

Wild Maine Rockweed: Environmental Hero

Rockweed, or *Ascophyllum nodosum*, creates a **vast underwater forest**, teeming with life at high tide along our rocky coast. At low tide, the forest rests flat on the shore and forms mounds of brown/olive seaweed draped on the rocks. At both high tide and low tide, **rockweed performs multiple critical ecological services** for our **climate**, for our **shoreline**, for **fish and shellfish species**, and for **Maine wildlife**.



Purple Sandpipers by B. Willson



Maine rockweed forest fish
high tide



Maine rockweed forest
low tide

Wild Maine Rockweed is an Environmental Hero



Wild Maine Rockweed supports Maine commercial fisheries

- Rockweed **eases intertidal temperature extremes**, protecting shellfish and other organisms from drying out in summer and freezing in winter¹.
- Rockweed provides **protection and food for commercial fisheries**: lobsters, juvenile cod, pollock, striped bass, eels, etc. Periwinkles² clams, scallops³.
- Rockweed beds are **essential fish habitat** for juvenile cod⁴ (NOAA).



Maine Atlantic silverside fish

Wild Maine Rockweed is critical habitat for Maine wildlife

- Rockweed beds serve as feeding habitat⁵ for at least **17 bird species**, including shorebirds, herons and seabirds.
- Rockweed beds are habitat for **species on Maine's SGCN⁶ (Species of Greatest Conservation Need)** list⁷.
- Rockweed beds are habitat for **seals, raccoons⁸ and otters**.



Maine otter by C. Lookabaugh

Wild Maine Rockweed protects Maine from climate change

- Intact rockweed forests, like the Amazon forest, are **champions at absorbing carbon**, more carbon even than eelgrass meadows⁹.

THEREFORE: We need to protect this vital marine forest. What can we do?

- **Legislators:** learn about the vital role that rockweed plays in the marine ecosystem, and about the ways rockweed cutting degrades fish and wildlife habitat. **Protect fisheries habitat.**

"... both Eelgrass and Rockweed have a very different canopy structure and complexity and utilize different bottom types that support unique species assemblages, meaning one habitat cannot replace another.

Therefore, protecting these marine macrophyte beds should be a management priority (Schmidt et al. 2011). "¹⁰

- **Everyone:** support your local coastal land trust and encourage them to review their conservation mission and develop policy that protects their rockweed forests.

- **Coastal Shore Property Owners:** protect rockweed habitat and **deny permission for cutting your rockweed**, share information about the rockweed industry and cutting impacts with your neighbors.

- **Students:** come up with creative ideas for **making media that get out the message about rockweed forest protection.**



Screenshot from animated film: "SOS: Save our Seaweed: Maine's rockweed forest at risk!" Lesley University student animator team, 2023



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Learn more and see references at mainerockweedcoalition.org
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