

Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument

Public Meeting Transcript – Comment Period (Virtual)

October 23, 2023 | 5:30 – 7:30 ET

Number of Attendees: 18

Jessica Miller 00:00

The transcript. So all you have to do is hit the got it button when you see the notification, and everything we will begin recording. So as long as we're good to go there, Hanna, which I think we are, Helen, you had your hand up first. So please do let us know your comment is.

Helen Smith 00:18

Great, thank you so much. I'm Helen Smith and I am the policy advocate for Creation Justice Ministries, as well as the co-lead of the ocean work group for the America the Beautiful for All Coalition. And Creation Justice Ministries, educates, equips, and mobilizes Christian communions and denominations, congregations, and individuals to protect, restore, and rightly share God's creation. And the America the Beautiful for All Coalition is working to achieve the dual goals of 30 by 30 and implementing Justice40 throughout conservation efforts as well as industry. And so, we're just so excited to have a draft management plan for the Canyons and Seamounts. As a faith-based organization for Creation Justice Ministries, we recognize that God's people and planet are depending on us to not only reduce the harm that we perpetuate against God's creation, but to also ensure that we have the correct boundaries in place to safeguard this incredible Marine Monument for generations to come. And so, we really appreciate the finalization of a strong management plan that ensures this underwater treasure is effectively safeguarded. And a couple of the things that we are in favor of to effectively manage the Monument and achieve the goals and vision in both the 2016 and 2021 presidential proclamations, both Creation Justice Ministries, and the ocean work group and America the Beautiful for All Coalition urge that the final plan include an effective monitoring and enforcement program to ensure compliance that's consistent with the presidential proclamations. We acknowledge that the draft plans permitting goals and urge movements to -- urge improvements --- in the proposed permitting program to ensure compliance with these rules and regulations set forth. The final management plan really needs to include actions that will develop regulations necessary to implement all prohibitions consistent with the governing presidential proclamations, as well as the final plan, including a requirement to review and update the plan periodically, at least every 10 years. Though, we know with climate change, we cannot wait 10 years in between seeing whether these, these different tactics are actually working for conservation, and we really need it to be sooner than every 10 years. Additionally, we support the draft plans action to engage with Native American communities, recognizing that co-stewardship and co-management is such an important thing. These Indigenous peoples have lived here and successfully cared for this earth in creation for so much longer than we could have ever thought to. We support the draft plan's actions to evaluate shipping vessel traffic and see how that works and whether that's something that continues to be allowed in the future. We support the draft plan's inclusion of a robust

public education and outreach component that definitely prioritizes serving communities that have not historically or currently had access to nature and outdoor spaces. We're supportive of the draft plan's inclusion of an exploration and research plan aimed at improving our understanding of all of the different resources in this Monument, whether they be biological, physical, cultural, or historical. We're supportive of the efforts to inventory these resources and really want the final plan to expedite these efforts, as well as to identify and minimize any impacts to said resources. We really appreciate the plans efforts to collaborate and coordinate among the relevant co-trustees, stakeholders, any additional agencies, and we're supportive of the issuance of an annual report that summarizes key accomplishments and activities because we believe that we need transparency and providing information on staffing, budgeting, and permitting information. And I just want to say again, thank you so much for holding these sessions, and for working to get this done and continue to have a place that's wonderful for all of us.

Jessica Miller 04:43

Thank you so much for your comments, Helen. Kelsey, you're up next and then Danielle, you're after her.

Kelsey Lamp 04:54

Thank you. Um, my name is Kelsey Lamp, and I am speaking today on behalf of Environment Massachusetts. We're a statewide citizen-funded advocacy organization that works to protect clean air, clean water, and open spaces. And I'm based in Boston, Massachusetts. So thank you so much for the opportunity to speak to you today in favor of the swift approval of a strong conservation-focused management plan for the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. I have been talking to New Englanders about the Canyons and Seamounts for six years. And one of my first jobs with Environment Massachusetts was petitioning on the streets of Boston to maintain protections for this amazing place. Seeing people's excitement as they learned that off their coast in their own backyard, we have coral older than the US Constitution, a place where dolphins and whales gather with their babies, where fish just teem. They were so excited to hear that this place existed, and that we were already working to protect it. Their enthusiasm inspired me to not only keep fighting for the Canyons and Seamounts to keep it safe, but also to keep advocating for ocean conservation more broadly. That's why I am so happy to see the Biden administration move forward with a management plan that will help us better understand, appreciate, and protect this amazing place. Every time the Okeanos takes another dive in the monument we discover more, and I can't wait to see how new research will shape our understanding of New England's deep sea and inform how we can keep it safe for decades to come. In order to make the most of this management plan and ensure that it lives up to the President Biden's vision laid out in the America the Beautiful initiative, the final plan should include effective monitoring and enforcement programs to ensure the protections put forward by President Biden's proclamation can achieve their goal of safeguarding ocean life. Monument managers should know who's 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. Secondly, we should ensure that the plan can do research that will inform management to advance conservation outcomes that can sustain its biodiversity, even though climate change impacts. The monument serves as a living laboratory off New England's coast, which was why I was excited to see the draft include an exploration and research plan that will help us better understand what wonders the areas holds and will help us spot threats as

they emerge. A conservation minded plan with strong safeguards, ongoing research and the ability to respond to new threats, will keep the centuries old coral, the scores of dolphins and whales safe for decades to come and hopefully inspire future ocean advocates to work to protect the many other places that make up New England's ocean heritage. Thank you so much.

Jessica Miller 08:02

Thanks, Kelsey, for your comments. We really appreciate it. Danielle, you're up next and then Ian, after Danielle.

Danielle Glidden 08:12

My name is Danielle. I'm a senior at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today in favor of the swift approval of a strong conservation focused management plan for the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. The ocean is so important to me, because sea life is constantly dying every day due to people leaving trash everywhere and its pollution. Animals in the ocean are such interesting creatures we need to help protect. One step at a time we can make an impact on saving our oceans and the sea life amongst it by picking up trash we see not where it belongs and conserving special places like Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. 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 world. Keeping this ocean life safe is just one way the Biden administration can fulfill its commitment to America the Beautiful. In particular, the final plan to ensure future research should effectively inform management to advance conservation outcomes, that sustains its biodiversity through climate change impact. The monument serves as a living laboratory which is why it was excited to see the draft include an exploration and research plan to help us better understand what wonders the area holds and will help us spot threats as they emerge. As a team, we can work together to help make an impact and protect our oceans. Thank you.

Jessica Miller 09:39

Thank you, Danielle, your for your comments. Ian, you're up next and then Lori.

Ian Giancarlo 09:45

Awesome, can you hear me?

Jessica Miller 09:49

Can you say something?

Ian Giancarlo 09:50

Yeah, can you hear me now?

Jessica Miller 09:51

Yes, much better. Okay.

Ian Giancarlo 09:53

I'll move my mike closer, great. So hello, my name is Ian Giancarlo and I'm oceans advocate with Environment America, an environmental advocacy group that works for clean air, clean water, and open spaces. Thank you for the opportunity for allowing me to speak today in favor of a swift approval for a strong conservation focused management plan for the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. Growing up in Connecticut, I developed a strong affinity for our coastal areas and our oceans very early on. My family took annual summer trips to Acadia National Park and I remember that the top of Cadillac Mountain in Acadia is the first spot in the United States to see the sunrise. I remember sitting there one early morning, watching the sun seemingly flow out of the water, and at that moment, I realized I was so thankful to be from a country that understands the beauty of the natural world, and wants to preserve these wild places. That's really why we designate national parks and why we create places like National Marine monuments. I was really glad to see that the Biden administration move forward with a management plan that will help us better understand, appreciate, and protect this amazing place. It's the first and only Marine National Monument in the US Atlantic, and it's home to some canyons that are really deeper in places than the Grand Canyon itself. Keeping this ocean life safe is just one more way the Biden administration can fulfill its commitment to America the Beautiful. In particular, the final plan should include and ensure future research should be effectively informed by management to advance conservation outcomes that sustain its biodiversity through climate change impacts. The monument serves, really, 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 the wonders the area holds and will help us spot threats as they emerge. The plan should also include an effective monitoring enforcement program that ensures the protections put forward by President Biden's proclamation achieve our goals and their goal of safeguarding the ocean life. 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. Establishing these rules will ensure a future for this incredible ecosystem and serve as an example of similar plans for our Pacific Marine Monuments still waiting on a plane like this. Moving forward with this plan in New England and similar plans in the western Pacific will ensure we are creating ocean refuges where colorful corals, deep canyons, and vibrant ocean life can thrive as wild spaces for decades to come. Thank you.

Jessica Miller 12:49

Thanks so much for your comments. Ian. Lori, you're up next and then Sahn.

Lori Brown 12:56

Yes, hi, thank you. My name is Lori Brown. I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters, and I do thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of the proposed Northeast Canyons and Seamounts draft management plan. Everything everyone else said so far totally support that. But the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters has been working in partnership with Connecticut's environmental leaders for many years to establish the strong protections that the monument has now And we're very proud actually that the initial push for the monument designation was from our own Connecticut Senator Richard Blumenthal, who's been a real steadfast champion for the monument over the years and for the environment in general in our state. And we've been, at the League, we've been working with our partners to educate our members and the general public about the Seamounts monument, which is roughly the size of our state, just off our New England shores, but truly not well known or understood by the public. So we've activated our members, we've

organized public events, we've lobbied our congressional delegation, we've joined the broader regional efforts to restore the protections that had been eliminated by the prior administration. And so a joint letter of support is being submitted by the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters that's been signed by the major Connecticut groups that have helped restore the protections back in 2021. And we are all just immensely grateful to the Biden Harris administration for the steps it's taking to safeguard this truly precious natural national marine monument for the long term. The development of the draft management plan does as everyone has mentioned, you know, it aligns with the Biden Harris administration's commitment to conserve and restore at least 30% of the US lands and waters by 2030. And we support all of the provisions in the draft management plan to ensure that the Canyons and Seamounts national treasure is truly well protected going forward. So the Connecticut LCV does intend to testify on the upcoming commercial fishing regulations that are out there. And we, you know, we obviously want to prevent any harmful activities from within the monument's boundaries and some of the questions that came up earlier about the military and sonic booms and things like that I obviously have concern to all of the environmental groups. And we do urge the US Fish and Wildlife Service to finalize the absolute strongest possible protections as swiftly as possible. So on behalf of the Connecticut LCV, thank you again, for allowing me to comment on this wonderful draft management plan.

Jessica Miller 15:43

Thanks Lori, for your comment. Sahm, You're up next and then after that, Mark.

Sahm Schiller 15:51

Hello, can you hear me?

Jessica Miller 15:53

Yes, we can hear you.

Sahm Schiller 15:54

My name is Sahm Schiller, and I'm an undergraduate student at Tufts University studying the environment. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in favor of the swift approval of a strong conservation focused management plan for the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. I'm here today to advocate for the strongest possible plan because growing up I got to see the difference that a well thought out and considered conservation to make on our natural ecosystems. So I'm from a neighborhood in downtown Brooklyn, New York, that is a 10 minute drive from the East River and the school where I completed grades seven through twelve also sat directly on its shore. So the salty scent of the East River as well as the color and sound of its current are part of me as much as why I'm from. New York just isn't New York without the East River. And the same can be said for Coney Island or Brighton Beach, their waters are what make these areas what they are. They're fundamental to my memories of these places, but also the collective memory of all New Yorkers. And while the East River I grew up with is now protected, I also saw what it looks like when we fail to protect our waterways. Not far from the East River is the Gowanus canal, one of our nation's most heavily contaminated bodies of water. It smells terrible, the water's unnaturally green, there's trash floating around. What was once home to a thriving ecosystem is now not suitable for life in the slightest, so we have effectively lost that part of our city. Witnessing the stark difference between these

bodies of water is enough for me to want to advocate ensuring the character and the health of our nation's waters are maintained. That's why I was glad to see the Biden administration move forward with a management plan that will help us better understand, appreciate, and protect Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. If we fail to protect this place adequately, then we risk losing that part of our country's identity. And if the Gowanus canal serves as an example in any capacity, then getting that back will be difficult to near impossible. President Biden's America the Beautiful initiative recognizes just that an implementing a strong plan is critical to protecting our natural heritage. In order to make the most of this opportunity, I urged the administration to include an effective monitoring and enforcement program and plan to ensure the protections put forth by President Biden's proclamation achieve their goal of safeguarding ocean life. 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. Because just like the East River, the corals in the Canyons and Seamounts deserve, the corals of the canyons and seamounts deserve protection, and so do the area's whales, sharks, and dolphins. I encourage the administration to make the right patriotic choice, heed their call, and follow through with their plan. Thank you.

Jessica Miller 18:34

Thanks so much for your comments, Sahm. Mark, you're up next and then back to Chasis.

Mark Haver 18:42

Hello, can you hear me?

Jessica Miller 18:44

Yes, I can hear you. Go ahead.

Mark Haver 18:47

Great. Hello, everyone. My name is Mark Haver, and I'm with Sustainable Ocean Alliance. We are the world's largest network of young ocean leaders. We support community building and leadership development in over 180 countries across the world. I'm the North America regional representative and I manage our community, the United States and Canada. And we have hubs, groups of young ocean leaders and northeast states, including New York, Massachusetts. I want to thank you all for providing this opportunity to provide questions and comments about the monument as well as for the outstanding work that you've done in putting together this draft conservation plan. I think it's incredibly important that we ensure that the enforcement and monitoring that's included in this conservation plan are consistent with the compliance that we all desire for effective conservation. Part of this includes requiring all vessels transiting through or operating in the monument to have automated identification systems and vessel monitoring systems turned on at all times to ensure the effective enforcement and compliance with monument rules and regulations. Of course, you want to ensure that in the absence of monuments specific permits that agencies establish clear and comprehensive processes to share information, track usage of the monument, to enable effective monument management. I would like to second all comments provided by Helen Smith from Creation Justice Ministries and Kelsey Lamp from Environment Massachusetts. And I've been in agreement with pretty much all the comments so far, but especially those two. I also wanted to add that it's important.

Jessica Miller 20:31

I'm sorry to interrupt. The last couple of sentences. I couldn't hear. There's some background noise, I think.

Mark Haver 20:38

Yeah, sorry. I'm at a cafe.

Jessica Miller 20:40

The last I heard was support for Kelsey Lamp. And do you mind getting back to that point?

20:46

Yep. That's basically just what I said. Support for Kelsey lands and Helen Smith's comments, essentially. And then two last comments. One is about conservation in the face of plastic pollution, especially understanding the migratory routes of the North Atlantic right whale. Well, it's important that we avoid entanglement. Some monuments have really effective debris management programs. And I would encourage the same to be integrated into this conservation management strategy to ensure that we don't lose any more right whales or any other species. And last but not least, I also think that effective conservation is an opportunity in this monument specifically to perform greater research on ocean carbon pump and the DC storage potential of carbon, from the abyss to the sea mountain summits. This is an area that is fully understood and especially with the unique deep-sea ecosystems this monument possesses, we have a greater opportunity than ever to understand one of the least understood ecosystems on Earth. Thank you so much.

Jessica Miller 21:59

Thanks so much for your comments, Mark. Chasis, can you remind us of your first name again?

Sarah Chasis 22:05

Sure, it's Sarah Chasis. I'm a senior strategist with the Oceans Division at the Natural Resources Defense Council. NRDC applauds the draft plan's focus on protection of the monument's resources, its support for scientific research and exploration, and its emphasis on public outreach and education. These are admirable goals. We would like to emphasize the importance of the plan including an effective monitoring and enforcement program. To aid in such a program the management plan should require all vessels have their automatic identification systems turned on at all times while transiting through or operating within the monument. In addition, all commercial fishing vessels transiting through the monument should be required to have vessel monitoring systems that are turned on while transiting the monument. This will enable the Coast Guard and NOAA to monitor activity and ensure the monument prohibitions are complied with. Also, as part of an effective monitoring and enforcement program, the agency should prioritize the monitoring of satellite data. Currently, this is not identified as a priority activity in the draft plan, and we think it should be. With respect to shipping, we support the draft plan's actions related to assessing shipping vessel traffic impacts on the monument, including understanding the potential interaction with marine mammals. Monitoring and use of satellite data to better understand shipping vessel traffic patterns in the volume of shipping in the monument will help in this effort. Requiring a monument-specific permit, in addition to the required existing permits, would enable the agencies to better track and understand the uses of the monument and ensure compliance

with proclamation prohibitions and agencies' rules and regulations. In the absence of a monument-specific permit, the management team should establish a clear comprehensive process to regulate, track and share information surrounding usage of the monument to enable effective management. We recommend that the plan include a requirement to review and update the plan periodically, we think it should be that review should be conducted at least every 10 years, if not sooner. In conclusion, the monument is a unique national resource that contains highly valuable and vulnerable species and ecosystems. We urge the adoption of a strong management plan that ensures that this underwater treasure is effectively protected. And we urge its adoption as soon as possible in light of the September 15, 2023 date set in the President's proclamation. Thank you.

Jessica Miller 24:55

Thanks so much for your comments, Sarah. Are there any other folks on the line you'd like to submit a comment. I don't see any other hands up at this time. We're happy to take more comments. We have plenty of time. Anyone else? I'm going to ask you to lower your hand unless you have another comment you'd like to submit. Thanks. Anyone else have any comments to submit? We're happy to hear from you. Just want to give everybody a little more time. Anyone else want to submit a comment at this time? Okay, well, we if you do, feel free to come off mute or raise your hand. But in the meantime, I think we'll we'll try to wrap things up and make sure everybody's prepared with sort of next steps and we may close out the meeting a bit early, if there are no other comments, but please do raise your hand if you do have additional comments. And forgive me, I will be repeating this several times. So, thanks for all of your comments, it was really great to hear from all of you, and really appreciate you all being here. And also just preparing really well thought through comments. It's very nice to hear. So we again, really appreciate you showing up and being here and submitting something. We'll be creating a transcript out of all the comments that we received this evening and submitting that to the Fish and Wildlife website. So all the transcripts from all meetings will be up on the Fish and Wildlife website in addition to this one. So any of the ones that you missed that you're curious about, you can go check those out as well. But for now, one last call for any comments from anyone who didn't get a chance to or for additional comments from the folks who did. Okay, so I think we'll move on to a few, feel free to raise your hand in the meantime, but we'll continue kind of closing out here. So all written comments can be submitted by the 26th of October, anything that you said, you submitted as a comment this evening will be written, transcribed, etc. and then shared on the website, on Fish and Wildlife website. So you don't necessarily have to submit the same thing if you're going to, if you've been here this evening and said it verbally, it will be transcribed into something that's written. But if you would like to submit additional comments, please do so by Thursday, October, Thursday, October the 22nd. Sorry, foot in my mouth. And then I just want to remind you of a couple of resources. We have the Management Plan website, which is the first link on the screen and then that QR code, the first QR code. The second QR code is for submitting this, those written comments on regulations.gov. So if you do have something to submit, please do go there before the end of the day on October 26. You can still submit things via mail as well to Brittany at the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument and her physical address is listed here on the screen as well. So we'll leave this up for you all in case you need a reminder. But we just want to say thank you so much for coming. And I think I'll turn it back over to Brittany unless there are other comments that anyone has. But feel free to raise your hand. At this time. If you do, and not seeing any I will hand it over to you Brittany, go ahead.

Brittany Petersen 28:59

Thank you, Jessica. I would just like to take a moment to thank everyone for participating in this public process and submitting your verbal comments on the draft management plan and taking the time out of your day to participate in this. And thank you to Kearns & West and my colleagues at NOAA fisheries and Lauren Bennett for being on the line to be part of this process. Just as a reminder, I know we've said this a few times. The comment period will wrap up on Thursday, October 26. And as you can see on the screen there are three different options on, or two other options on how to submit comments. But thank you again, thank you for your time, and thank you for participating. We greatly appreciate it.