



SEAGRASS BEDS OF OUR BIG BEND – CONSERVATION IS THE KEY!

Our Apalachee Bay of the Gulf is one of the two of most *extensive seagrass beds* in **continental North America!** The depth at which seagrasses occur is limited by water clarity because most seagrass species require high levels of light. Did you know that seagrass beds help maintain clear water by trapping small pieces of sediment in the water column with their leaves? Just like your lawn, these grasses stabilize the bottom sediment area with their roots including their spreading subsoil root zones called rhizomes. Most importantly to sportsmen, these seagrass beds provide habitat and the food base for our marine ecosystems.

Consider these seagrass beds as meadows that protect young species of drums, sea bass, snappers and grunts from larger predators; additionally some animals, such as shrimp, urchins, starfish, scallop and conch call the meadows home for part of the year. Manatees and sea turtles take advantage of the seagrass meadows ingesting it directly as food. Bottlenose dolphins and a variety of wading and diving birds also use seagrass meadows as feeding grounds. Even the seagrass-based detritus formed by the microbial breakdown of leaves and roots is an important food source. Amazingly, one study found that one acre of a healthy seagrass meadow may support as many as 4,000 fish, and 50 million small invertebrates.

One way to help protect these valuable seagrass habits is to decrease or substantially reduce unnecessary impacts from boating activities. Vessels running in too shallow water, can cause prop scarring of seagrass beds which damage the beds and take an extensive amount of time to regrow, if ever. Also running the prop too deep lifts sediment into the water which further decreases the surrounding plants abilities to grow by decreasing available sunlight. For a healthy and sustainable fishery, we have to minimize and eliminate our impacts to our incredible sea grass meadows. Everyone should be aware that the overall loss of seagrass per year is accelerating! We cannot afford to continue to lose this habitat and the diversity of species that depend on the seagrass meadows for their survival. Conservation and preservation of this resource is paramount to the overall health of our coastal environments.

Do your best as a responsible angler to keep our resources sustainable for our future generations:

- Make it a point to get **familiar with the waters** and the locations of the vulnerable seagrass beds of the area before you leave the dock
- **Use current nautical charts** and ask a local from the area what to expect
- **Use marked channels** where they exist and stay in deep water while running
- If you are in doubt about the depth, make sure your **bow is down and your motors trimmed/tilted up**
- Know and continually check the **status of tides**; and especially in our area of the Big Bend watch for that north wind which can substantially reduce water depths
- When you are running, **keep an eye on your wake** and know where the deepest water is available to safely continue your adventure.

And support Coastal Conservation initiatives!

Fair Winds,

Capt. T.