

Low tide at a beach in Edmonds. Credit: Mariloutrias

8. Marine Vegetation

OBJECTIVE STATEMENT:

Protect and restore native marine vegetation by advancing priority research initiatives, expanding conservation areas, ensuring regulatory and program protection, piloting restoration projects, and supporting community connections.

DESIRED OUTCOMES BENEFITED:

1. Protect habitat and habitat-forming processes from conversion and fragmentation

4. Restore habitat and habitat-forming processes to support biological communities

9. Increase the resilience of the Puget Sound ecosystem (including habitats, water resources, species, and humans) and recovery efforts by adapting to extreme weather events and changing ocean conditions when conducting protection and restoration activities

VITAL SIGNS AND STATUTORY GOALS BENEFITED:

STATUTORY GOALS	HEALTHY HUMAN POPULATION	VIBRANT HUMAN QUALITY OF LIFE	THRIVING SPECIES & FOOD WEB	FUNCTIONING HABITAT	HEALTHY WATER QUALITY
VITAL SIGNS	Local Foods, Outdoor Activity	Cultural Wellbeing, Sound Stewardship	Forage Fish, Salmon, Groundfish and Benthic Invertebrates, Birds	Beaches and Marine Vegetation	

STRATEGIES

08.01. IMPLEMENT TARGETED RESEARCH AND MONITORING INITIATIVES TO UNDERSTAND CHANGES IN MARINE VEGETATION, WITH CONSIDERATION OF ECOLOGICAL AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS.

Actions for 2026-2030 include:

- 08.01.01. Increase capacity and sustained funding to research partners for long-term distribution and trends monitoring.
- 08.01.02. Expand understory kelp research capacity and initiatives to improve management approaches.
- 08.01.03. Leverage historical data and ongoing distribution monitoring to understand short- and long-term changes in marine vegetation.
- 08.01.04. Expand kelp and eelgrass stressor research to understand contributing factors, across all life stages, for observed regional and site-specific losses and expansion.
- 08.01.05. Conduct research to better understand and quantify ecosystem services provided by marine vegetation such as habitat for juvenile salmonids as well as human health and quality of life consideration.
- 08.01.06. Ensure Tribal and community science marine vegetation programs are well supported and coordinated. Integrate data from these programs into broader regional efforts.
- 08.01.07. Leverage existing work groups, coalitions, and partnerships to increase outreach and effectively share research and monitoring information to improve coordination, identify research gaps, and inform marine vegetation management.

08.02. EVALUATE AND IMPROVE IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING SHORELINE, NEARSHORE, WATER QUALITY, AND LAND USE REGULATIONS, PROGRAMS, AND POLICIES TO ENHANCE PROTECTIONS FOR MARINE VEGETATION.

Actions for 2026-2030 include:

- 08.02.01. Cultivate support and capacity for regulatory staff to implement marine vegetation regulatory, programmatic, and policy planning efforts.
- 08.02.02. Review regulatory and aquatic land management protections for marine vegetation to identify implementation barriers (e.g., issues around mitigation), competing uses, and compliance issues.
- 08.02.03. Address barriers to implementing and enforcing protective measures for marine vegetation in existing regulations and aquatic land management programs (e.g., Shoreline Master Programs and mooring buoy regulations).
- 08.02.04. Develop targeted outreach and training initiatives to inform planners and coastal decision makers about marine vegetation and related regulations, programs, and policies.
- 08.02.05. Increase collaboration and information sharing between researchers, regulators, Tribes, and planners to improve protections for kelp and eelgrass, such as those that incorporate potential future changes to nearshore habitats.

08.03. PROTECT MARINE VEGETATION IN EXISTING AND NEW RESERVES, REFUGES, AND PROTECTED AREAS THAT RESPECT TRIBAL TREATY AND SOVEREIGN RIGHTS.

Actions for 2026-2030 include:

- 08.03.01. Assess protective measures, historical distribution, stressors, and sites with ecological, social, economic, resilience, and cultural value to prioritize regions and sites for protection.
- 08.03.02. Engage Tribes, community-based organizations, the public, and partners in the development and implementation of marine vegetation priority areas for conservation.
- 08.03.03. Support place-based partnerships to develop and broaden outreach and behavior change strategies that improve the understanding of protected areas and stewardship of marine vegetation habitat.
- 08.03.04. Expand efforts to establish protected areas for marine vegetation at suitable sites, such as voluntary no-anchor zones, Aquatic Reserves, designated marine vegetation priority areas, and tideland easements and acquisitions.
- 08.03.05. Support long-term funding for the monitoring and adaptive management of protected areas to improve their effectiveness.

08.04. USE EFFECTIVE RESTORATION METHODS TO ACCELERATE RECOLONIZATION AND EXPANSION OF MARINE VEGETATION AT SITES SHOWN TO POSSESS SUITABLE ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL CONDITIONS.

Actions for 2026-2030 include:

- 08.04.01. Enhance understanding and evaluate site-based stressors, restoration suitability, and effective restoration methods to inform project planning, prioritization, and design.
- 08.04.02. Support and leverage existing work groups to increase sharing on restoration science and approaches to improve coordination, community engagement, and restoration success.
- 08.04.03. Expand restoration partners' capacity to advance approaches to marine vegetation restoration through continued pilots of restoration methods, sustaining effectiveness monitoring, and exploring public-private partnerships.
- 08.04.04. Improve awareness and coordination within the Puget Sound restoration community to better integrate marine vegetation restoration into holistic, ecosystem-based efforts that address large-scale issues of nearshore habitat connectivity and resilience.
- 08.04.05. Explore multi-beneficial projects and programs that advance recolonization and expansion of eelgrass and kelp while supporting a diverse array of ecosystem services, such as the removal of unauthorized, unnecessary, and/or derelict in- and over-water structures from marine vegetation habitat.

08.05. EXPAND AND PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP, LOCAL FOOD HARVEST, AND OUTDOOR RECREATION TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS WITH MARINE VEGETATION AND SUPPORT HUMAN HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE WHILE UPHOLDING AND HONORING TRIBAL TREATY AND SOVEREIGN RIGHTS.

Actions for 2026-2030 include:

- 08.05.01. Improve understanding of how Puget Sound residents connect with marine vegetation, as well as access barriers and benefits for known and potential communities.
- 08.05.02. Increase long-term funding and capacity support for Tribes to lead marine vegetation stewardship efforts in ways that uphold cultural values and support community health and quality of life.
- 08.05.03. Support communities in developing resources and programming, such as community science and place-based education efforts, to promote stewardship of marine vegetation across user groups and the Puget Sound region.
- 08.05.04. Identify and expand equitable opportunities to appropriately access marine vegetation habitats for sustainable, safe, and responsible harvest of local foods for personal use.
- 08.05.05. Promote sustainable access, quality of experience, and responsible practices for outdoor recreation in marine vegetation habitats.