragmented) beds as the size and distribution of patches will vary between and within sites. The following method may require revision.

Establish a temporary transect line parallel to shore. Start at the zero metre mark and record the length along the transect that is occupied by the first patch located under the transect line. If the area of the patch exceeds 1m^2, use a quadrat to determine the density (total number of shoots rooted within the quadrat and number of reproductive shoots) within 0.25m^2, avoiding the edges of the patch. If the patch is greater than 6m^2, monitor two quadrats within the patch. Attempts should be made to sample randomly, one method is to hover over the patch and allow the quadrat to drop to the bottom, and sample wherever it lands. Follow the transect line recording the distance that it travels over each patch, the distance between each patch, and the density within patches >1m^2.

Leaf Area Index (LAI)- Level 3 and 4

The mean leaf length and width can be determined from a random sample of 30 shoots. The data may be collected at the same time as the density is assessed. In order to avoid sampling only the largest shoots, measure the shoot located nearest to the upper right corner and the lower left corner of the quadrat. Measure the leaf length from sheath to tip of the second oldest leaf and the width near the middle of the leaf.

Calculate the LAI according to the following formula:

LAI = mean shoot length x mean shoot width x mean density of shoot /m^2

There are variations in the way that researchers measure LAI; some include the sheath, and others measure each leaf. The above method was selected, as it requires the least amount of time to calculate and can be used to provide a relative estimate of biomass.

Turbidity - Level 3 and 4

A secchi depth reading is recommended to assess turbidity.

Salinity - Level 4

A salinometer should be used to determine salinity, in parts per thousand (ppt).

Total Suspended Solids - Level 4

Water samples should be collected and taken to a local laboratory for analysis. The laboratory will provide a specific protocol for collecting and storing the samples.

Chlorophyll A - Level 4

Water samples should be collected and taken to a local laboratory for analysis. The laboratory will provide a specific protocol for collecting and storing the samples.

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Appendix 1 – Summary of Several Seagrass Mapping and Monitoring Programs

The following pages summarize several seagrass mapping and monitoring programs that have been recently implemented. Additional information may be obtained from the website addresses for each program.

Puget Sound Submerged Vegetation Monitoring Program

The objective of the Submerged Vegetation Monitoring Program is to 'quantify the state resource and its change over time' (Sewell et al., 2001). The four goals established by the program are:

1. Capture Temporal Trends in Eelgrass Distribution and Abundance in Puget Sound
2. Summarize Temporal Trends over Puget Sound and subareas
3. Monitor vegetation parameters that are strong indicators of eelgrass extent and quality
4. Link stressors to abundance and distribution. Six "core" sites will be sampled each year, and the remainder of Puget Sound will be sampled using rotational random sampling with partial replacement.

The program reviewed the available methodologies suited to goal 1 and selected linear transect sampling using a towed underwater video. Details are available in Norris et al., 2001a.

Methods that were considered and rejected included airborne remote sensing and colour air photo interpretation. Airborne remote sensing was rejected as the accuracy associated with this technique is +/- 40 feet which would not permit trend analysis, many of the beds in Puget Sound are located on beaches <40 feet wide, and the deep edge of many beds would not be visible. NOAA recommends using colour air photo interpretation, and stresses the importance of filming under optimal conditions, which are not always available in the Pacific Northwest.

SeagrassNet

*SeagrassNet is global monitoring program to investigate and document the status of seagrass resources world wide and the threats to this important and imperilled marine ecosystem (*www.seagrassnet.org*).* The objectives of the program are to preserve seagrass ecosystems by increasing scientific knowledge and public awareness of this threatened coastal resource. The program began with seven countries in the Western Pacific and is expanding. The program uses a globally applicable monitoring protocol and a web-based interactive database. Each site is monitored on a quarterly basis.

The protocol involves determining distribution (including maximum and minimum depth), species composition, and abundance (cover, canopy height, shoot density (reproductive status) and above and below ground biomass) along permanent transects (parallel and perpendicular to the shore).

Environmental data is collected as follows:

water temperature - continuous reading at deep and shallow stations using tidbit data loggers,

light levels - % surface light using a Hobo light sensor, meters record data for two weeks at the time of each quarterly sampling, plus one land-based meter at a nearby location without shade,

salinity - water samples collected from three stations and analysed on a refractometer at a laboratory

surface sediment characteristics – estimates of the sediment type at three points on each cross transect and collect a core at each station on the primary transects

European Union Special Areas of Conservation

The European Union's Habitat Directive and developments to the Oslo and Paris Convention (OSPAR) lead to the creation of the Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) program. Eelgrass beds were identified as one of the habitats of major importance. Experts from academic and research institutes and nature conservation bodies compiled an Overview of Dynamics and Sensitivity Characteristics for Conservation Management of Zostera Biotopes. The review provides recommendations for mapping and monitoring.

The review states that "of the various monitoring techniques, airborne or sublittoral remote sensing (including side scan sonar) can rapidly map the distribution of beds over a large area, but must be ground-truthed by some other method. Underwater video and field observers (diving or shore) must be used to provide information on plant condition and associated biological community."

The review recommends the following parameters need to be monitored to detect change in the extent or health of eelgrass communities;

- distribution and extent of eelgrass coverage
- standing crop (biomass) and shoot density
- condition of shoots (leaf length, sexual status)
- occurrence of characteristic and representative species in the associated community
- local water quality (turbidity, nutrient levels)

Details are available at http://www.english-nature.org.uk/uk-marine/

Appendix 2 – Equipment

The following table lists the basic equipment that is required for each level of survey.

Equipment	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Eelgrass Field Datasheets	√	√	√	√
maps or orthophotos at an appropriate scale, tidetables	√	√	√	√
boat (motor or paddle)		√	√	√
GPS		√	√	√
50 or 100 metre measuring tape or line			√	√
50 cm x 50 cm quadrats			√	√
metre stick			√	√
secchi disk			√	√
salinometer			√	√
Dive gear, snorkel gear, aquaviewer, or underwater camera			√	√
water quality sampling equipment				√

Waterproof notebooks or paper are highly recommended; these are available from stores that sell surveying equipment and some marine supply shops.

Quadrats may be constructed from any waterproof material. Local metal shops can usually make them out of aluminium for about $30. Aluminium quadrats are formed by a thin piece of 1” wide metal 2 metres in length that is bent to form a square and welded. Aluminium quadrats are recommended, as they are durable, rust proof, and are negatively buoyant so that they will lie flat on the substrate even if it is covered by water. Quadrats may also be made from wood or plastic pipe, although these types are more cumbersome to use and have a tendency to float.

A plastic coated surveyors measuring tape works well for marking transects. Alternatively, a thick nylon rope with labelled flagging tape to mark each metre may be constructed. The nylon tape has a tendency to float, this can be remedied by inserting short (e.g. 1” lengths) of lead wire into the rope at one metre intervals.

Secchi disks are used to measure the distance that one can see into the water, and to provide an indication of the turbidity. A secchi disk is a round flat disk, usually about 12” in diameter, with a cord attached in the centre. The surface of the disk is divided into four equal sized pie shaped triangles. The triangles are coloured white and black alternatively. The disk is lowered into the water and the depth at which it is no longer possible to distinguish the black from the white is recorded. A secchi disk may be purchased from a scientific supply company or hand made.

Tidetables are recommended to assist with planning the survey. Tidetables may be downloaded from http://tbone.biol.sc.edu/tide/sites_othernorth.html.

Appendix 3 – Safety Considerations

Intertidal Safety

The intertidal is a relatively safe place to work, however one should always be aware of the potential for injury. The most common cause of injury while working in and around intertidal eelgrass beds is from walking. Rocks and even mud, when covered with algae may be slippery. Rip rap (blasted rock that is often used as shore protection and to construct breakwaters), may be unstable; be cautious when climbing over it. People are often tempted to walk barefoot in soft glutinous mud, rather than loose their boots. However, broken shell embedded in the substrate can be sharp and may cut bare feet. Neoprene booties or old running shoes (with socks because the sand chaffs) work well.

Field work needs to be planned around the tides. On days when the low tide is less than 1 metre you can usually start work 1.5 to 2.0 hours before low tide, and continue for an hour afterwards. These times vary with other factors such as wind. If you are working around a headland, be sure to watch the tide; your return access may become blocked after the tide turns.

Never work alone, and carry a cellular phone or VHF radio in case of emergency. If possible try to include one member in each crew who has first aid certification. Always carry a first aid kit.

Bears and cougars frequent the backshore and sometimes intertidal areas in remote locations, so stay alert and keep an eye on the backshore for visitors.

It is a good idea to carry drinking water, as fecal coliform contamination and beaver fever is common in many of British Columbia's streams and rivers.

Subtidal Safety

Boating

Safety regulations are available from the Canadian Coast Guard (www.ccg-gcc.cg.ca). The Coast Guard is phasing in operator requirements over several years. Currently, anyone born after April 1, 1983 must have a 'proof of competency' licence to legally operate a power boat. After September 15, 2002, anyone operating a power boat less than 4 meters in length must have a licence.

The safety regulations vary with size and type of boat. Boats (pleasure craft) less than six metres in length must be equipped with at least one personal floatation device for each person on board. Small motorized boats must also carry a paddle in case of engine failure or an anchor with 15 metres of rope, a bailer or manual pump, a 15 metre heaving line, a watertight flashlight or three flares, a sound signalling device (whistle or air horn), and navigation lights after sunset.

A basic boating safety course is available free of charge, on line at http://www.boatsafe.com/

SCUBA

Anyone participating in a SCUBA survey must be certified. A dive flag must be readily visible to warn boaters that divers are in the water. PADI recommends that a dive master be in attendance whenever a diver is in the water. The Reefkeepers manual has a section on diving safety that is available on line at http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/sci/protocol/reefkeepers/Guide/default.htm. Divers and boat operators must be aware of each other's actions, and the danger associated with spinning propellers.

Appendix 4 – Project Planning

The following information is provided as a guide to assist with planning and organizing a field survey. Individual groups and organizations may want to modify the plan depending on the number of people available to assist with the survey.

The first step is to gather the background information (see Section 5 – Location of eelgrass beds) and review tide tables to select the best days for field work.

Level 1 Survey

1. Habitat Overview. Arrive on site within approximately 1 hour of low tide. Walk around the perimeter of the bed, then through it with the datasheet, thinking about the form, distribution, percent cover of eelgrass, and main substrate types in the bed. Avoid having many people follow the same path as excessive trampling can kill the eelgrass. Complete the Eelgrass Field Data Sheet – Section 1.
2. Georeference. Identify and map the edges of the bed with a GPS or on a map, airphoto, orthophoto, or chart.
3. Take photographs.

Tasks 1, 2, and 3 may be completed concurrently if the study team has enough members. The time required to complete a Level 1 survey will depend on the size of the study team and the area of the bed. A two member team could complete a Level 1 survey of a bed 100 metres wide or less within an hour.

Level 2 Survey

Intertidal areas of eelgrass beds should be surveyed at low tide as it will be much easier to assess them. Subtidal areas may be surveyed at any time, however the habitat may be easier to see if working from a boat, when there is less water at low tide.

1. Map the perimeter. It is always important to get a ‘big picture’ of the bed before you start the survey, either from a boat or underwater with SCUBA. Once the team has a fairly good idea as to the location of the bed, they can start mapping the perimeter.
2. Complete the Eelgrass Field Datasheet- Sections 1 and 2. In order to complete the datasheet, either the boat or divers will need to travel slowly over the bed, back and forth, until they feel that they have seen enough to complete the datasheet (habitat overviews). If possible, survey the intertidal area during low tide.

The perimeter mapping and habitat overviews may be completed simultaneously if there are adequate resources (boats and/or divers). It is estimated that one hour will be required to map the perimeter, and one hour to assess the habitat.

Level 3 Survey

Intertidal areas of eelgrass beds should be surveyed at low tide as it will be much easier to assess them. Subtidal areas may be surveyed at any time, however the habitat may be easier to see from a boat when there is less water at low tide. The entire survey does not need to be completed in one day, however it should be completed within one calendar week.

1. Map the perimeter. It is always important to get a ‘big picture’ of the bed before you start the survey, either from a boat or underwater with SCUBA. Once the team has a fairly good idea as to the location of the bed, they can start mapping the perimeter.

2. Complete the Eelgrass Field Datasheet – Sections 1 and 2. In order to complete the datasheet, either the boat or divers will need to travel slowly over the bed, back and forth, until they feel that they have seen enough to complete the datasheet (habitat overviews). If possible survey the intertidal area during low tide.
3. Determine maximum and minimum depths.
4. Determine the number of zones and select locations for transects.
5. Establish transects, collect shoot density data, and leaf length and width data.
6. Secchi depth reading may be taken at any time during the survey.

Study teams that include more than one pair of divers may decide to dedicate one team to mapping the perimeter and determining maximum and minimum depths, while the other pair(s) complete tasks 4 and 5.

Calculations (means, leaf area indices) may be completed subsequent to the field survey.

A study team of one boat tender and two divers would require approximately 5 hours to complete the survey. A study team of one boat tender, two teams of divers, and two people to assess the intertidal could complete the survey in less than 2 hours.

Level 4 Survey

Refer to the instructions for a Level 3 Survey. Collect water samples at any time, but remember to record the time of collection on the datasheet.

Appendix 5 – Field Data Form & Data Entry Form

A field data form (p. 22 – 27) and images of the electronic data entry forms are provided (p. 28-32). The 'Eelgrass Field Data Sheet' may be photocopied onto waterproof paper for use during fieldwork. The 'Eelgrass Bed Mapping Data Entry Form' (EBMDEF) is a snapshot of the one that can be used to enter data into the interactive web based database. In order to enter data into the Community Mapping Network database (http://www.shim.bc.ca/eelgrass/main.htm) each group will be assigned a username and password. The data from the field data sheet may then be submitted electronically. A help menu is available on the toolbar.

Eelgrass Field Data Sheet

Background

Location: ....

Date: .... *(dd/mm/yr)*

Primary Field Surveyor: ....

Crew: ....

....

Time start: .... Time finish: ....

Tide height start: .... Tide height finish: ....

Level of Survey: .... Tidal range of eelgrass bed (subtidal, intertidal, both): ..

Platform used to survey eelgrass bed (shore, boat, dive, video): ....

Reference used to determine tide height: ....

Reference map type: .

Reference map name or number:

Reference map scale:

Geographic (Lat./Long.) or Projection:

Specifics of Projection (UTM, Albers, etc. including zone and other details): ..

Method and Level of accuracy to which bed was mapped (circle one)

Code	Map Accuracy
1	Location measured using GPS (see GPS model and accuracy fields)
2	Location generalized from DFO log book lat/long positions
3	Location indicated to 2 mm at chart scale
4	Alongshore location indicated to 2mm at chart scale; across shore accuracy unknown
5	General location only; rough sketch on chart or place name (5 mm at chart scale)
6	Tied to shoreunit or other shoreline segment
7	Tied to DFO Statistical Subarea
8	Tied to DFO Statistical Area
9	Alongshore location indicated to 5 mm at chart scale, across shore accuracy unknown
10	Vague location only (1-2 cm at chart scale)

Method used to georeference (GPS/hardcopy map/orthophoto/airphoto): ....

Make and Model of GPS (if one was used): ..

Comments specific to the eelgrass bed (health, adjacent backshore land use, backshore structures, possible threats)

1. Overview of Intertidal Habitat: All Levels – if bed is restricted to the subtidal go to Section 2.

Form Fringing ❑ Flat ❑
Distribution Continuous ❑ Patchy ❑

Percent Cover of intertidal eelgrass

Primary	1 to 10%	....	Secondary	1 to 10%	....	Tertiary	1 to 10%	....
	11 to 25	....	(optional)	11 to 25%	....	(optional)	11 to 25%	....
	26 to 50%	....		26 to 50%	....		26 to 50%	....
	51 to 75%	....		51 to 75%	....		51 to 75%	....
	> 75%	....		> 75%	....		> 75%	....

Substrate Type

Primary	mud	....	Secondary	mud	....	Tertiary	mud	....
	mud/sand	....	(optional)	mud/sand	....	(optional)	mud/sand	....
	sand	....		sand	....		sand	....
	gravel	....		gravel	....		gravel	....
	cobble	....		cobble	....		cobble	....
	boulder	....		boulder	....		boulder	....
	bedrock	....		bedrock	....		bedrock	....

2. Overview of Subtidal Habitat: Levels 2, 3, and 4

Form Fringing ❑ Flat ❑
Distribution Continuous ❑ Patchy ❑

Percent Cover of subtidal eelgrass ( )

Primary	1 to 10%	....	Secondary	1 to 10%	....	Tertiary	1 to 10%	....
	11 to 25	....	(optional)	11 to 25%	....	(optional)	11 to 25%	....
	26 to 50%	....		26 to 50%	....		26 to 50%	....
	51 to 75%	....		51 to 75%	....		51 to 75%	....
	> 75%	....		> 75%	....		> 75%	....

Area occupied by: ( )

Primary	1 to 10%	....	Secondary	1 to 10%	....	Tertiary	1 to 10%	....
	11 to 25	....	(optional)	11 to 25%	....	(optional)	11 to 25%	....
	26 to 50%	....		26 to 50%	....		26 to 50%	....
	51 to 75%	....		51 to 75%	....		51 to 75%	....
	> 75%	....		> 75%	....		> 75%	....

Substrate Types ( )

Primary	mud	....	Secondary	mud	....	Tertiary	mud	....
	mud/sand	....	(optional)	mud/sand	....	(optional)	mud/sand	....
	sand	....		sand	....		sand	....
	gravel	....		gravel	....		gravel	....
	cobble	....		cobble	....		cobble	....
	boulder	....		boulder	....		boulder	....
	bedrock	....		bedrock	....		bedrock	....

Area occupied by ( )

Primary	1 to 10%	....	Secondary	1 to 10%	....	Tertiary	1 to 10%	....
	11 to 25	....	(optional)	11 to 25%	....	(optional)	11 to 25%	....
	26 to 50%	....		26 to 50%	....		26 to 50%	....
	51 to 75%	....		51 to 75%	....		51 to 75%	....
	> 75%	....		> 75%	....		> 75%	....

3. Depth: Levels 3 and 4

Method used to determine Maximum Depth
(diver with depth gauge, diver with boat and metre tape or rod, survey rod without diver, other –explain)

....
....
....
....
....

.... Time measurement was taken
.... Depth Reading (metres e.g. 8.2 m)
.... Tide height at this time
.... Actual depth

Method used to determine Maximum Depth
(diver with depth gauge, diver with boat and metre tape or rod, survey rod without diver, other –explain)

....
....
....
....
....

.... Time measurement was taken
.... Depth Reading (metres)
.... Tide height at this time
.... Actual depth

4. Distribution & Density: Levels 3 and 4

Distribution Continuous - *proceed to Section 4A*
Patchy - *proceed to Section 4B*

4A. Continuous Eelgrass – complete one form for each zone

Number of Zones:...................................

Zone #:					
length of transect			**# of quadrats sampled**		
raw data (#/0.25m^2)					
total	**reproductive**	**total**	**reproductive**	**total**	**reproductive**
mean # total:			**mean # reproductive:**		

4B. Patchy Eelgrass – complete one form for each zone

Number of Zones: ....
Direction of Transect (e.g. 0m at north end):...........................

Zone #: ....

Distance across eelgrass patch (e.g. 2.4m)	# shoots / $0.25m^2$	Distance to next eelgrass patch

Mean # shoots/$0.25m^2$ (within patches): ....

4. Leaf Area Index (LAI): Levels 3 and 4

sample	length	width
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		
16.		
17.		
18.		
19.		
20.		
21.		
22.		
23.		
24.		
25.		
26.		
27.		
28.		
29.		
30.		
Ó (total)		
x̄ (Ó ÷ 30)		

Mean leaf length (x̄): ....Mean leaf width (x̄):

Leaf Area Index (mean leaf length x mean leaf width x mean shoot density): .

5. Turbidity: Levels 3 and 4

Turbidity (secchi depth reading): ....

Time that reading was taken: ....

6. Salinity, Total Suspended Solids, Chlorophyll A: Level 4

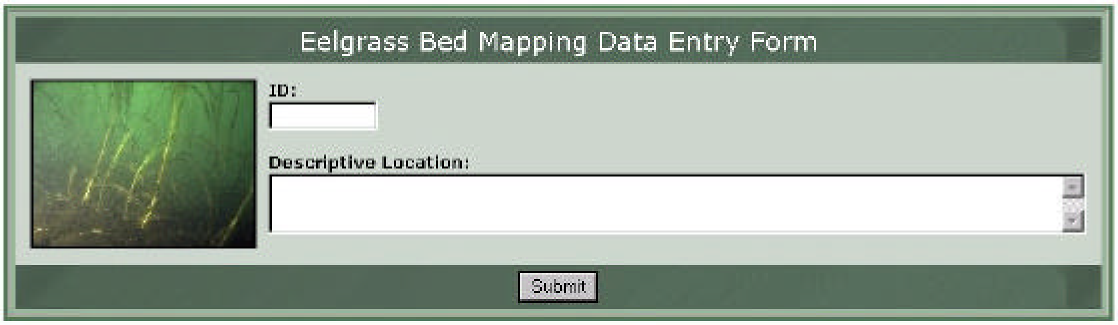
Salinity: ....

Total Suspended Solids: ....

Chlorophyll A: ....

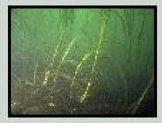
Time that samples were collected: ....

Form 1:



Form 2 (Main form):

Eelgrass Bed Mapping Data Entry Form



Unique id for eelgrass bed: 23222

Descriptive Location: Test

LOCATION OF INTERTIDAL BEDS ALONG SHORE
(All Levels)

Is there any other spatial data with this report? Please comment:

To what level of accuracy to which eelgrass bed is mapped? 0 - N/A

What method used to georeference and describe eelgrass bed? 0 - N/A

What platform was used to survey eelgrass bed in the field? 0 - N/A

If samples were taken, how were they taken? 0 - N/A

Was GPS used? ☐ Make and Model of GPS:

Reference map type: 0 - N/A

Reference map name or reference #:

Reference map scale:

Geographic (Lat/Long) or Projection: N/A

Specifics of projection (UTM, Albers etc including Zone and other details):

Is eelgrass represented as a line (shoreline) or polygon (bed)?: Point

# of reference points collected to delimit eelgrass bed edge:

Form of eelgrass bed: Select One

Tidal range of eelgrass bed: Select one

Eelgrass species present: Select One

Comments specific to polygon (health, adjacent backshore land use, backshore structures, threats):

Primary Source of Information: Select One

Assistant field surveyer: Select One

Date when eelgrass bed was surveyed (format: March 16, 2002):

Date when data was mapped or last updated (format: March 16, 2002):

Person compiling the information: Select One

Time Start: Time Finish:

Tide Height Start: Tide Height Finish:

Reference used to calculate tide height:

Eelgrass Bed Data Entry Form

OVERVIEW OF INTERTIDAL HABITAT

Distribution of eelgrass bed: Select one

Percent Cover Eelgrass:

Primary Select one | Secondary (optional) Select one | Tertiary (optional) Select one

Substrate Type:

Primary Select one | Secondary (optional) Select one | Tertiary (optional) Select one

OVERVIEW OF SUBTIDAL HABITAT (Level 2)

Distribution of eelgrass bed: Select one

Primary Select one | Secondary (optional) Select one | Tertiary (optional) Select one

Substrate Type:

Primary Select one | Secondary (optional) Select one | Tertiary (optional) Select one

DEPTH (Level 3-4)

	MAXIMUM DEPTH	MINIMUM DEPTH
Depth Reading:		
Actual depth:		
Time measurement was taken:		
Tide height at this time:		
Method used to determine depth:	Diver with depth gauge	Diver with depth gauge
Other method:		

LEAF AREA INDEX (Level 3 and 4)

ZONE 1:

Leaf length and width [Enter Measurements] | Mean leaf length:

Leaf Area Index | Mean leaf width:

ZONE 2:

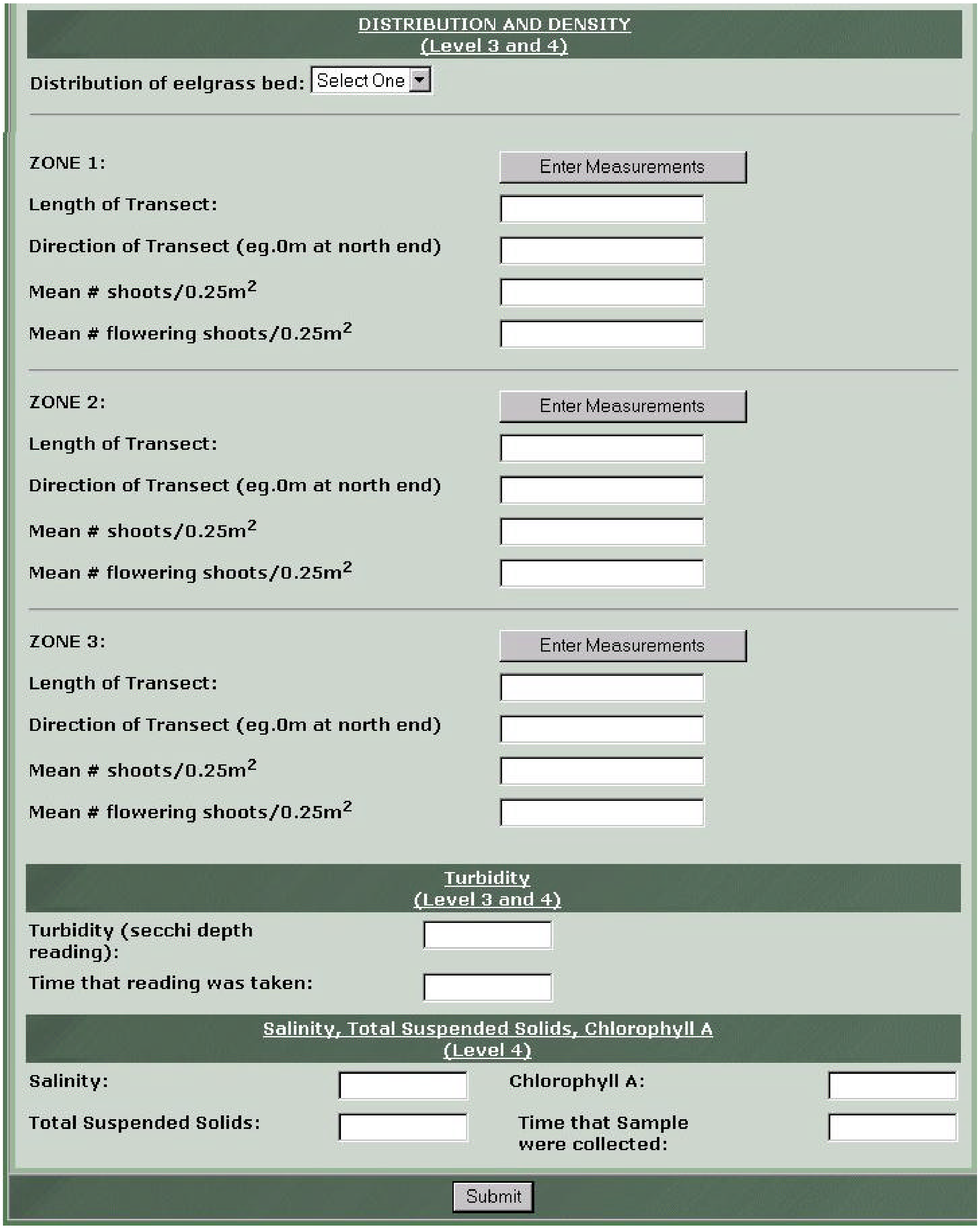
Leaf length and width [Enter Measurements] | Mean leaf length:

Leaf Area Index | Mean leaf width:

ZONE 3:

Leaf length and width [Enter Measurements] | Mean leaf length:

Leaf Area Index | Mean leaf width:



DISTRIBUTION AND DENSITY
(Level 3 and 4)

Distribution of eelgrass bed: Select One

ZONE 1: Enter Measurements

Length of Transect:

Direction of Transect (eg.0m at north end)

Mean # shoots/0.25m^2

Mean # flowering shoots/0.25m^2

ZONE 2: Enter Measurements

Length of Transect:

Direction of Transect (eg.0m at north end)

Mean # shoots/0.25m^2

Mean # flowering shoots/0.25m^2

ZONE 3: Enter Measurements

Length of Transect:

Direction of Transect (eg.0m at north end)

Mean # shoots/0.25m^2

Mean # flowering shoots/0.25m^2

Turbidity
(Level 3 and 4)

Turbidity (secchi depth reading):

Time that reading was taken:

Salinity, Total Suspended Solids, Chlorophyll A
(Level 4)

Salinity:

Chlorophyll A:

Total Suspended Solids:

Time that Sample were collected:

Submit

Eelgrass Bed Data Entry Form

LAI Form:

ZONE 1 - Leaf Area Index

Existing Measurements:

No measurements available

Enter records one at a time and hit submit every time:

Measurement No	Width	Length	Feature ID
			90

Submit and Next | Done

Distribution and Density Form:

ZONE 1 - Distribution and Density

Existing Measurements:

No measurements available

Enter records one at a time and hit submit every time:

Measurement No	No of shoots (patchy / continuous)	No of flowering shoots (patchy / continuous)	Distance across eelgrass patches (patchy only)	Distance between eelgrass patches (patchy only)	Feature ID
					90

Submit and Next | Done

Appendix 6 – Patchy vs. Continuous Eelgrass Distribution

The following illustrations are provided to demonstrate the difference between patchy and continuous eelgrass cover. The term Continuous is used to indicate that eelgrass is distributed over most of the area within the bed (Figure 1). There may be some areas without eelgrass within the bed (Figure 2).

Eelgrass is described as patchy when the bed or meadow is composed of many patches or islands of eelgrass, most of which are surrounded by areas without eelgrass (Figure 3). The area between patches is usually either exposed substrate or macroalgae.

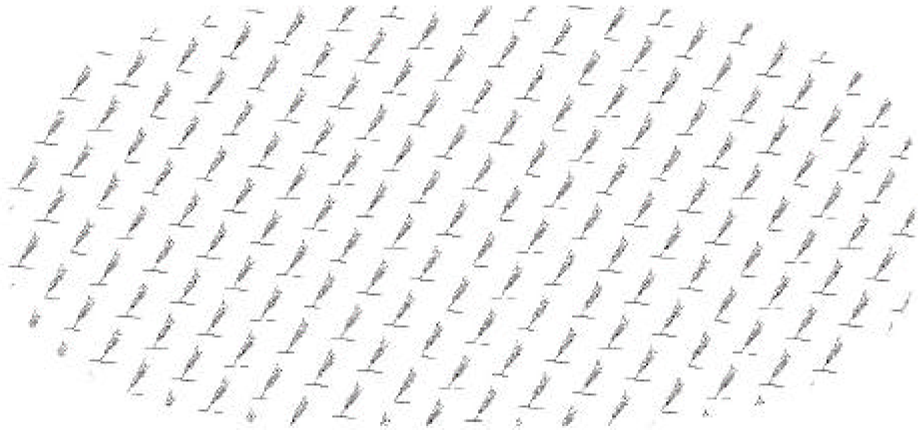


Figure 1. Continous Cover

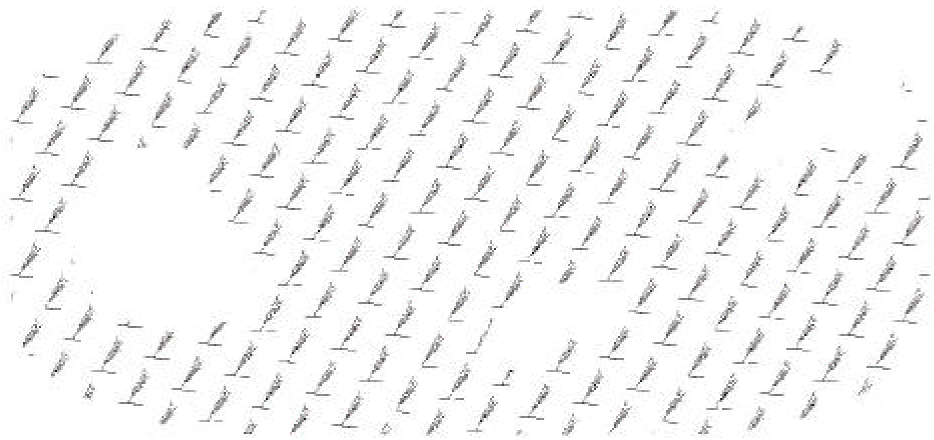


Figure 2. Continous cover with bare patches

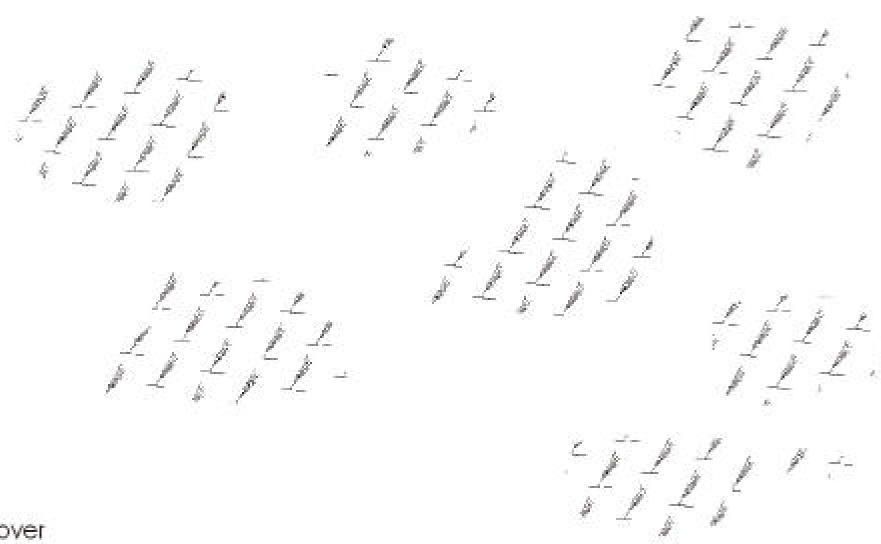


Figure 3. Patchy Cover

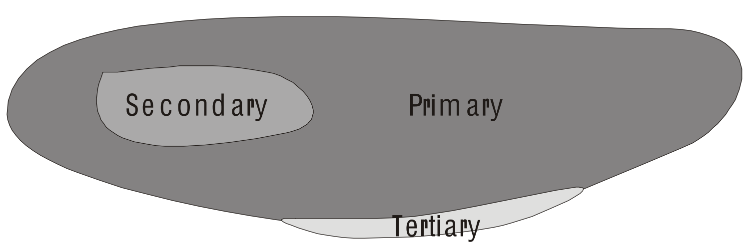
Appendix 7 – Percent Cover

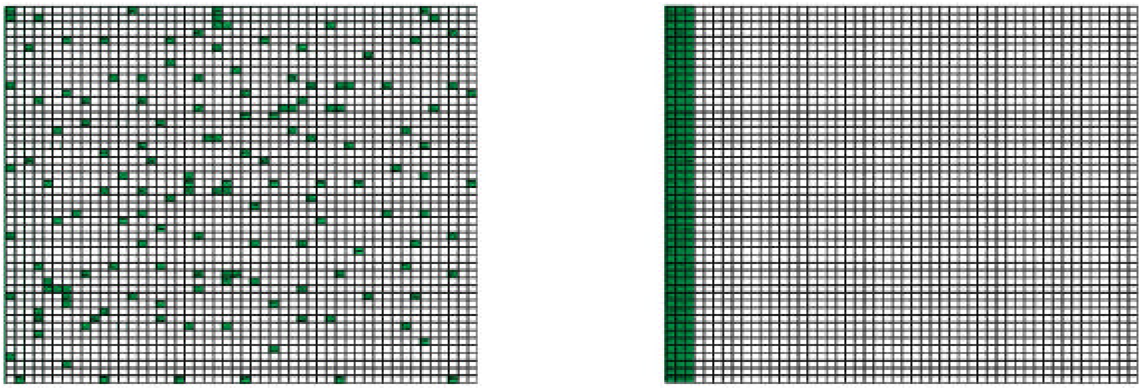
Percent cover is a quantitative assessment of the area covered by plants. For example, when the leaves and shoots form a dense blanket over the substrate (ground) such that it is impossible to see the substrate below the plants the percent cover is 100%. If you can see the substrate between the plants then the percent cover is less than 100%. The following figures are provided to illustrate this concept.

Imagine that the grey squares represent cover by eelgrass; the white squares represent exposed substrate (no eelgrass). Some people find it helpful to mentally move all the plants together in order to estimate the percent cover. Figure 7.1a represents a sparse eelgrass bed where only 6% of the area is covered by eelgrass. Figure 7.1b contains the same number of grey squares but they have been moved together. Accurately estimating precise percent cover requires training and experience. A way to circumvent this problem is to estimate percent cover within ranges. The datasheet provides a series of ranges that can be used to evaluate percent cover. By looking at the area covered by eelgrass, and perhaps mentally shifting all the plants together, you can determine which range best reflects the percent cover of eelgrass in the bed. For example, the diagram shown in Figure 7.1a would fall between 1% and 10%. The ranges that are used in this study are listed below.

Primary	1 to 10%	....	Secondary	1 to 10%	....	Tertiary	1 to 10%	....
	11 to 25	....	(optional)	11 to 25%	....	(optional)	11 to 25%	....
	26 to 50%	....		26 to 50%	....		26 to 50%	....
	51 to 75%	....		51 to 75%	....		51 to 75%	....
	> 75%	....		> 75%	....		> 75%	....

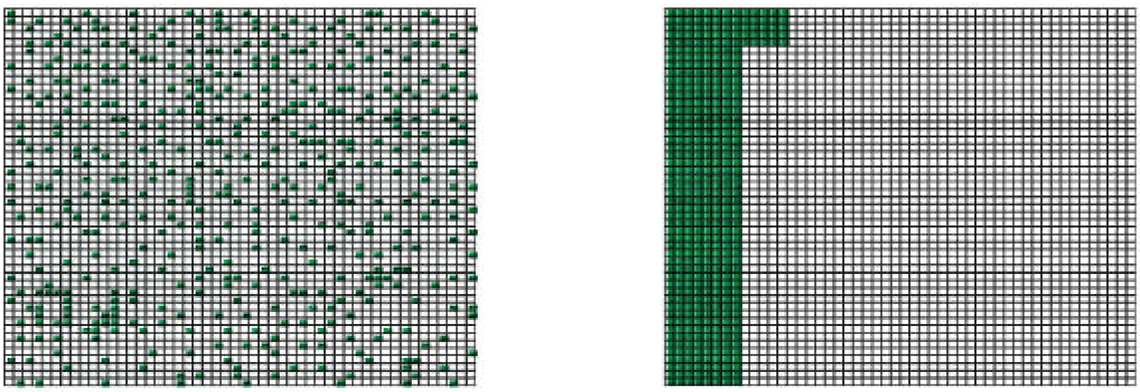
There are often differences in percent cover within a bed due to variations in physical variables such as depth or substrate. The following diagram provides a graphic representation of a bed that is composed of three areas with distinctly different percent covers. The dark area represent very dense eelgrass (>75%), the light area represents an area with low percent cover (1-10%), and the mid shade an area with intermediate cover (26 – 50%). Since most of the area falls into the >75% range this would be the primary percent cover. The secondary and tertiary percent covers would be 1-10% and 26-50% respectively. The secondary and tertiary percent cover estimates are considered optional as many beds are relatively uniform within the broad ranges that are provided. An area should represent at least 10% of the total area before it is considered significant enough to note on the datasheet.





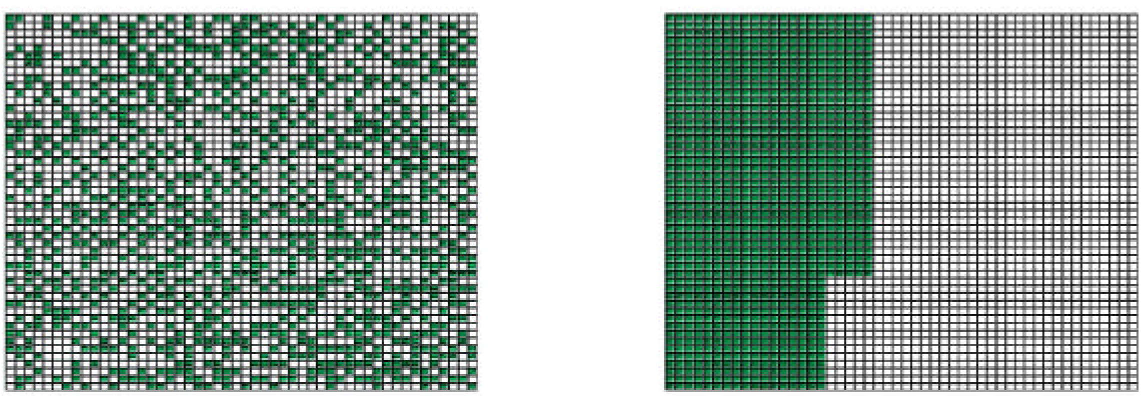
6%

Figure 7.1 Six percent of the squares are shaded. The squares are randomly located in the first diagram (a) and are grouped in the second (b). This represents an area that would be classified as 1-10% cover on the datasheet.



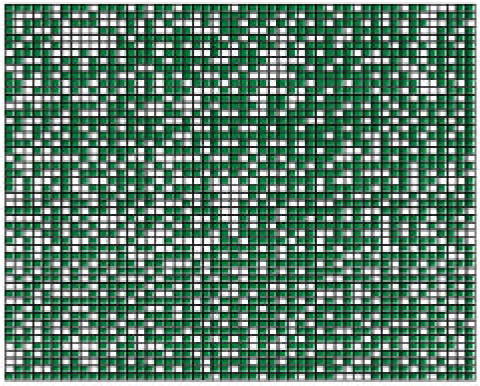
18%

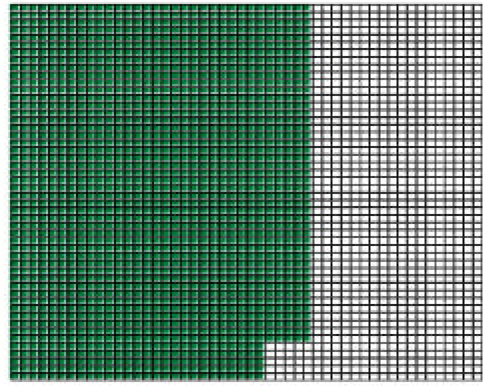
Figure 7.2 Eighteen percent of the squares are shaded. The squares are randomly located in the first diagram (a) and are grouped in the second (b). This represents an area that would be classified as 11-25% cover on the datasheet.



41%

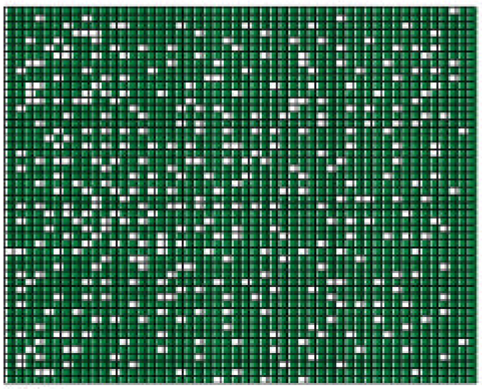
Figure 7.3 Forty-one percent of the squares are shaded. The squares are randomly located in the first diagram (a) and are grouped in the second (b). This represents an area that would be classified as 26-50% cover on the datasheet.

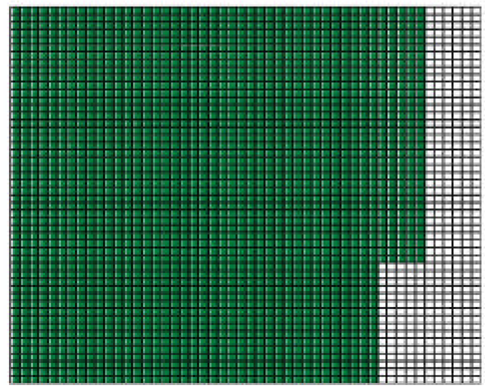




63%

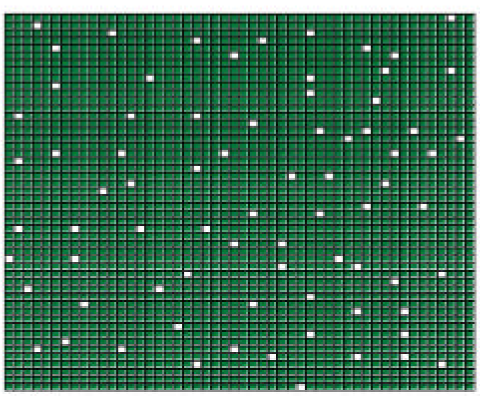
Figure 7.4 Sixty-three percent of the squares are shaded. The squares are randomly located in the first diagram (a) and are grouped in the second (b). This represents an area that would be classified as 51-75% cover on the datasheet.

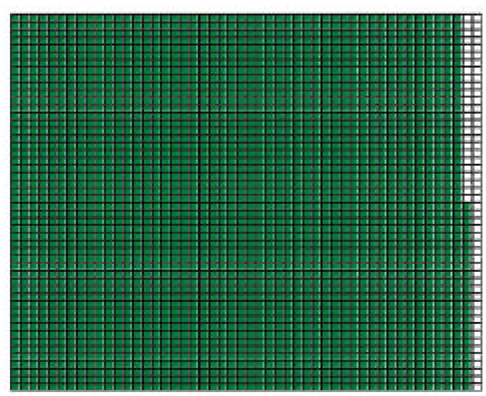




85%

Figure 7.5 Eighty-five percent of the squares are shaded. The squares are randomly located in the first diagram (a) and are grouped in the second (b). This represents an area that would be classified as >75% cover on the datasheet.





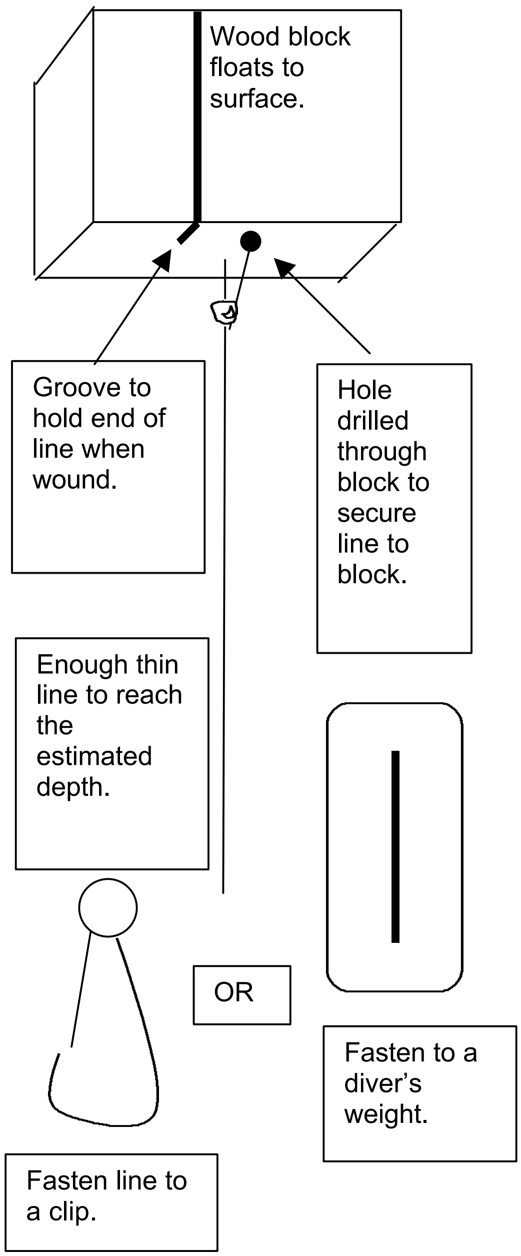
97%

Figure 7.6 Ninety-seven percent of the squares are shaded. The squares are randomly located in the first diagram (a) and are grouped in the second (b). This represents an area that would be classified as >75% cover on the datasheet.

Appendix 8 – Marker Floats

The following float design was developed by Sarah Verstegen of SeaChange to mark the perimeter of eelgrass beds.

If you need to mark the location of eelgrass under water so that you can find it from the surface, try these for short-term use. The line is wound around the block and notched into the groove. A diver can carry a few in a goody bag. When the diver finds a location to mark for people at the surface, she or he sets the marker weight on the bottom. (Clips work when there is something to fasten to.) Then, s/he un-notches the line from the groove. The line will unreel itself from the block as it floats to the surface. It helps divers avoid that nasty tangle of line when working under water.



Use either a 2 x 4 or 2 x 3 inch piece of lumber. It's easier to make notches in a long piece before it's cut into the smaller blocks. Plastic clips are ligher than lead weights and cheaper than brass.

1. Drill holes for line. Use a bit slightly larger than your line diameter.
2. Cut the grooves. Set your saw blade for the desired depth.
3. Cut each block from the length.
4. Paint blocks a bright color.
5. Number each one.
6. Thread line through hole and tie securely.
7. Wind line around block.
8. Tie end of line to chosen bottom piece.