

From My Coast to Yours



Here is a photo of the rockweed forest on the coast of Maine where I live. It's not as dramatic as the bull kelp forests of the Pacific Northwest, but it's every bit as important to the nearshore marine ecosystem.

One big difference is that our forest is intertidal and has to withstand the daily stress of desiccation and inundation with the tides. Rockweed (*Ascophyllum nodosum*) is the dominant species and is threatened by commercial mechanical harvesting.

Rockweed here is perennial and grows very slowly at a rate of only seven to 10 centimeters per year—quite a difference from kelp that grows to full height in less than a year. It takes up to 10 years to restore the full forest canopy of rockweed from the 40-centimeter stumps required to be left after a harvest. The hundreds of different animal species that shelter and feed in the rockweed forest are left with a very different habitat!

Our beautiful and fascinating rockweed is a keystone species that is plentiful now, but without a significant conservation effort and with poorly regulated harvesting, fisheries that depend on this intertidal ecosystem will be at risk in the future.

—David Porter, cofounder of Blue Hill Peninsula Rockweed Forum