

COASTAL CONCERNS:

FRINGING MARSHES AND EELGRASS BEDS

Fringing marshes, like the one seen on the north side of the T-wharf beach, are valuable components of estuaries despite their small size and narrow width. These small areas filter nutrients, provide habitat for fish and other wildlife, and help to stabilize and protect the shoreline by minimizing waves. Increasingly threatened by sea level rise, boat-generated waves, and shoreline development, efforts to conserve and restore this habitat are increasing. Please take care to not walk on these grasses when they are exposed at low tide.

Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) is an incredibly important habitat for many of Rhode Island's fish and shellfish species including crabs, flounder, and scallops; these species and many others seek protection and/or food from the thick grassbeds. Eelgrass is faced with many threats throughout the Bay including water pollution, damage from boat traffic, shoreline development, and wasting disease, which can wipe out large swaths of eelgrass in a short amount of time. The Reserve is assisting with a multi-year project aimed at mapping the distribution and extent of eelgrass beds; the information gathered will help us better understand, manage and protect this vital underwater habitat.

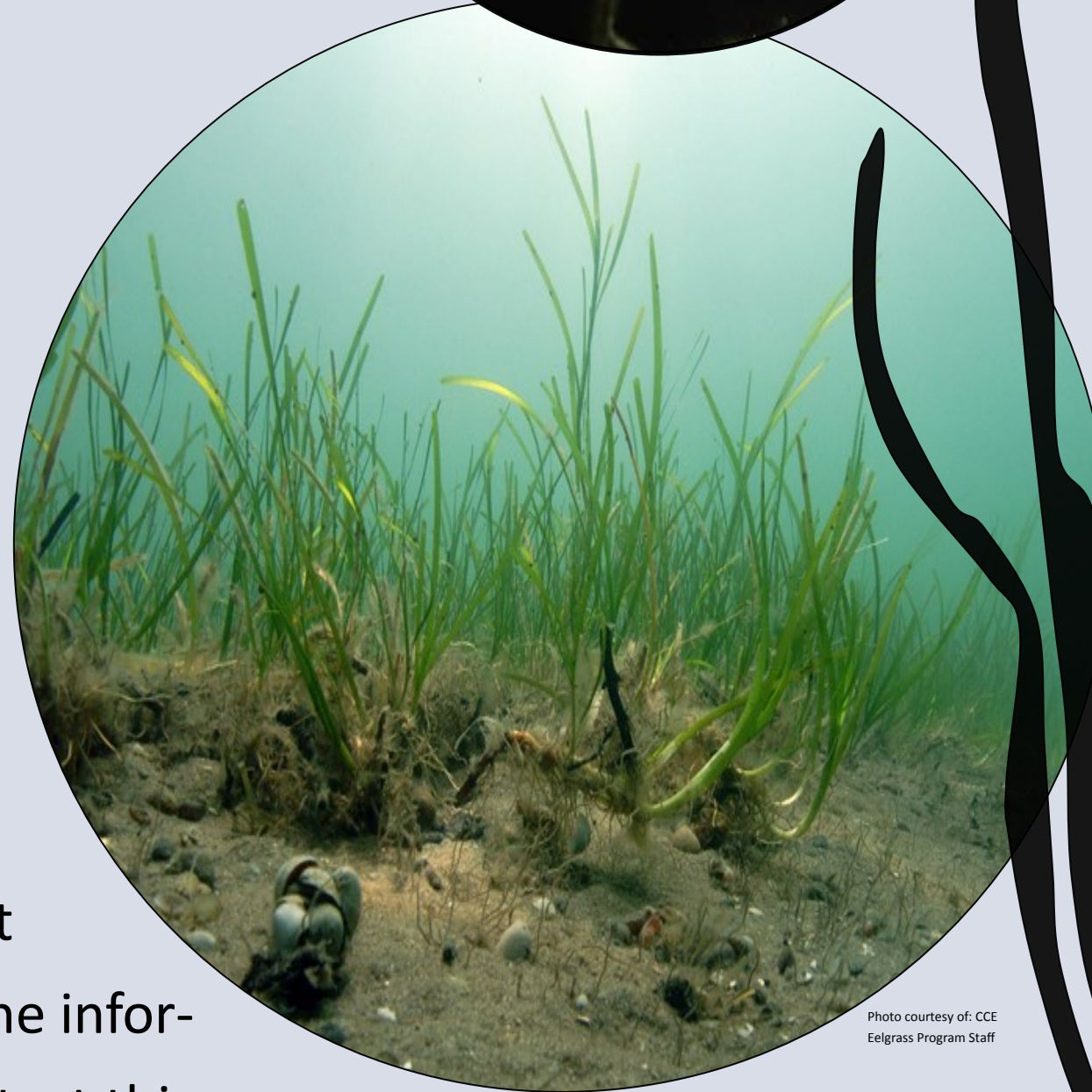


Photo courtesy of: CCE
Eelgrass Program Staff

