



ECOTONES “INK”

Focus on Eelgrass

June, 2009

What it is...

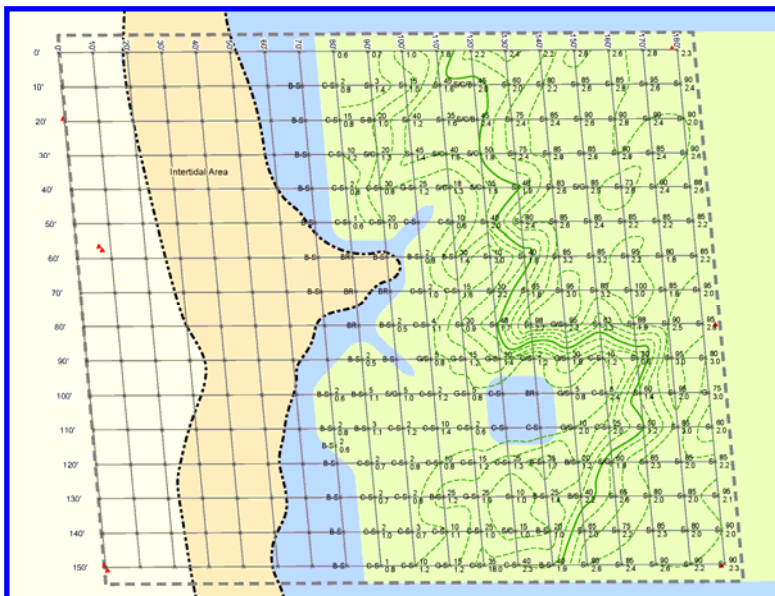
Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) is the most common Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) found in shallow New England coastal waters. Widgeon grass (*Ruppia maritima*) is also present, but is generally less abundant and typically limited to very shallow areas of coastal ponds. Unlike algae and other “seaweeds”, eelgrass and widgeon grass are rooted vascular flowering plants.

Why it's important...

SAV is important as a habitat for juvenile fisheries, bay scallops, and as a crucial food source for many waterfowl. It also performs nutrient cycling functions and reduces wave/current energy (reducing shoreline erosion). SAV is sensitive to physical disturbances, water quality, and light availability.

Regulations...

SAV habitats are primarily regulated in Rhode Island by the RI Coastal Resources Management Council, but are also considered during RIDEM Water Quality Certification reviews and the US Army Corps of Engineers permitting process. Several sections of the Coastal Resources Management Program, a.k.a. the “Redbook”, pertain to SAV. Docks, marinas, and any project involving subtidal work (dredging) may require a SAV assessment per CRMC regulations.



Requirements...

Recognizing the importance of these habitats, the CRMC requires evaluations of possible SAV habitat when subtidal work is proposed. Specific requirements for the evaluation, as outlined in CRMP Section 300.18, include a detailed assessment of the species present, percent coverage, estimated mean blade length, and substrate type. This information needs to be collected

every 10 feet throughout the project area. Some areas require a closer spaced sampling grid.



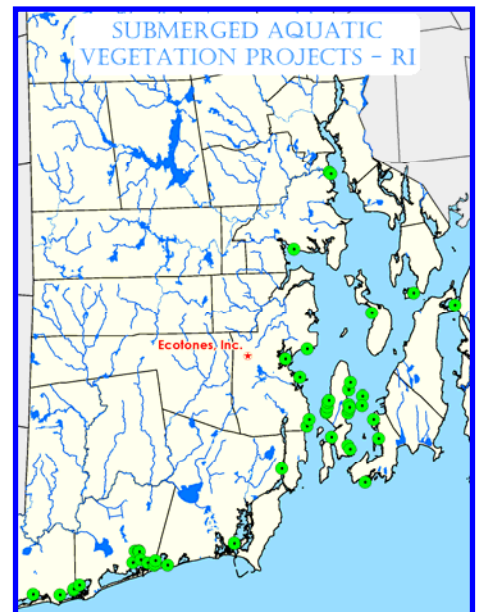
If SAV is present, it is often necessary to expand the evaluation area outside of the immediate project area to demonstrate that there are not other more suitable locations for the proposed work.

Ideally, SAV will not be disturbed directly (dredging), shaded by overlying construction (docks) or subjected to water quality degradation (turbidity/thermal impacts).

Services...

Ecotones, Inc. has performed numerous SAV evaluations throughout Rhode Island. Evaluations have included residential, commercial, industrial, and government properties and facilities related to proposed docks, dredging, and site remediation projects.

In addition to CRMC standard evaluations, Ecotones, Inc. has collected sediment samples and provided underwater photo/video documentation of SAV habitat conditions in and around SAV beds for numerous projects. Ecotones, Inc. has also prepared restoration/mitigation plans for the planting of new SAV habitats resulting from the unavoidable impact to existing habitats. Ecotones, Inc. staff have also volunteered time to harvest and plant eelgrass as part of Narragansett Bay wide restoration efforts.



More Information...

Ecotones, Inc. is ready to work with your engineer, surveyor, and construction contractor to assist with the regulatory requirements related to SAV habitats. Contact us to discuss the details of your project:

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