



4.13 Boat Operations

Boats allow people to explore the backwaters of marshes, visit stretches of barrier beach miles from the nearest road, and reach rocky islands offshore. Many of these more remote places contain healthy marine habitats that provide feeding, breeding, and other required life functions. Improper use of boats in these areas can cause harm to these healthy habitats.

Destruction of eelgrass is an example of the damage some boats can cause. Eelgrass beds form in sandy areas of only a few feet of water at low tide. These beds are the nursing grounds for many species of fish. While the entire plant is covered completely by water for most of its life, it can only develop in clear, shallow waters where sunlight can penetrate and thereby allow for photosynthesis. The top part of the eelgrass plant floats on the water's surface at low tide and can often be seen by boaters who are cautiously navigating through shallow waters. At mid to high tide, however, the extended plant is stretched out in the water column to within a few feet of the surface, but is often not visible to boaters. Hidden just below the surface, eelgrass is at risk of being damaged by boats that travel through shallow coastal waters. Boat props can tear up eel grass beds and completely destroy the habitat by uprooting plants. This is of particular concern since potential eelgrass habitat has dramatically decreased statewide due to poor water quality and increased turbidity that has limited light penetration.

Salt marsh visibly forms the border between the land and the sea. At low tide, it is entirely exposed. At high tide, the upper parts of the salt marsh plants extend up above the water in the high marsh alerting boaters to its presence. Like eelgrass beds, salt marshes are important food and nutrient sources for fish and other marine animals. Careless driving of boats over salt marsh, particularly at mid to high tide, can cause damage to the marsh from the propeller. Additional damage is caused to salt marshes by boat wakes. Because salt marsh generally forms in low wave energy areas, such as protected bays and coves and behind barrier beaches, it has not evolved to withstand extended wave action. Regular boat traffic in a salt marsh will cause erosion, which can lead to sediment filling of boat channels and to extensive salt marsh destruction over time.

To keep your marina clean and reduce impacts to coastal waters, it is important to provide boaters with the right tools and information so they can do their part. To help boaters understand potential impacts of their boating behavior on marine habitats, distribute the boater fact sheet on this subject from the back inside pocket of this guide. The following boating tips are discussed in the fact sheet as part of the Clean Marina Philosophy.

Safety Courses

The following organizations, each certified by the U.S. Coast Guard for on-the-water training, offer state- and nationally-approved boating safety classes:

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary
(800) 848-3942, ex. 8309
www.uscgaux.org/-013

U.S. Power Squadrons
Locations throughout Massachusetts, including Hingham, Orleans, and Salem
(800) 336-2628
www.usps.org

New England Maritime
Hyannis, Massachusetts
(508) 790-3400
www.nemaritime.com

Boatwise
South Hampton, New Hampshire
(800) 698-7373
www.boatwiseclasses.com

Vineyard Maritime
Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts
(508) 693-7030
www.vineyardmaritime.com

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The following regulations apply to boating operations.

- Massachusetts Boat Operations Restrictions [MGL c. 90B, ss. 8-12 and 323 CMR 2.00 and 4.00].

Best Management Practices

Oftentimes, boaters may not know how their boat operations can degrade the marine habitats. By passing along the following tips to your customers, you can inform them about simple ways to protect the coastal environment that they enjoy.

- ▶ **Observe No Wake Zones:** In No Wake Zones, boat speed must be decreased to the point where the boat does not produce a wake (or waves). These zones are often located in boating channels where there is a significant amount of boat traffic, in areas where boats are docked and moored, and in salt marsh areas where wakes cause erosion which can lead to boat channel filling. Local enforcement officials monitor adherence to no wake laws and issue citations when the rules are not followed.
- ▷ **Promote Safe and Responsible Use of Boats:** Encourage all boat operators (including personal watercraft riders) at your marina to complete an approved boating safety course of training. Provide safety and legal handouts such as *The Massachusetts Boater's Guide* for easy reference.
- ▶ **Abide by Personal Watercraft Laws:** Make sure personal watercraft (PWC) riders know that regular operation of PWCs within 150 feet of shore is prohibited under Massachusetts State Law.
- ▷ **Avoid Boating in Shallow Waters:** Inform boaters about the environmental damage caused by boating in shallow waters, particularly to eelgrass. As described above, eelgrass is particularly at risk for damage by boat propellers because it grows in shallow waters. Local marine resource departments might consider posting signs informing boaters about sensitive areas.
- ▷ **Do Not Speed Near Salt Marsh:** Because salt marsh naturally forms in low energy environments away from wave action, it is particularly susceptible to boat waves. Regular boat waves will lead to erosion and destroy salt marsh.
- ▷ **Sell Four-Cycle Engines:** If your marina sells boat engines, sell the most advanced and cleanest four-cycle engines available. The newest engines are clean burning and fuel efficient, which saves money for fuel costs and keeps the air and water clean. These engines meet 2006 EPA standards.

Useful Contacts

1. Massachusetts Division of Environmental Law Enforcement (DFWELE)—
Call DFWELE at **(617) 727-3905** for information about boating rules and regulations.
2. State Boater Safety Courses—For further information regarding the Massachusetts’ recreational boating safety program contact the Safety Bureau at **(617) 727-8760**. Another source for boating safety information is BOAT/U.S. Foundation at **(800) 336-2628** or **www.state.ma.us/dfwele/dle/DLE_SAF.HTM**.
3. Recent changes in Massachusetts Boating Law are summarized at **www.state.ma.us/dfwele/dle/DLE_UPD.HTM**.

