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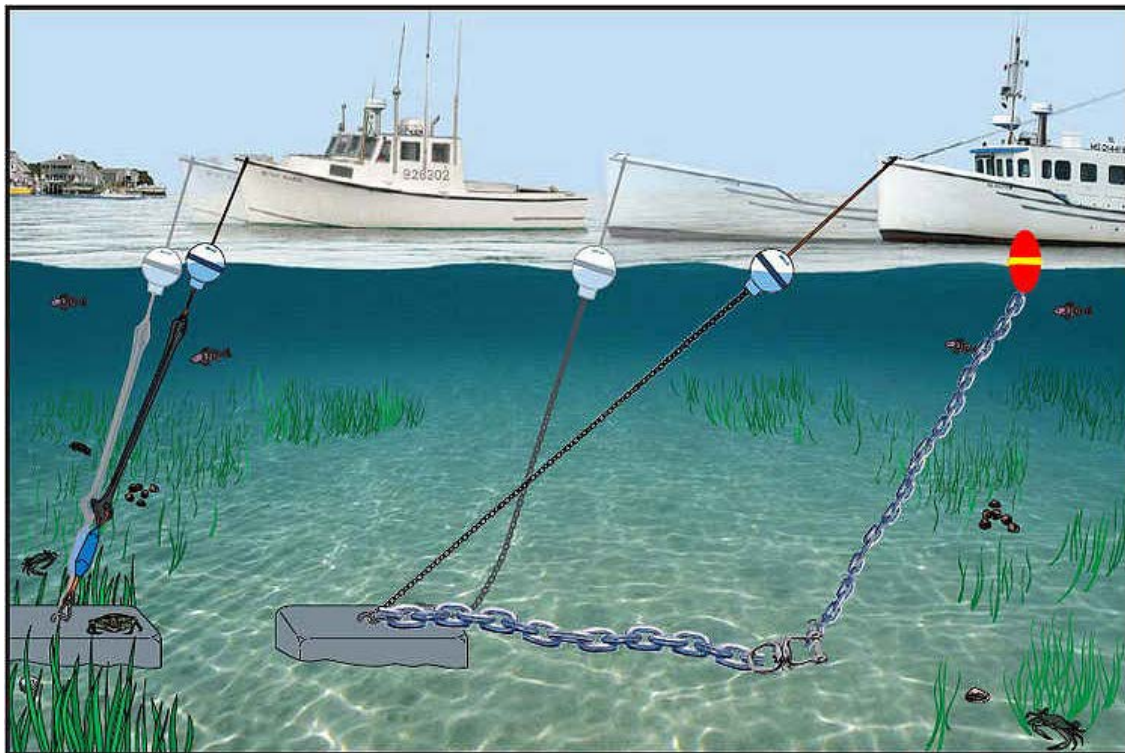
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## Coastal Fish Habitat Partnerships

Summer 2017 Newsletter



Conservation moorings (left) allow seagrass to thrive, whereas traditional moorings (right) create a halo of bare substrate. Photo credit:

<http://www.prodiveserv.com/marineservices.htm>.

## ACFHP Works to Restore Seagrass in

# Rhode Island Boatyards

Seagrass, a valuable spawning and nursery habitat for many fish and invertebrate species, is declining worldwide, and the waters around Rhode Island are no exception. In the 1930's, seagrasses in the area were infected with wasting disease (the slime mold *Labrynthula zosterae*), and had still not fully recovered 30 years later. Since then, there has been an additional 40% decline in seagrass bed area, leaving approximately 500 acres of seagrass (the species eelgrass, *Zostera marina*, in particular) in Narragansett Bay. Since much of the seafood New Englanders enjoy spends at least part of their life cycles in seagrass, attempts to conserve as much seagrass as possible have been ongoing.

Seagrass is vulnerable to a number of boating-related activities, including prop damage and the use of traditional chain moorings. When placed within or adjacent to seagrass beds, traditional chain moorings can drag on the bottom, severely damaging habitat through physical removal of seagrass shoots, causing a 'haloing' effect. Disturbance to the seafloor also suspends sediment, increasing turbidity and reducing water clarity. This diminishes the amount of light penetration critically important for eelgrass growth and survival.

To restore damaged seagrass and protect healthy beds, the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) worked with partners (including Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife, Jamestown Boat Yard, Conanicut Marine Services, Inc., Clarks Boat Yard, Aquidneck Mooring Company, and the Town of Jamestown Conservation Commission) to install four conservation boat moorings in three Jamestown, Rhode Island boat yards, replacing four traditional mooring systems. Conservation moorings use a buoyant bungee-like cord to minimize contact with the seafloor, thereby reducing physical damage to seagrass. Prior to installing the conservation moorings, the status of eelgrass habitat around each of the existing moorings was documented by divers on SCUBA. The moorings were installed in the summer of 2016, and preliminary monitoring for seagrass recovery has been positive.

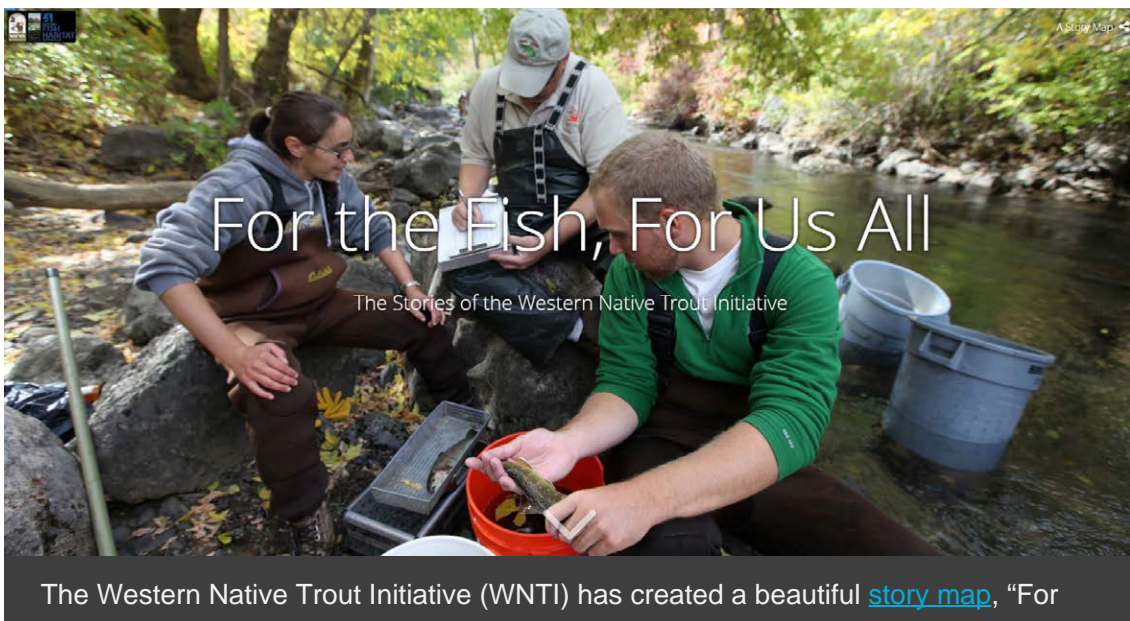
The National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration provided ACFHP with the funding for this proof-of-concept project, and results have already inspired at least one boat yard to replace all of their traditional moorings with this conservation technology. In addition to the restoration work, ACFHP created a sign for the Jamestown boardwalk, so the public can learn more about the benefits of seagrass and how ACFHP is working to restore this vital fish habitat.



Seagrass haloing caused by traditional moorings in Jamestown, Rhode Island. Photo by Chris Powell.



Hannah Swett and her daughter, Elle, read about the benefits of conservation moorings.  
Photo by Chris Powell.



The Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) has created a beautiful [story map](#), "For

the Fish, For Us All", to help us communicate about conservation work underway to conserve and protect native trout. WNTI's Story Map features five stories plus an Arc GIS-based projects map overlaid with the species' distributions. The five stories focus on Yellowstone Cutthroat, interior Redband Trout, Gila Trout, Coastal Cutthroat in Alaska and Bonneville CT. The StoryMap combines beautiful photos with historical and current background information on these trout, and additional content about the projects WNTI has funded. We also present overarching themes about iconic western water and landscapes, and common threats to the native trout: fish passage, catastrophic wildfire, decreasing water, human impacts, and competition from nonnative fish. Visit the Story Map and spend some time exploring – it is inspiring!



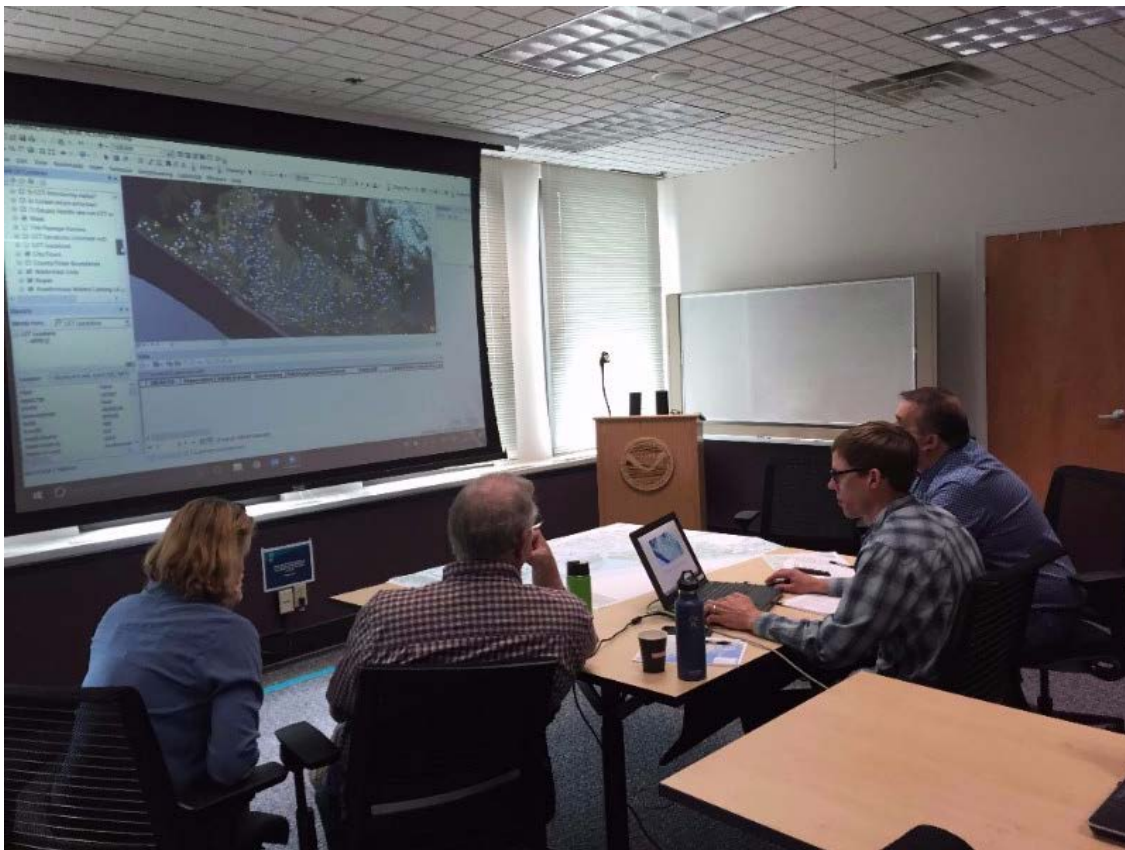
## Coastal Cutthroat Trout Rangewide Assessment for Southeast Alaska

The Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) and the Coastal Cutthroat Trout Interagency Committee (<http://www.coastalcutthroattrout.org/>) are in the process of conducting an assessment of Coastal Cutthroat Trout (CCT) throughout the subspecies' geographic range, including Alaska. The assessment includes regional workshops with knowledgeable local biologists from multiple agencies where data is captured using a GIS-based protocol. These workshops took place in southeast Alaska the week of April 24, 2017 in Juneau, Ketchikan, and Sitka. Synthesis of input is underway.

In general, the assessment focuses on gathering existing data from agency partners into a single GIS framework. Focus is on distribution, habitat quality, population health indicators, and limiting factors. The protocol includes professional judgement because CCT are often monitored incidentally. Because of this holding workshops with 15-20 experts per workshop is key to gathering an immense amount of information in a short timeframe.

Previously, a similar effort partnered with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to gather data as a foundation for this effort. Data from six states and four federal sources that were included in that effort are available to view in the final report located at [http://www.westernnativetrout.org/media/2011-funded-projects/final-report---wnti\\_alaska-cct\\_2013.pdf](http://www.westernnativetrout.org/media/2011-funded-projects/final-report---wnti_alaska-cct_2013.pdf). This recent effort is the second phase of the process. You can find updates including new information from the Alaska assessment on the interactive map here which displays the data that were geo-referenced: [Coastal Cutthroat Trout WebApp](#). A final report is expected towards the end of 2017.

For more information contact Kitty Griswold at [griskitt@isu.edu](mailto:griskitt@isu.edu).



## California Fish Passage Forum Supports Juvenile Salmon Fish Passage Criteria Assessment



Testing equipment. Photo credit: NMFS.

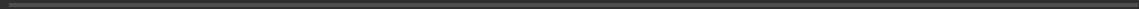
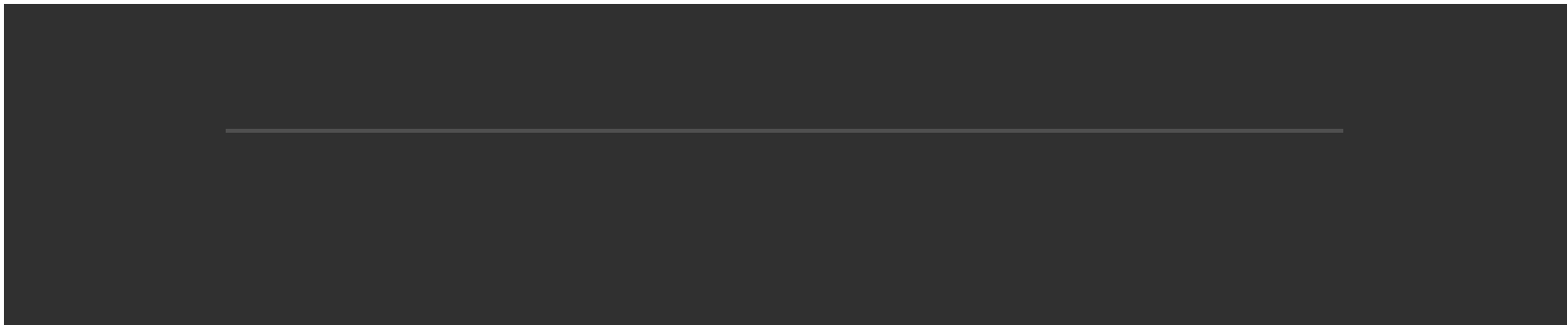
The Forum is supporting a project to inform National Marine Fisheries Service fish passage criteria in the West Coast Region to determine if the maximum jump height for boulder weirs can be raised to 12 inches without significantly negatively affecting fish passage.

The National Marine Fisheries Service currently requires a maximum 6-inch jump at fish passage project boulder weirs. Projects with smaller required jump heights require more boulder weirs added to the channel downstream of the culvert to compensate for the difference in grade. Projects built with 6-inch jumps are significantly more expensive than projects that require 12-inch jumps because more excavation and boulder weirs are required. In urban areas, some projects are not completed because of the lack of channel space to accommodate 12-inch jumps.

Michael Bowen, Chair of the California Fish Passage Forum, said that jump height requirements at new facilities are based on our best interpretation of the scientific literature regarding jumping ability. He noted, however, that "This interpretation may not always correspond to the abilities of juveniles or adults. Moreover, these standards are often difficult and costly to meet, and do not always match the surrounding grade of the streams where the facilities are installed." Bowen added, "We want to build the best projects possible as efficiently as possible, and hopefully this information will help guide both the regulatory and the restoration communities."

Knowledge gained from this assessment could increase operational and regulatory efficiency at dams and diversions, ultimately improving the timeliness and cost-effectiveness of fish passage restoration efforts.

The Forum supported acquisition of the acclimation and holding system, including a deeper tank with a chilled water loop, to perform the assessment, which will occur at the Don Clausen Fish Hatchery in Geyserville, California. The equipment was acquired in October of 2016, the system components were tested in February of 2017, and the jump test experiments began in May of 2017.



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