

NEW ENGLAND'S SPECIAL OCEAN PLACES

CONSERVATION LAW FOUNDATION



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For a thriving New England



A colorful array of marine life covers the remains of a shipwreck in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. (Photo: NOAA/Tane Casserley)

The biological richness and productivity of New England's ocean is illustrated in the diversity of ocean and coastal habitats found in the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, southern New England and the Outer Continental Shelf. For over a decade, the Conservation Law Foundation has studied the vital component that ocean habitat provides for ocean wildlife and New England's commercial and recreational fishermen. Several ecological areas in New England's ocean are consistently noted as the most important for ocean wildlife and serve as reservoirs of productive fish populations and as refuge for rare, threatened or endangered species. New England's special ocean areas include the following:

Cashes Ledge

This unique underwater mountain range lies about 80 miles east of Cape Ann, Massachusetts. Cashes Ledge is a truly a world-class ecological marine area and home to one of the world's deepest cold water seaweed communities. Ammen Rock, the underwater equivalent of Mount Washington, is the highest peak of Cashes Ledge and rises from the seafloor to within ten meters of the surface. Because of the ecological value of Cashes Ledge, the New England Fishery Management Council designated it for protection from the harmful impacts of bottom trawling and overfishing, but this protection is subject to change. Cashes Ledge has also served as a research area for many of New England's ocean scientists.

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary

The Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary is located at the mouth of Massachusetts Bay between Cape Ann and Cape Cod. It was designated a National Marine Sanctuary in 1992 to conserve biological diversity and culturally important sunken ships. Stellwagen is a hotspot for ocean wildlife, attracting more than 575 known species to the area, including four whale species and four sea turtle species that are all protected by the Endangered Species Act. This richness of marine life and Stellwagen's close proximity to the shore helps to draw human use to the area, including both recreational uses and commercial activity. Unfortunately, some of these activities can be destructive. As such, the Sanctuary prohibits the mining of

sand, gravel, and oil and gas. Additionally, Stellwagen contains an area known as "The Sliver," in which highly disruptive fishing called "bottom trawling" is prohibited. This helps to make "The Sliver" the best-protected area in New England's ocean.

Jordan Basin

Jordan Basin lies about 70 miles south of Bar Harbor, Maine and is one of three deep basins in the Gulf of Maine. In recent years, it was found to be a wintering ground for the endangered North Atlantic right whale, one of the rarest animals on the planet. Jordan Basin has a deep, muddy bottom, which may not be as exciting to the mind as other areas, but its ecological importance is just as high as that of other types of habitats.

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About CLF

Since 1966, Conservation Law Foundation has used the law, science, policymaking, and the business market to find pragmatic, innovative solutions to New England's toughest environmental problems.

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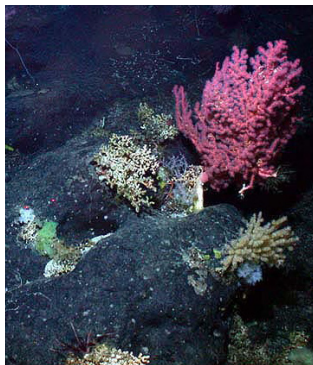
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Deep Sea Canyons

At the southern edge of Georges Bank lie a number of deep sea canyons that provide habitat for corals, sponges, anemones, and other species. Corals thrive in this environment because they can successfully attach to the hard, sloping seafloor and eat the abundant microscopic plants and animals that are swept over the canyons by deep sea currents. The canyons are also important breeding and foraging areas for commercially significant species, including American lobster, monkfish, and red crabs. Endangered Sperm whales, North Atlantic Right whales and Beaked whales all make their way to the canyons to feed. Because of their important ecological function, sensitivity to human-caused impacts, and rarity of habitat type, many of the Atlantic canyons are proposed to be protected as "Habitat Areas of Particular Concern" by the New England Fishery Management Council, which would restrict potentially-harmful activities from occurring in these areas. Since late 2009, portions of four of the canyons have been closed to destructive bottom trawling and scallop dredges in an effort to protect the golden tilefish, which burrow in the sediment in the canyons.

Photo (left): A North Atlantic Right Whale. (Photo: Center for Coastal Studies)



Seamounts

Seamounts are underwater mountain peaks that rise from the ocean floor. They often hold unique habitats that serve as the homes of numerous rare or interesting fish and invertebrate species, including deep water corals. The New England chain of seamounts extends in a line stretching southeast from Georges Bank into the greater Atlantic Ocean. Four of these seamounts exist in the part of the ocean under United States jurisdiction – Bear, Physalia, Mytilus and Retriever. Two of these, Bear (1102 meters deep) and Retriever (1819 meters deep), have been proposed for some protection by the New England Fishery Management Council. The coral found on the seamounts provides shelter to numerous fish and invertebrate species, making the New England seamounts essential habitat for various types of marine life.

Photo (left): A marine community in the New England seamount chain. (Photo: NOAA Ocean Explorer)