

Draft Sign On Pending

October 26, 2023

Submitted via regulations.gov

Brittany Petersen
Marine Monument Superintendent
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035

Re: Comments on U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Draft Monument Management Plan for the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument (FWS-R5-NWRS-2023-0154-0001)

Dear Superintendent Petersen:

On behalf of the **X** undersigned organizations and others from the State of Connecticut, we submit these comments to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) regarding the Draft Management Plan for the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument.¹ The development of the draft plan demonstrates the continued commitment of the Biden-Harris Administration to secure the Monument's extraordinary biodiversity and cultural resources and advance the goal to conserve and restore at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.

The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National Monument was established in 2016 and stands to this day as the first and only Marine National Monument in U.S. Atlantic Waters. Situated approximately 130 miles off Cape Cod, the area was designated in the interest of preserving the unique ecological resources found within its boundaries, including its fragile, yet dynamic underwater landscape and stunning array of rare and threatened marine species. The Canyons and Seamounts are a genuine biodiversity hotspot, supporting a multitude of marine species including ancient corals, bottlenose dolphins and endangered sperm whales. The area plays a critical role in bolstering marine wildlife populations in the northeast region, including humpback whales, rare seabirds, and loggerhead sea turtles.

The Canyons and Seamounts also work to fight climate change and its impacts on ocean ecosystems. One of the single most important actions the U.S. can take to combat climate change impacts on our oceans (in addition to aggressively reducing greenhouse gas emissions) is to

¹ See U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, *Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument Draft Management Plan and Environmental Assessment*, (Sept. 12, 2023), <https://www.fws.gov/media/northeast-canyons-and-seamounts-marine-national-monument-draft-management-plan-and>

increase resiliency of our marine ecosystems. This can be accomplished by protecting substantial areas of ocean habitat where marine life can thrive. The Canyons and Seamounts are the only protected area of their kind in U.S. Atlantic waters.

While this letter's signatories each work in different ways to protect and restore Connecticut's environment, we all share the strong view that the ocean is critical not only to our shared ecological health but to our common cultural heritage. The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National Monument fits squarely in this vision and bolsters these values. The Monument has overwhelming public support, including in the State of Connecticut. The State's federal elected leaders including U.S. Senators Richard Blumenthal and Chris Murphy, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro and other members of the Connecticut delegation were integral in the effort to establish the monument and have continued since to support its protection and management, and to advance monitoring and research initiatives. Connecticut's research institutions and aquariums have also been on the forefront of scientific research in the Monument since even before its designation.

A strong management plan that ensures this underwater treasure is effectively safeguarded is vital. Such a plan should call for effective regulatory, monitoring and enforcement regimes; robust scientific programs, including for inventorying Monument resources and impacts, and for exploration and research; regular reporting to the public; periodic review and updating of the plan; and strong and inclusive public education and outreach activities that include engagement opportunities for underserved communities. Each of these essential components should be detailed in the plan.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Draft Management Plan and urge that it be finalized as soon as possible.

Sincerely,