

Sea Palm

Status of Biological Knowledge

The sea palm, *Postelsia palmaeformis*, is a brown alga first described by Franz Joseph Ruprecht in 1852 from specimens collected near Bodega Bay, California. It is locally abundant in the upper to mid-tidal zones from Vancouver Island, British Columbia to Morro Bay, California but is restricted to rocks exposed to heavy surf. Although it is illegal to harvest this attractive kelp, some people collect it for souvenirs or to eat its tender blades.

Postelsia is an annual kelp, thriving in dense aggregations where its dispersal and recruitment are local and influenced by seasonal disturbance. Several studies have documented sea palm's relationship to its unique habitat – its tolerance of and dependence on heavy surf and its common association with the California mussel.

Status of the Beds

Although individuals can regenerate blades, they cannot survive if they are cut near the base of the stipe. All of these characteristics (restricted habitat, short life span, local dispersal, and limited powers of regeneration) signify a species that cannot tolerate heavy harvesting pressure. Although many stands of *Postelsia* are difficult to access, others are in or adjacent to recreational areas where they are at risk from human disturbance. Education of the public is the best defense for the conservation of this charismatic and ecologically interesting alga.

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Sea Palm,
*Postelsia
palmaeformis*
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