

## The Loss of Eelgrass Beds in Waquoit Bay

The most commonly observed change that has occurred in Waquoit Bay during the last several decades is the loss of eelgrass (see "The Ecology of Waquoit Bay", M. A. Geist, Ed.). In the 1960's, Curley et al. (1971) observed "an over abundance of eelgrass from excessive growth". Today there is almost none. The decline is attributed to multiple factors that are the consequence of the development of Cape Cod, which has progressed steadily during the period of eelgrass decline (Short and Burdick 1996).

Shown here is a mosaic of several digitally processed aerial images of Waquoit Bay, taken on April 27, 1950. The dark patches are eelgrass beds during a period when the grass was near its climax in abundance. It is clear that even with the expanse of eelgrass beds in the bay, there were also large tracts of open, sandy bottom. As a result, there was a variety of habitats for fish, shellfish, seabirds, and waterfowl.

Today the bay's bottom is thickly covered with several species of algae. Some of these were present in the bay in the 1950s and 1960s and likely are in the dark patches visible in the 1951 image. Since these pictures were taken, the eelgrass has disappeared and the algae have thrived. They carpet the bottom of the bay, even the open areas shown here. The variety in the habitats in Waquoit Bay has been lost.

