

## **PROMOTING ALTERNATIVE MOORING TECHNOLOGIES TO PROTECT EELGRASS HABITAT**

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The Cooperative Habitat Protection Partnerships initiative (CHPPs) emphasizes voluntary, community-based, fish-focused approaches to supplement regulatory activities and seeks to address threats before they become new sites in need of restoration. Eelgrass habitat is defined as "Essential Fish Habitat" under the provisions of the Magnuson Stevens Act because it is important habitat for a variety of fish and shellfish resources. Eelgrass is vulnerable to impacts from a wide range of anthropogenic effects, including boating. An area of concern is the use of traditional mooring tackle - typically a heavy anchor and chain assembly that can scour eelgrass beds during periods of low tide. NOAA Fisheries is partnering with the State of MA and local harbormasters to encourage the replacement of old tackle with new, helical-type anchors that avoid and minimize impacts to eelgrass. NOAA Fisheries and the State of MA have teamed up to promote the adoption of this new mooring technology by boaters. The partnership will carry out demonstration projects to alleviate concerns that the new technology may not be suitable for the Northeast climate, to demonstrate to the public and particularly boaters, the positive habitat benefits and to foster stewardship through the voluntary use of this gear. This presentation will discuss the installation of several of the new moorings in coastal embayments and harbors along the Massachusetts coast, the fishery habitat resources that will be protected, how the partnership will convey this message to the public through outreach as well as this unique collaboration.