



Fan Corals in Oceanographer Canyon | NOAA Okeanos Explorer Program



Sperm Whale | New England Aquarium's Anderson Center for Ocean Life



Crinoid Sea Lilies | NOAA Okeanos Explorer Program

SUNKEN TREASURES OFF SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND'S COAST: THE NORTHEAST CANYONS AND SEAMOUNTS MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT



Squat lobster | NOAA Okeanos Explorer Program



Deep Discoverer on Retriever Seamount | NOAA Okeanos Explorer Program



An octopus stretches its tentacles on Physalia Seamount | NOAA Okeanos Explorer Program



Puffin | Jean-Jacques Boujot, Flickr CC BY-SA 2.0

About the size of Connecticut and roughly two hundred miles off its shores, the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument protects a spectacular underwater seascape inhabited by an extraordinary diversity of life, including endangered whales, sea turtles, seabirds, and ancient deep-sea corals. Described by scientists as a “Serengeti of the Sea,” the Monument was designated by President Obama in 2016 in order to conserve its unique and vulnerable ecology for scientific research and future generations of Americans. This ocean sanctuary is the first and only marine national monument off the continental United States.

Connecticut has a special and unique connection to the Canyons and Seamounts Monument. The state’s Congressional delegation was the first to propose the Monument to President Obama, with the support of a coalition of state political leaders, coastal businesses, recreational fishermen, religious leaders and organizations, aquariums, scientists, and conservation groups. Connecticut’s Mystic Aquarium, which hosts an exhibit about the Monument’s ecological riches, has been a leader in public education and outreach about the Monument. Specimens from the Monument area are housed at the Yale Peabody Museum. One of the wildlife species that the Monument is best known for, the sperm whale, is even Connecticut’s state animal.

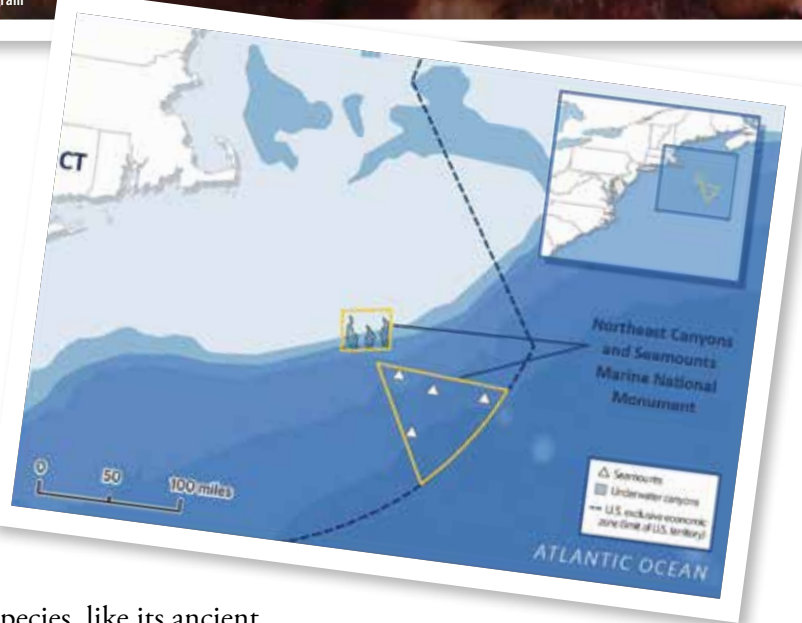
The Monument’s three largest canyons are deeper than the Grand Canyon and its seamounts are higher than any peak east of the Rockies. The Monument’s cliffs and crags are home to dozens of species of vivid cold-water corals—some reaching the size of small trees and dating back to the Middle Ages. These coral communities form the foundation of deep-sea ecosystems, providing food, spawning habitat, and shelter for fish and invertebrates. The waters above the canyons and seamounts teem with marine life, drawn to upwellings of nutrients and dense schools of small fish and squid. Whales, dolphins, seabirds, sharks, tuna and other predators come to the Monument to feast on this bounty. A September 2018 aerial survey of the Monument observed more than 600 whales and dolphins, including rarely-seen beaked whales that can dive nearly two miles deep and hold their breath for over two hours, in less than four hours.¹ Many mother-calf pairs



Red coral in Lydonia Canyon | NOAA Okeanos Explorer Program

have been seen in the Monument, demonstrating its value as a marine mammal nursery.²

Commercial extractive activities, such as offshore oil and gas activities, seabed mining, and commercial fishing, are not permitted in the Monument. It therefore serves as a sanctuary that safeguards fragile and interconnected ocean ecosystems, builds resilience to threats like warming temperatures and ocean acidification, and helps to sustain tourism, recreation, fishing, and other sectors of New England's economy that depend on abundant fish and wildlife. Scientists have called for 30 percent of the planet's oceans to be protected from extractive activities by 2030 to safeguard ocean ecosystem health and resilience.³ Many of the Monument's deep-sea species, like its ancient



and fragile corals, have particularly long recovery times and low resilience. Such marine life is increasingly vulnerable to disturbance as technological advances enable human activity to venture deeper and deeper into the ocean.

The Monument's deep-sea environment remains a source of scientific discovery. A 2018 scientific expedition found two new species of fragile deep-sea corals in the Monument.⁴ Future expeditions are almost certain to yield more new marine life, new natural phenomena, or even cures to diseases (deep sea sponges like those found in the Monument have produced cancer medicines). The Monument is an ideal place to study how climate change is affecting our oceans.

The Trump Administration has targeted the Monument, as well as other protected natural treasures around the country, for rollback. The Interior Department has recommended that commercial fishing be allowed in the Monument, despite its ecological fragility and the fishing industry's absence of need: post-designation landings and dockside revenues in the relevant fisheries (for squid, mackerel, butterfish, swordfish and tuna) have remained at or above levels before designation.⁵

AMERICA HAS A PROUD TRADITION OF PRESERVING THE BEST EXAMPLES OF THE COUNTRY'S NATURAL HERITAGE AND BIOLOGICAL BOUNTY. THESE PROTECTED CANYONS AND SEAMOUNTS—A BLUE PARK—UPHOLD THAT GREAT TRADITION IN CONNECTICUT'S OCEANIC BACKYARD.

¹ E. Quintana, "Biodiversity Abounds in the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument," Anderson Cabot Center For Ocean Life - Field Work (blog), September 12, 2018, <https://www.andersoncabotcenterforoceanlife.org/blog/september-aerial-survey-canyons-and-seamounts/>.

² New England Aquarium, "Aerial Team Conducts Survey in Northeast Canyons Marine National Monument," Anderson Cabot Center For Ocean Life - Field Work (blog), November 16, 2017, <https://www.andersoncabotcenterforoceanlife.org/blog/aerial-team-conducts-survey-northeast-canyons-marine-national-monument/>.

³ E. Dinerstein et al., "A Global Deal For Nature: Guiding Principles, Milestones, and Targets," Science Advances 5, no. 4 (April 2019): eaaw2869, <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aaw2869>.

⁴ K. Pierre-Louis, "'Dr. Seuss's Garden' Yields a Deep-Sea Discovery, but It Already Faces Threats," The New York Times, April 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/09/climate/coral-atlantic-warming.html>.

⁵ B. Sewell, "New England Ocean Monument Has Not Harmed Commercial Fishing," NRDC Expert Blogs (blog), July 25, 2018, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/brad-sewell/new-england-ocean-monument-has-not-harmed-commercial-fishing>.