§ 13-0705. Departmental responsibilities.

1. The department shall designate seagrass management areas. Designation of such areas shall include consideration, on a geographic or estuarine basis, of likely threats to seagrass.

2. For each designated seagrass management area, the department shall develop and adopt a seagrass management plan to guide the development of rules and regulations pursuant to subdivision three of this section. Such plan shall be developed after consultation with local governments, representatives of recreational boating interests, the marine industries (including commercial and recreational shell fishermen, and commercial shell fish farmers), affected property owners, and other stakeholders, so as to effectively manage and protect seagrass beds and seagrass restoration efforts at those locations at which the restoration of seagrass is reasonably possible. Such plans shall, to the extent practicable, take into consideration, the goals of existing estuary programs. In addition, seagrass management plans shall seek to preserve traditional recreational activities, including recreational boating and marina operations, as well as finfishing, shellfishing and tourism while ensuring such activities do not threaten seagrass beds or negate seagrass restoration efforts.

3. The department shall have the authority to adopt rules and regulations to regulate coastal and marine activities that threaten seagrass beds or seagrass restoration efforts.

4. The department shall have the authority to restrict the use of mechanical-powered fishing or shellfishing gear which may directly impact seagrass beds, including churning, dredges, rakes and tongs.

5. The department shall identify water quality impacts such as nitrogen pollution and make recommendations on how to minimize such impacts.

6. The department shall make information concerning the importance of seagrass protection and the status of seagrass restoration efforts

available on the department website.