



Laminarian Kelp

FACT SHEET

NEW ENGLAND'S OCEAN TREASURES

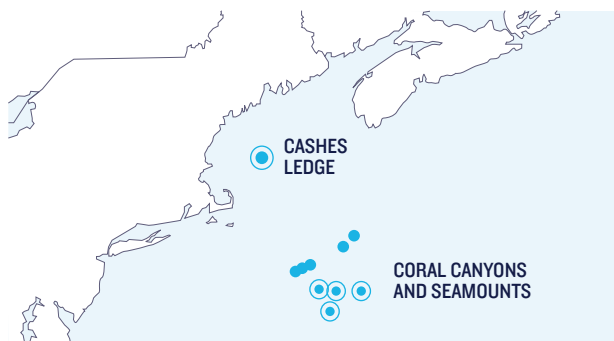
PERMANENT PROTECTION FOR NEW ENGLAND'S OFFSHORE TREASURES

Two of the nation's most spectacular ocean areas lie off New England shores: Cashes Ledge and the New England Coral Canyons and Seamounts. The two areas serve as vital refuges for a stunning diversity of ocean wildlife and habitats, including delicate and ancient coldwater coral gardens, vast kelp forests, whales, dolphins, sea turtles, seabirds, and fish. The health of these areas is also important to the tourism, recreation, and other sectors of the New England economy that depend on abundant fish and wildlife. Although largely pristine currently, the Canyons and Seamounts area and Cashes Ledge are highly vulnerable to long-term harm from commercial fishing, oil and gas exploration, and other resource extraction activities. Hundreds of thousands of scientists, educators, business owners, boaters, surfers, beachgoers, and members of faith-based organizations—together with the region's leading aquaria and conservation organizations, representing millions more people—support permanent protection of these areas. We have an historic opportunity to forever protect these unique biodiversity hot spots.

WHY PERMANENT PROTECTION?

A combination of partial fishing restrictions and natural protective features has kept these special ocean places remarkably free from human disturbance to date. But the push to fish, drill, and mine in more and more places puts these fragile habitats at risk. Permanent protection of these offshore marine jewels from all commercial extractive activity will preserve them as thriving biodiversity hot spots and living marine laboratories for years to come. Such protection can also build resilience against the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.

America has a long tradition of protecting our remarkable natural heritage and biological bounty. In contrast to our public lands and the Pacific Ocean, where very large areas have been protected, no fully-protected areas from commercial extraction exist in the U.S. Atlantic. Now is the time to right the balance, and safeguard these marine treasures to avoid irreversible damage to remarkable ecosystems.

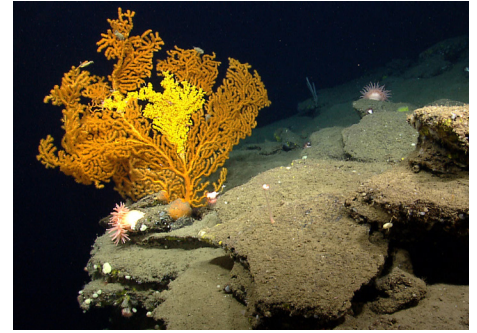




Sea Stars



North Atlantic Right Whales



Paramuriceid Deep Sea Coral

CASHES LEDGE CLOSED AREA

The Cashes Ledge Area, located in the Gulf of Maine about 80 miles southeast of Portland, Maine, is a unique underwater mountain range with a virtual treasure trove of marine life living among its peaks and valleys. The steep ridge rises from basins hundreds of feet deep to a ledge that comes within 40 feet of the surface. The ledge's peak, known as Ammen Rock, punctures the ocean current. This results in a unique environment where nutrient- and oxygen-rich water mix, resulting in ideal conditions for marine life. Along the peaks and ridges of Ammen Rock grows the deepest and largest cold-water kelp forest on the Atlantic seaboard. This lush kelp provides superb habitat and serves as a food source for the vast array of ocean wildlife.

The diverse seafloor habitat of Cashes Ledge ranges from the rocky outcroppings of Ammen Rock to deep nutrient-enriched mud basins, to the fertile plateaus of Fippennies Ledge to the west. The diverse habitats of Cashes Ledge provide a place of refuge and restoration for iconic New England fish such as cod and pollock and rare species like the Atlantic wolffish. Migrating schools of bluefin tuna, sea turtles, blue and basking sharks are common at Cashes Ledge. Cashes Ledge is a regular seasonal habitat for a variety of whales and is located at the southwestern edge of the likely winter breeding ground for the highly endangered North Atlantic right whale.

Cashes Ledge is important not only to marine life but also to scientists hoping to learn about the health and function of New England's oceans—many scientists believe that Cashes Ledge represents the best remaining example of an undisturbed Gulf of Maine ecosystem. As a result, scientists have used Cashes Ledge as an underwater laboratory for decades.



Atlantic Cod



Squat Lobster on Coral



Octopus

NEW ENGLAND CORAL CANYONS AND SEAMOUNTS AREA

Approximately 150 miles southeast of Cape Cod, where the continental shelf drops into the pitch-black abyss of the deep Atlantic Ocean, five massive undersea canyons plunge thousands of feet, some deeper than the Grand Canyon. Just beyond these canyons, four underwater mountains (or “seamounts”)—the only ones in U.S. Atlantic waters—rise as high as 7,000 feet above the ocean floor, higher than any mountain east of the Rockies.

The walls of the canyons (Oceanographer, Gilbert, Lydonia, Nygren, and Heezen) and the slopes and summits of the seamounts (Bear, Physalia, Mytilus, and Retriever) are alive with vivid cold-water corals of otherworldly beauty—some the size of small trees and taking centuries to grow. These coral communities form the foundation of deep-sea ecosystems, providing food, spawning habitat, and shelter for an array of fish and invertebrate species.

The waters above the canyons and seamounts teem with diverse marine life. More than 320 marine species have been identified in the region's canyons and another 630 on the seamounts, with additional species discovered and described with each exploration. Upwellings of deep, cold water bring nutrients to plankton and schools of squid and forage fish, like mackerel. This concentration, in turn, attracts tunas, billfish, sharks, seabirds, and marine mammals, such as endangered sperm whales and the North Atlantic right whale, the rarest of the North Atlantic's great baleen whales.

In recent years, research expeditions to these ocean oases have uncovered new and rare species, yielded new understandings about ecological relationships and the biological diversity in the canyons and on the seamounts, and fueled new appreciation of the uniqueness of these deep-sea ecosystems.