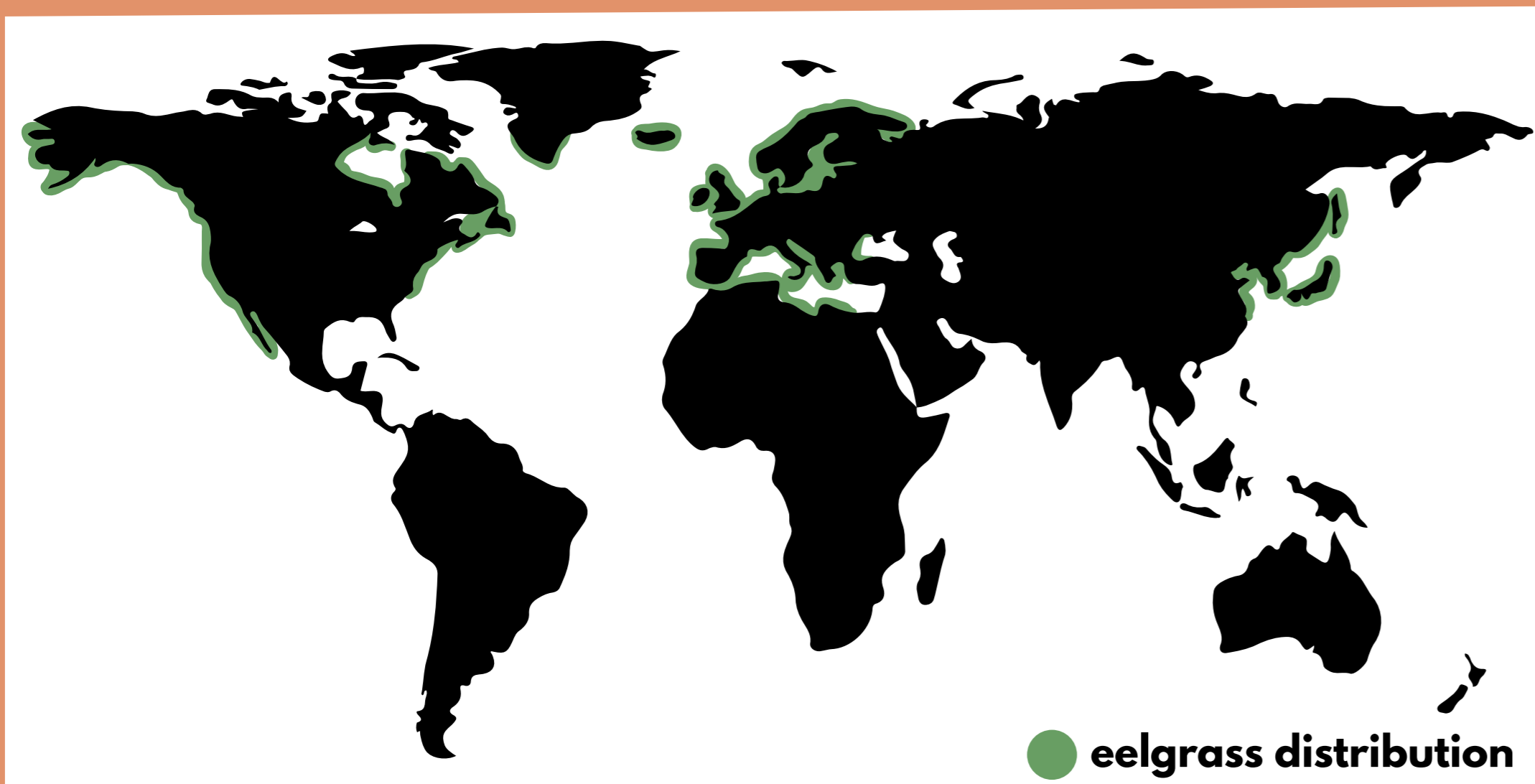
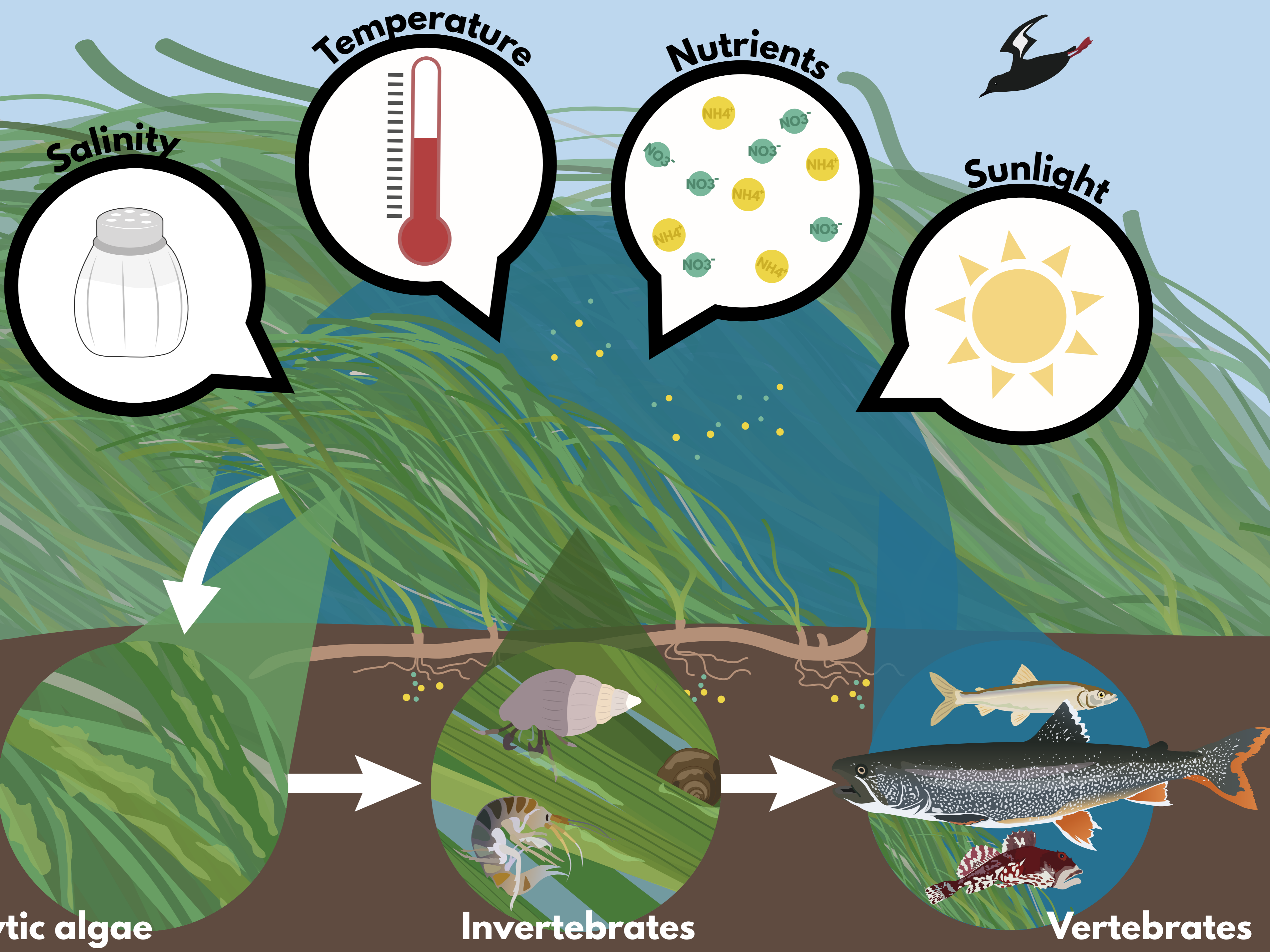


THE ECOLOGY OF EELGRASS



What influences eelgrass health?

Environmental factors like **temperature**, **salinity**, **nutrients**, and **light** are known to affect the size and condition of eelgrass. When these factors are just right, eelgrass can be large, with long thick leaves that are deep green in color. Eelgrass also depends on its neighbours to keep it healthy. **Epiphytic algae** grows on eelgrass leaves taking up some of the light and nutrients that eelgrass needs to grow, so it is important that **grazing invertebrates** are around to eat the algae, and keep it from getting too thick. If all of the algae is gone, that's not good either, so it is important that there are other **invertebrates** and **vertebrates** around to keep the grazer population in check. Other vertebrates, such as **geese** and **brant**, eat the eelgrass itself, but only if they can find it! We think eelgrass is easier to find when leaves are long, water is clear, and other animals are hunting for food in the bed.



Eelgrass, or *Zostera marina*, lives in coastal zones all over the world and can grow in all kinds of different habitats. However, just because eelgrass can survive under certain conditions in one place doesn't mean it can survive under those conditions everywhere. For example, some eelgrass beds are always underwater, while others are able to withstand being above the water when the tide goes out. The history of an eelgrass bed is important in determining what conditions it can survive in today.