

Voluntary Eelgrass Protection Zone Along Port Townsend Waterfront

The Jefferson County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) is implementing a pilot project that has both boating safety and environmental protection benefits. The *Voluntary Anchor-Free Eelgrass Protection Zone Project* is a boater education campaign that uses seasonal marker buoys to delineate the submerged eelgrass beds along Port Townsend’s downtown waterfront and informational signs, brochures and volunteers to inform & encourage boaters to voluntarily drop anchor outside that zone. The beautiful color illustration by local artist Cory Ench highlights the bounty & vitality of eelgrass habitat.

The aim of this project is twofold: 1) reduce the risk of dangerous and costly vessel groundings due to poor anchor holding in the loose sediments that could lead to boat damage and spills of fuel, oil and hydraulic fluids, and 2) reduce negative impacts to the nearshore ecosystem caused by anchors crushing and uprooting the eelgrass. Eelgrass in Puget Sound has been identified as Priority Habitat by the State of Washington with a “no net loss” management policy since herring, smelt, salmon, Dungeness crab, starry flounder and many other species depend on eelgrass meadows for refuge, feeding and reproduction. This voluntary stewardship approach avoids strict regulations and enforcement.

For further information, contact the MRC at 201 W. Patison, Port Hadlock, WA 98339 or 360/379-5610 or visit www.jefferson.wsu.edu/mrc.

