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AMERICA'S DEEP SEA TREASURES: THE NORTHEAST CANYONS AND SEAMOUNTS MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT

Located about 130 miles southeast of Cape Cod and approximately the size of Connecticut, the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument is the first and only marine national monument off the continental United States.¹

The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument features three underwater canyons deeper than the Grand Canyon and four seamounts (extinct volcanoes) that rise higher than any mountain east of the Rockies. These dramatic ocean features, and the water column above them, provide a refuge for an array of marine life including endangered marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, and rare deep-sea corals. The monument was designated in 2016 to safeguard fragile and interconnected ocean ecosystems; improve ocean resilience to warming temperatures and other threats; and help sustain tourism, recreation, fishing, and other sectors of the New England economy that depend on abundant fish and wildlife.

This ocean park upholds our nation's proud tradition of preserving the best examples of its remarkable natural heritage and biological bounty using the Antiquities Act, a tradition that has been embraced by 17 presidents of both parties. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are currently preparing a monument management plan

and regulations, which are due by September 15, 2023, to safeguard the monument's unique ecosystem, marine life, and natural and historical resources.²

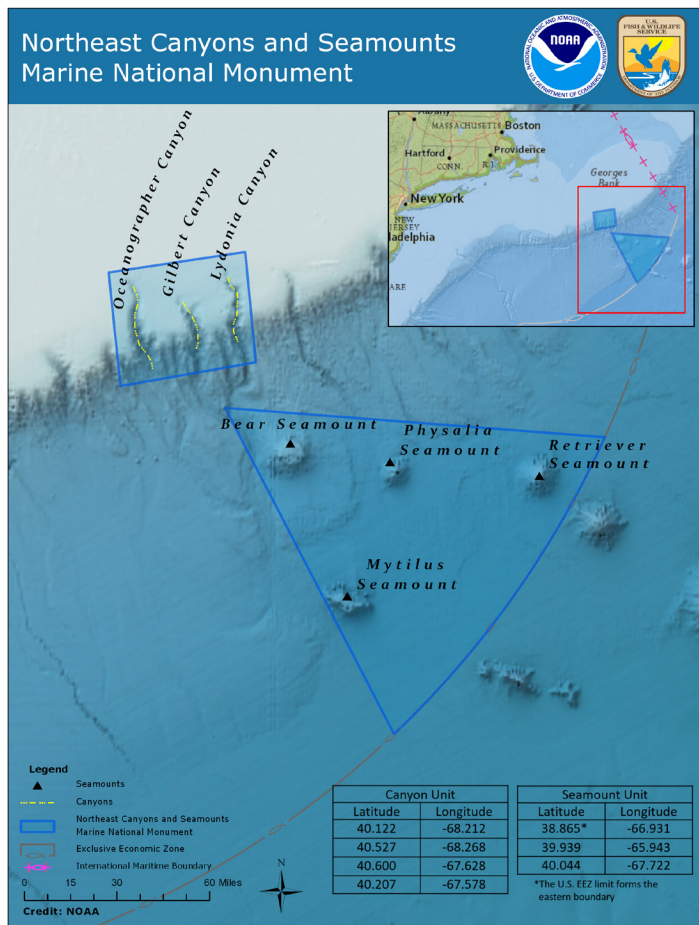
A BIODIVERSITY HOT SPOT

The monument encompasses a spectacular underwater seascape inhabited by an extraordinary diversity of life.³ On its cliffs and crags, colonies of vivid cold-water corals grow—some the size of small trees, centuries old, and as thick as forests. As many as 73 coral species have been identified in the monument area.⁴ These corals form the foundation for deep-sea communities, providing food, spawning habitat, and shelter for fish and invertebrates. The water column also teems with marine life, drawn to upwellings of nutrients and dense schools of small fish and squid. An exceptional diversity and abundance of marine mammals forage in the monument, including 15 whale and dolphin species.⁵ Seabirds like the iconic Atlantic puffin, sea turtles, and, of course, a multitude of fish species, including apex predators like sharks, tuna, and billfish, also thrive there.



AN ECOLOGICAL RARITY THAT REQUIRES SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

The monument's unique geologic and ecologic features make it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of increasing ocean industrialization. Many of its deep-sea species have very long recovery times and extremely low resilience. They are vulnerable to disturbance as technological advances enable human activity to venture deeper into the ocean. The 2016 designation protects the monument from industrial activities, such as offshore oil and gas and seabed mining, as well as commercial fishing (with the exception of a seven-year phaseout of lobster and red crab fishing that ends on September 15, 2023).⁶



AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE MONUMENT

Scientists have called for protection of at least 30 percent of the planet's ocean waters from harmful activities by 2030 ("30 by 30") to stem biodiversity loss and build resilience to climate change.⁷ President Biden committed the nation to this goal in his climate executive order and with the launch of the America the Beautiful initiative.⁸ The administration's 2023 *Ocean Climate Action Plan* reinforced the importance of "well-planned, -resourced and -managed" marine protected areas (MPAs) "and other conserved areas [to] provide a foundation for both local and national ecosystem conservation needs and promote healthy ocean ecosystems."⁹ The plan also acknowledged, consistent with a growing body of scientific evidence, that higher levels of protection increase MPAs' ecological and social benefits. Significant increases in marine life, for example, have occurred in strongly protected ocean areas.¹⁰

Though the Canyons and Seamounts encompass only about 1.5 percent of U.S. waters in the Atlantic, the designation of the monument has been, to date, the most important step taken in these waters toward achieving the "30 by 30" goal in a manner that will provide our ocean wildlife and coastal communities with the benefits and lasting protections they need.

UPHOLDING A PROUD TRADITION AND BENEFITING COMMUNITIES

Americans strongly support protecting and conserving public lands and waters. The monument designation was supported by hundreds of thousands of citizens as well as hundreds of federal, state, and local elected officials, scientists, businesses, faith leaders, aquariums, fishermen and fishing groups, whale watch operators, dive groups, and conservation organizations. The monument is a step toward an expanding national system of "blue parks" that simultaneously conserve biodiversity, support healthy ecosystems, bolster ecosystem resilience to climate change impacts, and provide opportunities for tourism, recreation, research, and education in truly unique seascapes. Through strong protections, sustained support, and sufficient funding, we can ensure that the incredible opportunities the monument offers for scientific research, education, and greater public understanding of the wonders of the deep sea are available now and for generations to come.

ENDNOTES

- For more detailed information about the monument, see U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument," accessed May 4, 2023, <https://www.fws.gov/national-monument/northeast-canyons-and-seamounts-marine>; and NOAA Fisheries, "Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument," accessed May 4, 2023, <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/habitat-conservation/northeast-canyons-and-seamounts-marine-national>.
- For more information about the management plan, see *Federal Register*, "Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument; Proposed Joint Monument Management Plan," December 28, 2022, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/12/28/2022-28203/northeast-canyons-and-seamounts-marine-national-monument-proposed-joint-monument-management-plan>.
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- Ibid.; Brooke C. Hodge et al., "Identifying Predictors of Species Diversity to Guide Designation of Marine Protected Areas," *Conservation Science and Practice* 4, no. 5 (May 2022): e12665, <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.12665>.
- For information on monument management and use restrictions, see NOAA Fisheries, "Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument Frequently Asked Questions," last updated March 14, 2022, <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/ecosystems/northeast-canyons-and-seamounts-marine-national-monument>.
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- The White House, "Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad," press release, January 27, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>; and The White House, "Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Celebrates Expansion of Locally-Led Conservation Efforts in First Year of 'America the Beautiful' Initiative," press release, December 20, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/20/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-celebrates-expansion-of-locally-led-conservation-efforts-in-first-year-of-america-the-beautiful-initiative/>.
- White House Ocean Policy Committee, *Ocean Climate Action Plan*, March 2023, 51, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Ocean-Climate-Action-Plan_Final.pdf.
- Sarah E. Lester et al., "Biological Effects Within No-Take Marine Reserves: A Global Synthesis," *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 384 (2009): 33-46, <https://doi.org/10.3354/meps08029>.

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