

Monitoring Changes in Boater Behavior regarding Seagrass Conservation in Redfish Bay State Scientific Area, Texas

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Abstract: By the early 1990s, boat propeller scars were causing significant damage to seagrass beds in Redfish Bay, Texas. Efforts initiated by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to address the problem began in 2000 with the designation of Redfish Bay as a State Scientific Area (RBSSA). An education and outreach program was initiated and three voluntary no-prop zones were established. However, these efforts were largely unsuccessful. Public comments made to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission in 2005 indicated a strong desire by constituents to see a more effective education and outreach program in addition to any regulatory decree. In May 2006 a regulation went into effect which prohibited the destruction of seagrasses by boat propellers without precluding access to the area. In order to make user groups aware of the new regulation and the importance of seagrasses, an extensive outreach and education campaign began in January 2006. It included oral presentations to community groups including local elected officials, brochure development and distribution, newspaper and magazine articles, radio and television spots and website development. After two intensive years, nearly 8 million potential impressions have been made. In addition, large informational signs were placed at nine launch sites that surround the scientific area and many smaller signs were installed marking the boundary of the RBSSA. Before the regulation went into effect, a mail-out survey was sent to over 2,000 anglers intercepted previously at RBSSA boat ramps to assess their shallow-water boating practices and knowledge of seagrass habitat. An on-site survey of 625 boaters conducted post-regulation indicated the majority were informed about the regulation and had seen the signage.

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