Eelgrass

Zostera marina

Eelgrass is an essential habitat that provides food for wintering waterfowl and nursery areas for juvenile fish. Eelgrass, like the oyster, filters estuarine waters and removes nutrients and suspended sediments, thus improving water quality. Scientists are concerned that eelgrass habitat has declined in recent years.

Soft-shell Clam

Mya arenaria

Harvesting of soft-shell clams, commonly called steamers, is an important part of coastal New Hampshire culture. However, bacterial contamination from stormwater runoff or failed septic systems restricts clam harvesting. Prevention of water pollution will result in increased opportunities to harvest clams.

Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias

The great blue is the largest heron in New Hampshire estuaries, but most nest in communal rookeries found in forested wetlands. Protection of these wetlands is important to maintaining healthy populations of these majestic birds.

Gundalow

A gundalow is a working boat of the 1600s that transported lumber, coal, and salt marsh hay throughout the Great Bay Estuary. Today, the only floating gundalow, the Captain Edward H. Adams, is a platform for public education about the cultural and environmental significance of New Hampshire’s estuaries.

New Hampshire Estuaries

Estuaries are partially enclosed bodies of tidally influenced water between the freshwater of rivers and streams and the saltwater of the sea. New Hampshire’s two major estuaries are Great Bay and Hampton-Seabrook. These estuaries are uniquely productive and important natural, economic, and cultural resources.

River Herring

Alosa pseudoharengus (Alewife) and Alosa aestivalis (Blueback Herring)

River herring ascend coastal rivers from the Gulf of Maine each spring to freshwater spawning areas. They are an important food source for predatory fish, seals, and birds. Many organizations are working to improve fish migration by repairing fish ladders, restoring natural habitats, and enhancing water quality.

Common Tern

Sterna hirundo

Common terns nest on offshore islands such as Seavey and White Islands in the Isles of Shoals and travel to the Great Bay Estuary to feed on fish. Swift and agile in flight, terns frequently travel from their nesting areas to the estuaries where they dive into the water to catch fish.

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