



is a global seagrass monitoring program, now active with several sites in Belize. SeagrassNet scientifically monitors seagrass beds so that changes in their health and structure can be determined with accuracy over time. All data collected are sent to a website for display and analysis: www.SeagrassNet.org.

Besides finding new information on the status and trends of seagrass health, SeagrassNet is committed to the long-term protection of seagrasses. In Belize, SeagrassNet monitoring has shown that seagrasses near populated and rapidly developing areas of Belize do poorly, while seagrasses in more remote, pristine and protected areas, are still largely healthy.



Threats to seagrasses

- what we do on land
- decreases in water clarity
- fertilizers/pesticides entering the ocean
- nutrients entering the ocean
- sediments entering the ocean
- dredging and coastal development
- some boating and fishing activities
- aquaculture
- docks and piers

Protecting seagrasses

- reduce runoff
- avoid overboard discharge
- minimize dredging and filling
- use careful boating practices
- practice sustainable aquaculture
- build high narrow docks
- clean up coastal areas
- support Marine Protected Areas

Dr. Frederick T. Short
Director, SeagrassNet
University of New Hampshire
603-862-5134 phone
fred.short@unh.edu



NEW HAMPSHIRE
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION
AND TOM HAAS

OAK FOUNDATION



UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE



WORLD SEAGRASS ASSOCIATION

January 2006

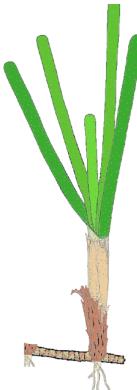
Belize

Seagrass
BELIZE

Seagrasses

- Underwater flowering plants
- Valuable coastal ecosystem
- Vast seagrass meadows in Belize
- Six species in Belize
- Nurseries, shelter and food for fish
- Manatees & sea turtles eat seagrass
- Recognize and protect them

Belize Seagrass



Turtle Grass

- Flat leaves 10-60cm long
- Food for sea turtles

(*Thalassia testudinum*)



Manatee Grass

- Leaves round
- Leaves 10-60 cm

(*Syringodium filiforme*)

Shoal Grass



- Leaves flat and thin
- Leaves 2-22 cm long

(*Halodule wrightii*)

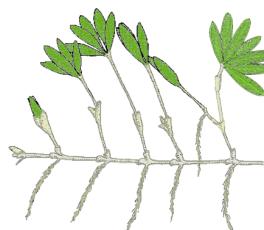
Paddle Grass



- Leaves 1-4 cm long
- Paddle-shaped leaves

(*Halophila decipiens*)

Star Grass



- 5-8 pointed leaves on a stem
- Leaves 2-5 cm long

(*Halophila engelmanni*)

Clover Grass



- 4-5 rounded leaves on a stem
- Leaves 2-3 cm long

(*Halophila baillonii*)

Seagrass functions and values

Seagrass contributes to a healthy coastal marine environment in Belize. Seagrass provides habitat for commercially and recreationally important fish and shellfish species. It is a nursery for young marine creatures. Manatee and sea turtles eat seagrass; so do some fish and birds. Seagrass filters the water of sediments and pollution. The seagrass root mat adds stability to the coastal zone, and seagrass leaves lessen the impact of wave energy on the shoreline. As dead seagrass breaks down, it becomes part of the coastal food chain.



Turtles and manatee



Sea turtles and manatees eat seagrass. In vast seagrass meadows, divers and snorkelers can observe "feeding trails" of manatee, where these sea mammals have plowed along the bottom, eating seagrass as they go. A healthy seagrass resource is essential to manatees and turtles in Belize.

Mangrove - seagrass - reef connection

Seagrasses, mangroves, and coral reefs form a three-part marine coastal ecosystem. Each part contributes to a healthy ocean. Mangroves filter the water coming off the land and create a stable shoreline. Seagrasses further filter runoff and are nursery areas for many of the fish that live in coral reefs as adults. Seagrass, as it dies and decomposes, provides a link in the food chain essential to coral reef animals. Coral reefs are productive areas of high biodiversity and beauty. Together, healthy seagrasses, mangroves, and coral reefs create a coastal resource for both fisheries and tourism essential to the people of Belize.

