

Eelgrass

Essential Estuary Habitat

Eelgrass is a marine plant (seagrass) that forms large meadows in shallow waters. It is native to Oregon and was once widespread in our estuaries.

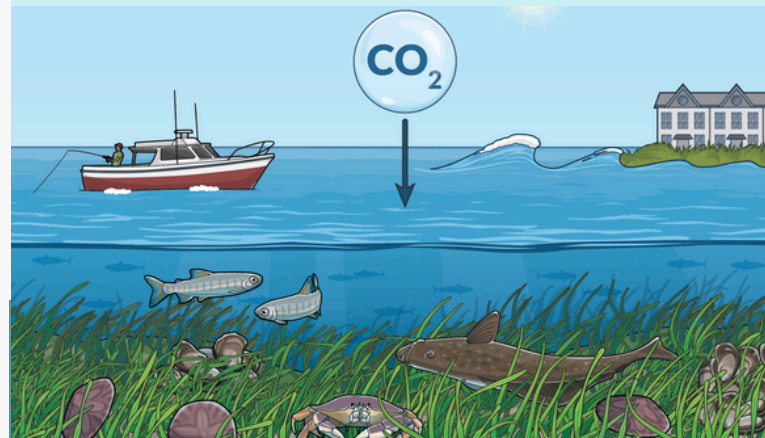
Priority Legislation: Eelgrass Action Bill, LC 3260

- Chiefly sponsored by Rep. Gomberg
- Develops a Task Force to recommend conservation targets for the State to adopt in 2028
- Mandates the State determine the current status of eelgrass meadows
- Identifies knowledge gaps and policy barriers to effective eelgrass management
- Coordinates among state agencies, Tribes, and stakeholders to address habitat loss and protection
- Fiscal: ~400k per biennium for 1.0 FTE position at DLCDD to facilitate and support task force



Why should we protect it?

- **Buffers ocean acidification:** Protects sensitive fish and shellfish from low pH conditions.
- **Natural climate solution:** Sequesters carbon, buffers against storm surges, and saves on mitigation costs.
- **Supports biodiversity:** Provides food and habitat for a variety of species, thereby supporting whole food webs.
- **Improves water clarity:** Filters and traps sediments and reduces harmful algal blooms.



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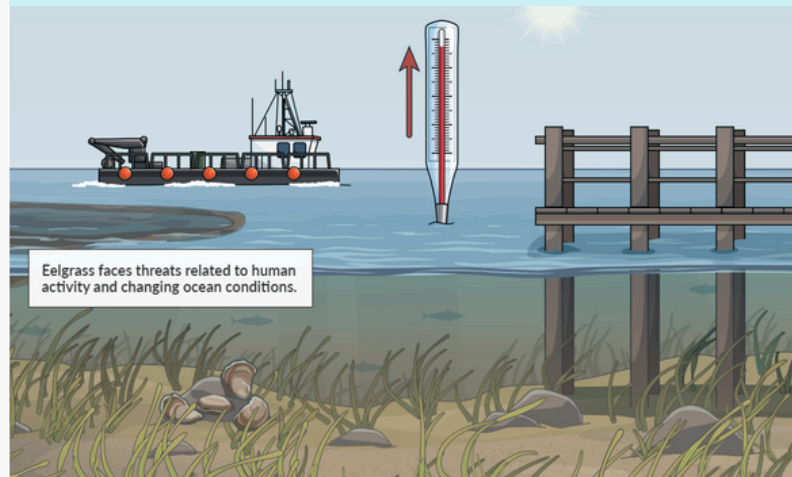
Why is eelgrass important?

- **Indicator of estuarine health:** Healthy eelgrass leads to healthy estuaries
- **Supports coastal economies and jobs:** Vital for fisheries, tourism, research, and aquaculture
- **Nursery habitat:** Crucial for juvenile salmon, Dungeness crab, rockfish, and herring
- **Cultural significance:** Sustains cultural practices for coastal Tribal Nations
- **Climate resilience:** Protects shoreline from storms and sequesters carbon

Graphics: Pew Charitable Trusts



The Eelgrass Action Bill is the first step for Oregon to develop a meaningful strategy for eelgrass conservation



Why isn't eelgrass thriving?

- **Degradation:** From pollution, dredging, sedimentation, fertilizer runoff, and some aquaculture practices.
- **Significant loss:** Oregon has lost 24% of estuary habitat since 1870, with severe declines of eelgrass in Coos Bay and Yaquina Bay in recent years.
- **Lack of monitoring:** Limited data on eelgrass means we don't know how much habitat we have lost in Oregon

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