

FWS Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument

Public Meeting Transcript | October 18, 2023

Attendees: 11

Jessica Miller 0:03

Okay, so I know that Miquela wrote on the back of your numbers, exactly what number you are, but I think first, I'm happy to take comments just in in line. And so, I asked that, you know, if you do have number one and you do want to make a comment, please head up to the mic. And then you can offer your comment for the recording and for the transcript. These or any kind of comments about the management plan or anything you'd like to add and make sure that the team hears. we're asking everybody to please take three minutes or less if you can. I'm not really that concerned. We're not a giant group. So, I don't think that's going to be an issue. But if you do see, see me say like, one more minute, you know, means please wrap it up if you can. So, I'll be standing over here and, and waiting to do that if I need to. Does anyone have any questions about the process for doing this or anything else before we start? No. Okay, so, anyone? I guess one through three, does anyone have a comment? Yeah, okay.

Dianna Schulte 1:12

Are we recording? Yeah.

Grace Reville 1:14

Yeah, thank you. And thank you to the co-managers for the opportunity today and for all the hard work that you guys have done. My name is Grace Reville, and in my professional life, I am a marine conservation practitioner, but I'm here today in my personal capacity because the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument is a special place that's near and dear to my heart. Growing up in New England I've spent much of my life near or in the Atlantic Ocean. I fished with my dad off the coast of Rhode Island and Cape Cod. I studied marine ecology as a student and thing. And I've explored shipwrecks scuba diving Long Island Sound, which was kind of scary. All eight of my great grandparents also emigrated across the ocean from Ireland in early 1900s to Southern New England. And in 2016, I was fortunate enough as a student to go to the announcement with Senator Rudolph for the designation of this National Marine Monument. I have a deep connection to these waters, and it gives me great pride to have a Marine National Monument in our backyard. Protecting these vulnerable marine ecosystems and the life that they support with a high level of protection also makes for a meaningful contribution towards conservation of at least 30% of our nation's waters by 2030. I commend the Biden Harris administration's continued commitment to supporting this Marine National Monument and its protections, and knowing that a management plan is essential to realize the full benefits afforded by the protections in the proclamation, I'd like to urge the finalization of the management plan happen as soon

as possible to ensure that this special place is actually protected and thrives for generations to come. I'd also like to express my support for the inclusion of an exploration research plan and would like to see this research inform management to advance conservation outcomes in the Monument. I'd also like to express my support for the plans commitment to engage our brothers and sisters from Native American communities, as well as the emphasis on outreach and education, particularly for those with historically limited access to nature and outdoor spaces. Lastly, I'd like to urge the final management plan include an effective monitoring and enforcement program to ensure that compliance is consistent with the proclamation including requiring AIS and VMS to be engaged on all vessels at all times transit, transiting through or operating in the monument. And I'd also like to encourage the agencies consider improving the proposed permitting program for the activities permitted within the monument through the implementation of a joint agency access permit, so much of the permits that we've seen in other Monuments, that would allow for us to better track and understand the uses of the monument consistently. And thank you for your time.

Jessica Miller 3:47

Thanks for your comments. Anyone else from one through three, come up and make it and please do state your name when you start.

Joseph Gordon 3:55

Sure. And I practiced, so I'll be close to three minutes. [laughs] My name is Joseph Gordon, and I'm here on behalf of the National Ocean Protection coalition. I'll call up Alex, who I switched with here, will be covering different areas of the plan, so we're splitting it up. Our coalition includes more than 15 organizations, many of whom are here, and played a pivotal role in the original designation of the monument. And, and its restoration of protections by President Biden. So, we commend the Biden administration's continued demonstrated commitment to secure the monuments extraordinary biodiversity and cultural resources and to advance the goal of protecting and conserving 30% of US lands and waters by 2030. We urge the completion and finalization of this management plan as soon as possible, certainly by spring of next year, to ensure that this national treasure is protected and thrives for generations to come. I want to begin by taking a broader view of the monument. The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Monument is one of the most spectacular biodiversity hotspots in the world. If you imagine the water taken away, you'd see the crossroads of some of Earth's most greatest wildlife migrations, including whales and puffins, and millions of fish and krill all crisscrossing in their global travel on epic journeys and spanning continents in the world's ocean, supporting coastal ecosystems and communities along the way. Below, like an old growth forest at the base of the Grand Canyon, and near gigantic volcanic mountains are these fragile NewSQL communities some 1000s of years old, with connections to biodiversity from the surface to the bottom of the ocean, we're only beginning to understand. Others we'll cover the recent expeditions but the most recent one by the New England Aquarium, found over 700 ocean animals including fin whales, pilot whales, bottlenose, striped, and rizo dolphins, as well as Chilean Devil Rays, manta rays, sunfish and hammerhead shark and that's just the tip of the iceberg of the biodiversity that's below. That's why that richness of biodiversity is why systemic management is so important. And it's from the base to the volcano from the sea floor to the

surface. And that's why it's different from fisheries management, which focuses on a few species across their entire range. This areas in this management plan is consistent with that vision, and the original presidential proclamation so thank you for that. There are a few areas of improvement. And I'll add that human activity has been growing even in the remote Atlantic and these places, whether it's vessel traffic or fishing, and these areas, and these species are facing the impacts of climate change. So we really appreciate present both Presidents Obama and Biden, for the foresight to protect it now for future generations. Just want to add on because I listened in on one of the prior hearings. This is the culmination - and it's exciting for me because I was a part of it - of over seven years of process. The public has been very engaged in various agents. For example, between May and July 2017, there were over 200,000 members of the public who signed letters, 30 CEOs and business leaders, 62, business owners, managers, restaurants, kayak shops, whale watching businesses, organizations, 65, leaders from the faith community 119, recreational fishermen and 21 aquariums. I think it's important to just remember that, because there are many stages, and maybe they aren't at this particular stage. But everything that this plan can do it is the culmination and is the is consistent with what they asked, and what the President asked for. So, we really appreciate that. And the only part that I think will be part- we'll be part of a coalition signing a letter that have detailed recommendations. But the one I wanted to focus on which Grace also just mentioned and was discussed earlier, is monitoring enforcement. And so, the requirement to turn on VMS, or ideally AIS for the vessels that have it and to understand what's happening within the monument is so essential to ultimately managing it. And so, we look forward to talking with you and we're working to try and figure out the best solution to achieve that. Thank you.

Jessica Miller 8:14

I didn't time that, but I'm feeling really generous. [laughs] Thank you for your comment. Anyone else in one through three? Sure, go ahead.

Dianna Schulte 8:31

Hello, everyone. My name is Dianna Schulte. I am the Co-Founder and Director of Research at Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation, based right here in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. I just want to start by thanking all of you who are integral in really the creation of the draft management plan for the Northeast Canyons Seamounts Marine National Monuments. It is beautiful area from what I've seen in online videos, and from what I've heard from reports as well. My colleagues and I at the Blue Ocean Society are supportive of the designation of the Canyons and Seamounts as a national monument and look forward to new protections in this area. This is an important habitat due to it's unique bathymetric features, benthic habitat, and wide variety of marine life. Only a part of this is what we know so far more survey work in monitoring of the area needs to be done, to realize it's full potential. And for example, just yesterday, there was a NOAA aerial survey that documented the area just adjacent to the monument. And they found an endangered blue whale, 42 endangered fin whales and, 20 humpback whales that live in the moment it was pretty much right next door. See, so really the area overall was steep drop offs and tall integrals creates upwelling currents that make for more productive habitats, and also a variety of marine species that can live there. Knowing more about what lives there now is going to be important the future management. As we all know that climate change is real, and it is here. At the

Blue Ocean Society, we've been collecting data on marine life species, primarily whales and dolphins, but also ocean sunfish, basking sharks, tuna and seals since 1996. We work with commercial whale watching vessels that visit the Jeffrey's Ledge area, which is about 20 miles offshore coast right over here. And in that time, I've seen changes in the use of the habitat via marine life and our data that we collect do reflect that drastically, for example, fin whales used to be the most commonly cited species of the large whale in that area and now they're very rare to find. Pilot whales used to visit our area in the late summer and fall. We haven't seen pilot whales in over a decade. Humpback whales, we're seeing about on half of our trips back in those earlier days. And now we've seen almost every single trip, which is great for whale watching [laughs]. But also, whales can be seen more offshore than they were 25 years ago, so things do change and getting accurate, complete, baseline data will be important for future management. Education and outreach is also critical parts of managing any national monument, whether that be on land or at sea, and disadvantaged communities deserve to know about these unique habitats and marine life that's out there. At the Blue Ocean Society, we give dozens of presentations to school children each year, some living near the coast and others inland. It always surprises me to travel even 30 minutes inland to talk to students who have never even seen the ocean and know very, very little about it. So again, to summarize here these points, please consider increased surveying of habitat, consistent monitoring of other human activities, and also improving outreach to all communities. Thank you.

Jessica Miller 11:50

Thank you for your comment. Okay, so I guess now, it's four through seven.

interviews a lot of

Jocelyn Lee 12:08

Thank you. My name is Jocelyn Lee speaking on behalf of Conservation Law Foundation. CLF will be submitting additional written comments, but today I'd like to reiterate what has brought us here, finalizing a management plan for an area so ecologically remarkable that it was designated a Marine National Monument. The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts is home to one of the Atlantic Ocean's most biologically productive environments. The monument contains incredibly unique geological features: three underwater Canyons deeper than the Grand Canyon and four extinct volcanoes taller than any mountain east of the Rockies. These features create a unique environment where as many as 73 deep sea coral species are able to thrive. Some the size of small trees and hundreds or 1000s or 1000s of years old. These rare slow growing corals provide the foundation for a vast array of deep-sea marine life, providing food and spawning habitat and shelter for fish and invertebrates. The Canyons and Seamounts also cause an upwelling of nutrient rich waters toward the ocean surface, drawing large schools of small fish and squid, which in turn attracts sea turtles, seabirds and apex predators, like sharks, tuna and billfish, and marine mammals including the fifteen whale and dolphin species. Researchers have even spotted the endangered Blue Whale, our planet's largest animal swimming in the Seamounts waters. With this extraordinary diversity of marine life, the monument's protections are vital.

Limiting human activity in the area will protect fragile ecosystems where threatened and endangered species take refuge; it will bolster the resilience of these ecosystems and species to warming ocean temperatures, climate change impacts; and it will safeguard this living laboratory for scientific discoveries, studying climate change impacts, marine resources, and public education on the wonders of the deep sea. The draft interim plan is a critical step towards ensuring the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts is protected. However, we urge that the final plan would include additional actions to ensure its proper care and management and that its natural, cultural, and scientific value is encouraging for generations to go. First, we asked for stronger monitoring and enforcement measures, including the requirement that all vessels in the monument keep AIS and VMS turned on. Second, we urge the creation of a monument specific permit to more effectively track permanent activities and evaluate their impacts. In the absence of a monument specific permit, managers should create a comprehensive program for tracking for tracking permanent activities and share that information between agencies. Finally, we urge the development of regulations implementing all revisions consistent with the presidential proclamation. We thank the agencies for their continued commitment to protecting this underwater treasure. Thank you.

Jessica Miller 15:01

Thanks, Jocelyn. Number six - hello!

Alexandra Verdeja 15:04

Hi, everyone. My name is Alexandra Verdeja and I'm originally from Puerto Rico. But now I currently live in North of Boston. I'm also speaking on behalf of the National Ocean Protection coalition. Our coalition includes 50 groups representing national, regional, and local perspectives across the United States and includes tribal leaders, racial justice advocates, scientists, faith leaders, conservationists, outdoor enthusiast, fishers and more, including many Native American communities, as Joseph mentioned. Native American communities are an integral part of the National Oceanic protection coalition. They were the stewards of our lands and oceans before we stepped foot here, they hold traditional ecological knowledge that Western science is just beginning to understand and we commend you for including Native American communities early and often as a high priority for the monument management team to successfully manage the monument. We support the plan's commitment for the robust public education and outreach with a focus on communities that have historically not had access to nature and outdoor places, creating equitable, accessible engagement opportunities for the public to connect with the vast and inspiring wonders contained within the monument is essential. In recent years, US Fish and Wildlife Services funded Mystic Aquarium's education and outreach programs to help improve historically underrepresented groups involved in nature and the protection of our resources. We encourage the development of longer-term partnerships with educational institutions to promote learning and engagement around monitoring. We commend the draft plan's inclusion of the plan's inclusion of exploration and research planning and to improving understanding of biological, physical, cultural and historical resources in the monument. The monument serves as a living laboratory and future research should effectively inform management and advance conservation outcomes that sustain its biodiversity through climate change impacts. As a fishery scientist, I understand how challenging it can be to garner

interest from the general public for fish. This Monument is a hotspot for charismatic megafauna that the public recognizes and adores even though this Monument is hundreds of miles away from shore. Protecting and effectively managing and exploring this Monument creates positive ripple effects in the Northeast as well as the whole country. Thank you for your time.

Jessica Miller 17:32

Thank you. Thanks for your comments. Number six.

Speaker Elliot Reali 18:00

Hi, my name is Elliot Reali. I'm a student at Salem State University. But I'm originally from Charlotte, North Carolina. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of a conservation focused management plan for the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. My qualifications started in sixth grade on my school field trip to the Georgia Aquarium where I saw the Beluga whales for the first time, and I wept [laughter] I was so happy to see them. I got a big beluga whale stuffed animal who I've carried with me all the way to Salem for college. He came with us on a road trip here. It's been a big part of my life. Since my move I've been working with MASSPIRG my on campus activist group to gain student support for the protection of ocean habitats in the New England area. And I've learned that the love of marine life is a big motivator for a lot of students to get involved. The Canyons and Seamounts I found are home to at least 10 dolphin species, seven large whale species and six medium whale species, including rare whales, like the North Atlantic Right Whale all of which are deserving of a clean and safe ecosystem that functions as it should. This marine life is why I'm so glad to see the Biden administration move forward with a management plan that will help us better understand and appreciate and protect this Monument as a part of their commitment to America people. Ideally, we want this plan to include an effective monitoring and enforcement program to ensure that protections put forward by President Biden's proclamation are truly safeguarding ocean life. I know we're discussing how to monitor what activity is going on in the area, but, if possible, Monument managers should know who's using the area for what and rules and permits should be enforced to ensure that illegal activities do not occur. Additionally, future research in the area should effectively inform management in order to advance conservation efforts and sustain the Monuments' biodiversity through climate change impacts. The Monument serves as a living laboratory which was why I was excited to see the draft include an exploration and research plan that will help us better understand what it is the area holds and help us spot threats as they emerge. Getting a plan with these goals in place will ensure the safety of a large, diverse community of marine life, and set a precedent for the protection of ocean habitats for years to come. Thank you.

Jessica Miller 20:26

Thank you for your comments. I think we're at number seven.

Cassia Picardy 20:40

Hi, I'm Cassia. I studied at Salem State University. And I'm also a part of MASSPIRG, I am the chapter chair for it. I just wanted to thank you for the opportunity to speak today in favor of the swift approval of a strong conservation focused management plan for the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. So, I just want to talk about my favorite ocean experience. Mine was when I was surfing in Costa Rica, I was so shocked at how big the waves were, they were just knocking me out every five seconds. And there was also a sea turtle that came right by and literally almost hit me. Or I almost hit the sea turtle. And I just remember that it was such an amazing experience, because I got to connect with the ocean in a way I never really had before. And after that trip, I surfed all the time, but I never surfed before that. And I just wanted to, I want to see the New England oceans protected so that future generations can enjoy the ocean that I also love. That's why I'm glad to see the Biden administration move forward with a management plan that will help us better understand, appreciate and protect this amazing place. Fun fact, actually, about the monument's ecosystem is there at least 54 species of deep sea corals. I love coral. And actually, on a recent expedition, NOAA scientists discovered a bamboo coral estimated to be around 1600 years old, which is crazy to me. Keeping this ocean life safe is just one more way the Biden administration can fulfill its commitment to American the Beautiful. In particular, the plan should ensure future research should effectively inform management to advance conservation outcomes that sustain its biodiversity through climate change impacts. The monument served as a living laboratory, which is why I was excited to see the draft include an exploration and research plan that will help us better understand what wonders the area holds and will help us spot threats as they emerge. The plan should also include an effective monitoring and enforcement program to ensure protection put forward by President Biden's proclamation to achieve their goal safeguarding ocean life in the monument. The Monument managers should know who is using the area and for what and I urge you to put in place rules and permits that will ensure that illegal activities are not able to occur in this ocean refuge. And again, thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Jessica Miller 23:52

Thanks for your comment. I think we are on to number eight.

Philp Fishman 24:05

My name is Phil Fishman. I'm also attending Salem State University and I'm also with MASSPIRG. And not to go in knots with what one of my colleagues have already said, I will address I guess really the more general issues and my personal feelings toward the ocean. My fondest memory of the ocean, the one that really made me fall in love with it was when I was six years old, I was down in Florida with my family and I watched a man help a sea turtle that was stranded on its back on the beach, and even though that was fairly mundane, it touched me in a way that I have never been able to really put into words and it has made me fall in love with sea life and our ocean and made me want to protect the ocean in any way possible. The fact is the global warming is a very real issue, and the ocean is one of our biggest defenses against such issues, and protecting the homeostasis of such a biodiverse rich region is critical to maintaining that defense. And in addition, when global warming is worse, when the temperature of the

ocean rises, it damages these vital diverse regions. So, maintaining that we do not cause any further harm to these regions, protecting these regions is critical in every aspect. I'm a numbers person, a lot of people are and so being able to have the data on everything going on in that region is, I think that'll be hugely important. In fact, it obviously maintaining that we understand what people are doing in that region, and where they're traveling around. That is also critical to understanding you know, what we can do better to protect these regions. Also, like to say, I commend the Biden administration for helping to push toward bills like this. Because I want to be able to protect these areas so that future generations can have the same love of the ocean, of the same ocean that I know, decades, centuries into the future. Thank you for your time and listening to me speak. Thank you.

Jessica Miller 26:44

Thanks for your comments. Anyone else want to speak? Number nine or number 10? Oh, you're saying there's no more numbers [Laughter].

Miquela Craytor 27:06

Unless someone changed their mind

Jessica Miller 27:07

Unless anyone else wanted to speak. Yeah. If you just didn't grab a number now decided they want to speak. Now's the time. Sure. Seems like everybody's pretty cozy.

Marianne Randall 27:21

Or we can do more questions.

Jessica Miller 27:23

Yeah. Yeah. If anyone has any additional questions... Yeah, sure, go ahead.

Dianna Schulte 27:27

My question - that maybe it was already addressed, but are there currently or will there be resources dedicated to the management plan as far as monitoring research? All the different things- I know, it's, it's a lot in this seeing from other things that have been going on, for example, is Stellwagen Bay National Marine Sanctuary, there's no enforcement of anything in that area because of funding. So are there resources that are being designated to help out with the project?

Brittany Petersen 27:59

There are- there is some funding that is going towards supporting research in Monument over the next several years. There's Mystic Aquarium, you know, the New England Aquarium the deep sea coral initiative that Fish and Wildlife Services is raising some funding to support that. We do have a few staffed individuals, up here [laughter].

Laurena Bennett 28:03

Brittany supported me to get the plan done.

Brittany Petersen 28:27

Yeah, focus on the moment. But I think that it will really depend on fundraising and what funding comes in, what that will look like.

Laurena Bennett 28:41

And it's not clear if the funding that was received will continue. So, most of it has gone to put in place research, education, and engagement programs for the next few years because those are project specific funds, that we can kind of get out the door and get the funding out the door. And those projects can happen over the next few years. But setting in place staff and other things, you need a much longer-term commitment that there will be the funding in place before agencies will kind of set up, I think what you guys are thinking about in terms of enforcement program or something along those lines. So, I think we're all kind of watching to see what happens on the funding front. And if it's ongoing commitment of funds, or if it was just kind of temporary funding to help get the management plan done and kind of get things off the ground. I guess. We also put in the plan; we'd really like to explore public private partnerships to try to fund programs in the monument because it seems like long term that might be a more successful path. Take with the funds we get and partner with organizations like the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, other groups that could help us kind of raise some funds to match those are that we can put toward supporting longer term efforts because relying on government can be... you can have good years and bad years and it's tricky some times to have in place long-term programs when things wax and wane so much.