

# Protecting Our Eelgrass: An Update

The value of eelgrass in removing and storing carbon and as a habitat for finfish and shellfish is indisputable. The versatile plant is also an indicator of water quality. Its decline in Lake Tashmoo and Lagoon Pond has been used by the Massachusetts Estuary Project as a sign of diminishing water quality. In Tisbury, safeguarding eelgrass continues to be a controversial issue.

In May, our Board of Selectmen created an ad hoc Eelgrass Advisory Committee (EAC) to consider available literature, research, and maps on eelgrass to develop a plan for its protection in our ponds. Current TWI president, Gerry Hokanson, served as the committee's chair.

In August, the EAC made three key recommendations to the Selectmen. However, EAC members had differing opinions on what course of action the Selectmen should take:

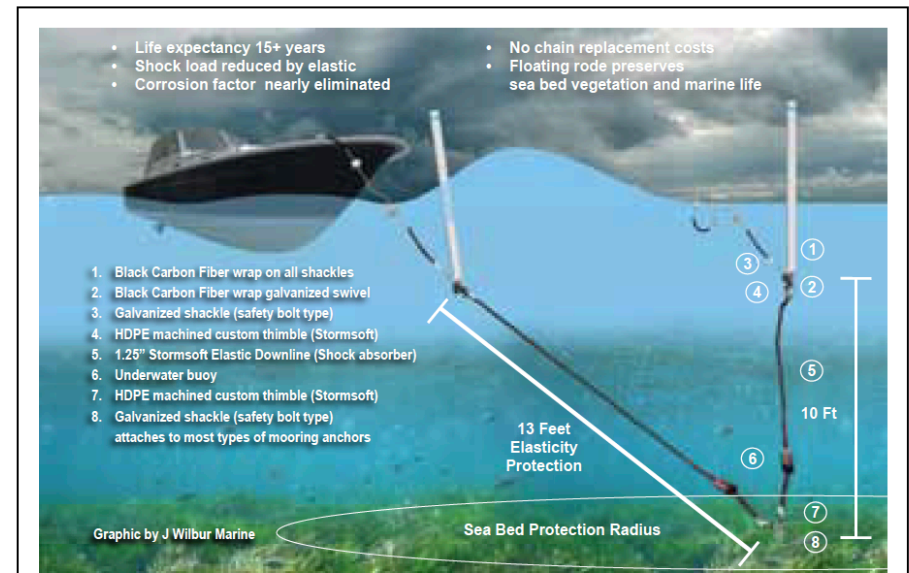
1. Local decline in eelgrass is due to a number of factors, the most troublesome being poor water quality and boating activities.

2. Conventional moorings that include tackle that drags the bottom scour away eelgrass and should be replaced with alternatives, such as conservation moorings that reduce or eliminate raking of the seabed. The Harbor Management Committee is currently developing a list of conservation moorings that they recommend. Contact the Harbormaster for more information. (Also, see box at right)

3. Dragging anchors from boats anchoring in eelgrass often rip eelgrass from the plant's habitat.

In September, the Board of Selectmen agreed to pursue a plan and timeline for the replacement of conventional moorings, working with the Harbormaster and Harbor Management Committee on the specifics of the plan. In

November the Board voted unanimously to ban anchoring in Lake Tashmoo and Lagoon Pond eelgrass areas as defined by the latest Massachusetts Ocean Resource Information System (MORIS) maps. In October, TWI applauded the Selectmen's passing of new town shellfish regulations that prohibit "drags with teeth, tines, rakes, scoops, fingers or any other extension, attachment, or device the (shellfish) constable finds harmful or damaging to eelgrass or any other benthic zone vegetation."



## How Conservation Moorings Can Help

Conservation moorings replace the heavy, dragging chain of conventional moorings harmful to eelgrass, often with an elastic mooring line that floats above fragile eelgrass beds. Former Tisbury Harbormaster Jay Wilbur offers one type of conservation mooring, the Stormsoft Elastic Mooring Rode (graphic). For more on the Stormsoft version, visit [jwilburmarine.com](http://jwilburmarine.com) or cruise the internet for other alternatives.