
T'aanu Telegram

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT EELGRASS CONSERVATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Issue No. 2
December 2003



Welcome to Our Second Issue!

Name That Newsletter Contest Winner!

The Grand Winner of our contest to name this newsletter about the eelgrass wonders of British Columbia is Kathy Dunster. T'aanu, she explains, is Haida for eelgrass!

Kathy has won membership to PERS: Pacific Estuarine Research Society, a non-profit organization "formed to bring together, for educational purposes, persons interested in estuarine and coastal issues."

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Eelgrass is almost a household name in BC, thanks to the efforts of the Seagrass Conservation Group and the twenty coastal stewardship groups mapping eelgrass along the BC coast. Over 5,000 hectares of this lovely plant have been mapped along the entire coast, from Haida Gwaii to Semiahmoo Bay. Members of the Seagrass Conservation Group (SCG) have written: *Methods for Mapping & Monitoring Eelgrass Habitat in BC* and *Eelgrass Mapping Review: Methods & Case Studies* (C. Durance), and *Review of Eelgrass Mapping Initiatives in Coastal BC* (K. Dunster). High quality eelgrass maps, museum

displays, videos, educational booklets and games are some of the results of the eelgrass project. Check out the *Community Mapping Network* website to download the manuals or view some of the maps: www.shim.bc.ca

The *Seagrass Conservation Group* continues to meet every four months (more or less). Members of the SCG include stewardship groups, government agencies, First Nations, universities, and local consultants. Our priorities are: outreach, mapping & monitoring, inventory and research.

If you would like more information, please contact Nikki Wright at seachange@shaw.ca

Eelgrass Festival Plans Underway

An **Eelgrass Festival** is being planned for April, 2004 in conjunction with the annual **Brant Wildlife Festival** in Parksville. Members from the Seagrass Conservation Group (You!) and twenty stewardship groups are invited to present achievements and convene to plan for the coming year.

Keep posted for more details as the plans unfold!
For more information about the Brant Festival see:

www.brantfestival.bc.ca



Celebrate Boundary Bay



Boundary Bay, Canada's top-rated Important Bird Area, is a major stop-over on the Pacific Flyway. Habitats support more than 320 species, some rare and endangered. Join us on weekends from January through May, 2004. Walks, talks, family activities, art and nature, night owling, dawn chorus and much more!

Birds on the Bay Opening

January 23- 25 • Crescent Beach

For Event Details call: 604-607-3700

check-out www.birdsonthebay.ca

A Friends of Semiahmoo Bay Society Initiative with Partners

Eelgrass Poster Campaign

In our continual search for new ways to raise the profile of our favorite plant, the SCG is looking for images of charismatic critters found in eelgrass habitats. The first poster that will be distributed far and wide will be of the Bay Pipefish (*Syngnathus leptorhynchus*):



Monterey Bay Aquarium

If you have images you would like to distribute in poster form to make eelgrass habitats more visible to the public, please send them on to: seachange@shaw.ca

♣ *New* ♣: “Ask Cynthia”

Dear Cynthia,

I am concerned that there is so much mucky brown stuff covering the eelgrass in my area. Is this going to kill it? Is this a sign of too many nutrients in the water?

Signed,
Distressed in Zosterville, B.C.

Dear *Distressed*,

The mucky brown stuff is actually an assortment of tiny plants; these are called ‘epiphytes’ since they live on the surface of other plants. The epiphytes add to the productivity of eelgrass habitat, and provide food for a wide range of animals. I’ve seen Dungeness crabs holding the leaves between their claws and scraping off the epiphytes; similar to way some people eat corn on the cob.

It is highly unlikely that the epiphytic growth will kill the plants. The eelgrass produces compounds known as polyphenols, which are chemicals that inhibit colonization by epiphytes when polyphenol concentrations are high. The concentrations are greatest in the spring when the plants are growing fast, then the production of polyphenols decreases and the epiphytes move in. Some researchers believe that epiphytes provide a natural sunscreen for the eelgrass, which actually benefits the plants.

This year we had extremely low tides, which coincided with clear sunny weather; it is likely that these factors combined to produce lush epiphytic growth earlier in the season than usual.

It is unlikely that the epiphytic growth that you observed is a sign of eutrophication. At a recent conference, Dr. Heck (University of South Alabama) suggested that over fishing of large predatory fish has led to an overpopulation of the smaller fish upon which the large fish feed. In turn these smaller fish are consuming a greater number of the grazers that historically keep the algal epiphytes from smothering the plants. Without the grazers, algal epiphytes are blanketing the Submerged Aquatic Vegetation, such as eelgrass.

In several experiments Heck has shown that grazing effects almost always explain more variance in algal abundance than nutrients. ‘Thus, reductions in eutrophication will not substantially benefit Submerged Aquatic Vegetation unless algal grazers are abundant.’

Sincerely,
Cynthia

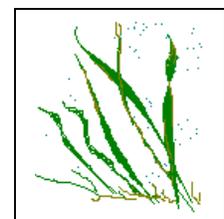
Do you have a burning question to ask Cynthia? Sent it on to us and we’ll make sure your curiosity is satiated.

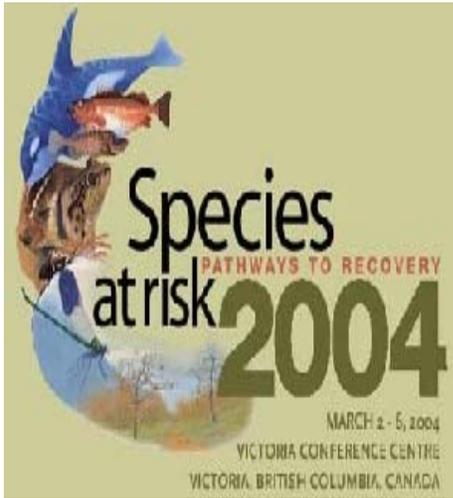
No question too small or too large to handle!

Send in your queries to:

Ask Cynthia

seachange@shaw.ca





Species At Risk 2004 is being organized as a forum for learning, training, and technology and knowledge transfer between scientists, managers, non-governmental organizations, policymakers, aboriginal peoples, industry, academia, students and other interested individuals in the recovery of species and ecosystems at risk. The conference will be held in the heart of one of Canada's most endangered habitats – the Garry Oak Ecosystem: **Victoria, March 2-6, 2004.**

The SCG will be presenting a display on eelgrass ecology and our accomplishments, pending approval of our poster proposal (Dec. 15th)

For more information: <http://www.speciesatrisk2004.ca>

Zostera japonica Update

We have found the introduced species of eelgrass (*Zostera japonica*) in Port Renfrew, Port Alberni, and Ucluelet. Sabina Leader-Mense submitted samples from Cortes, and Rod Palm has promised to send some from Tofino. The search continues and specimens will be submitted to the UBC Herbarium with credit to the collector.

Fresh samples can be mailed to Cynthia Durance in zip lock bags with a moist paper towel. If possible please try to collect at least 10 shoots with rhizomes attached. We have photos showing the difference in sheaths of *Zm* and *Zj* that we hope to have posted on the Community Mapping Network website soon.

In order for me to submit a reference collection to the herbarium, I will need the following information: date specimen was collected, location (as specific as possible), longitude and latitude, and name of the person who collected it. This information will be entered into a herbarium database to produce a label for the specimen, and may be used by scientists around the world who are studying the species.

Specimens should be sealed in zip lock bags with a damp paper towel and mailed to:

Cynthia Durance
Eelgrass Study
3622 West 3rd Avenue
Vancouver B.C. V6R 1L9

Please don't hesitate to call (604) 734-5048 or e-mail (preid@shaw.ca) me if you have questions.

We will report on new collections and range extensions in future newsletters.



Opinions from *Out of the Box* Possibilities for the Future of SCG

This space in the newsletter is dedicated to your thoughts on the future of the Seagrass Conservation Group. Where would you like the SCG to go? What would you like to contribute? What will the SCG look like in five years? Will we need to be around in ten years (always opportunities to transplant, I say!) Send your thoughts to seachange@shaw.ca and this newsletter can become your voices.

Update on recent work:

- ♣ A draft of a Five Year Strategy Plan for the SCG will be discussed during our Dec. 9th meeting. After that meeting, an amended draft will be sent to the list serve for feedback.
- ♣ Two proposals have been submitted for restoration of eelgrass habitats. The first proposal is a five year plan to survey potential sites in five estuaries in the Georgia Basin, and the second is a letter of inquiry for restoration of eelgrass beds in BC Parks areas impacted by log storage. Cross our fingers!
- ♣ The BC Coastal Eelgrass Stewardship Project just received notification that it received an EnviroFund Award of \$21,130 from Vancouver Savings Credit Union to support the endeavors of the project groups within the Georgia Strait. Let's celebrate! The project is fully funded for this year. We are always searching for ways to sustain it for future years.



Remember to send
your ideas.

Don't let the fish
catch your tongue!



