

Seagrass Density



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Introduction

This protocol provides standardized data on seagrass percent cover, species composition, and shoot density using a common non-destructive method: the quadrat. Additional copies of this protocol, field datasheets, data entry templates, instructional videos, literature, and more can be found here: <https://marinegeo.github.io/modules/seagrass-density>.

Measured Parameters

This assay quantifies seagrass community structure, measured as:

- Percent cover of each seagrass and macroalgae species (in bins: 0-10%, 10-40%, 40-70%, 70-100% cover)
 - Macroinvertebrate abundance (number 0.25 m²) and approximate size (cm)
 - Grazing scars (present/absent)
 - Shoot density (number 0.0625 m²)
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Requirements

Personnel: 2 people

Estimated Total Time Per Location ($n = 3$ transects):

Preparation: 1 person x 1 day

Fieldwork: 2 people x 1 day

Post processing: None

Data processing: 1 person x 1 day

*Estimated times will vary by site and conditions

Replication: Twelve (12) quadrats taken along three (3) transects (total $n = 36$ per location)

Materials:

Survey Design:

- ☐ 1 50-m metric transect tape
- ☐ Hand-held GPS unit
- ☐ 2 PVC marker poles (diameter and length as needed)

Fieldwork:

- ☐ 1 50 cm-x-50 cm (0.25 m² quadrat (PVC or other material) divided in 4 equal 25cm x 25cm (0.0625 m²) quadrants (Fig. 1)
 - ☐ Pencil
 - ☐ Waterproof paper
 - ☐ Clipboard
 - ☐ *RECOMMENDED*: Waterproof camera
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Methods

Fully review this and any additional protocols necessary for the sampling excursion. Address any questions or concerns to marinegeo@si.edu before beginning this protocol.

Preparation:

1. Review the MarineGEO [Seagrass Habitats Survey Design](#) for site selection and setup. This protocol assumes $n = 12$ quadrats for percent cover taken every 4m and $n = 6$ shoot density counts taken every 8m along a 50-m transect, replicated along 3 separate transects.
2. Print field data sheets on waterproof paper. You will need at least 3 sheets, but having more available is useful.

Fieldwork:

1. At each predetermined point along the transect where the sample is to be collected, lay down the 50cm x 50cm quadrat immediately adjacent to the transect line. If visibility is too poor to perform a visual survey of percent cover, skip to step 7.
2. Estimate and record cover of the following in bins according to the Braun-Blanquet method (Table 1):
 - a. Each seagrass species;
 - b. Other sessile organisms (e.g., macroalgae, sponges, etc.). Be as specific as you can in identifying these organisms but do not guess if you are unsure (e.g., record 'red sponge' not 'Acarnus erithacus?');
 - c. Bare substratum. Note the type (e.g., sand, mud, mixed).

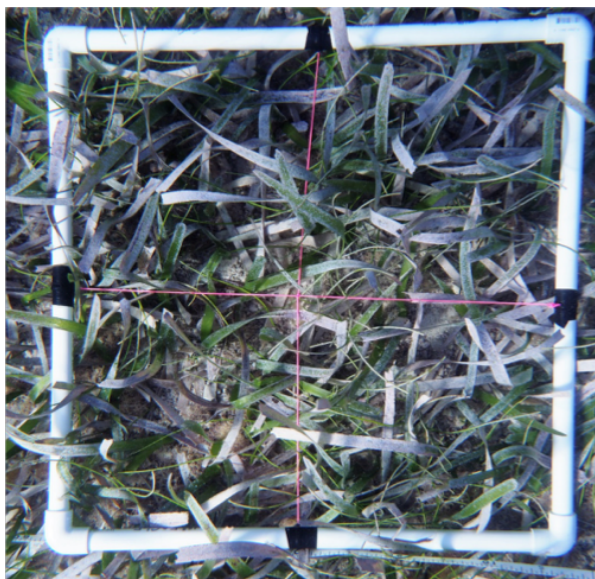


Figure 1: An example 1m x 1m PVC quadrat divided into four equal quadrats using string.

Table 1. Values of the Braun-Blanquet scale representing discrete percent cover bins.

Bin	Interpretation	Cover
0	Absent	0%
0.1	A single shoot	< 5%
0.5	A few shoots	< 5%
1	Some cover	5-25%
2	Moderate cover	25-50%
3	Majority cover	50-75%
4	Total or near total cover	75-100%

3. Record the presence and size of any large mobile benthic macroinvertebrates (>10 cm) that fall within the quadrat (e.g., gastropods, urchins, sea cucumbers).
4. Record the presence of any conspicuous grazing scars (e.g., turtle, manatee, parrotfish) within the quadrat.
5. Count and record the number of reproductive (i.e., flowering/fruiting) shoots in the lower right quadrant (25cm x 25cm).
6. In every other replicate, obtain a measurement of shoot density by counting and recording the number of seagrass shoots within the lower right quadrant (25cm x 25cm). If visibility is poor, shoot density can be obtained by touch.

7. If shoot densities cannot be assessed visually OR by touch, a biomass core can be used to destructively sample the bed and count shoot densities in the lab (see: Seagrass Biomass protocol).
8. Repeat steps 1-7 for each replicate on the first transect.
9. Repeat steps 1-8 for the remaining two transects.

¹Fourqurean, J. W., Willsie, A., Rose, C. D., & Rutten, L. M. (2001). Spatial and temporal pattern in seagrass community composition and productivity in south Florida. *Marine Biology*, 138(2), 341-354.

Data Submission

1. Scan the completed field data sheets and save both paper and electronic versions locally.
2. Enter data into provided data entry template.
3. Use our online submission portal to upload the Excel Spreadsheet (coming Fall 2019).
4. Contact us if you have any questions: marinegeo@si.edu.