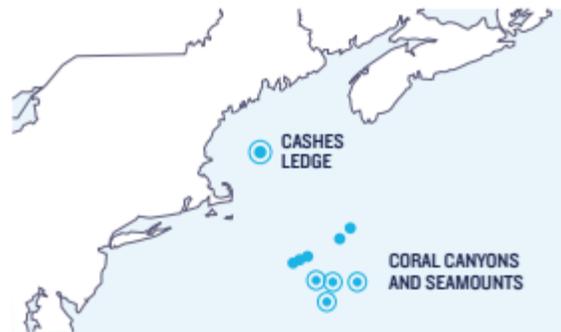


What are the places being called “New England’s Ocean Treasures?”

Two of the most spectacular parts of God’s creation in the ocean lie off New England shores: **Cashes Ledge** and the **New England Coral Canyons and Seamounts**. The two areas, which people are calling “New England’s Ocean Treasures,” serve as vital refuges -- **a modern day “Noah’s ark” of diverse ocean life**, including delicate and ancient coldwater coral gardens, vast kelp forests, whales, dolphins, sea turtles, seabirds, and fish.



Cashes Ledge Closed Area

The Cashes Ledge Area, located in the Gulf of Maine about 80 miles southeast of Portland, Maine, is an underwater mountain range with some of God’s most wondrous and curious creatures 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, nurturing a haven 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 a vast array of ocean wildlife.

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In God’s hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.”

Job 12:7-10

From mud-rich basins to rocky ledges, the diverse habitats of Cashes Ledge provide a place of refuge and restoration for iconic New England fish such as cod and pollock, as well as 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, the rarest of the North Atlantic’s great baleen whales.

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.

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 (“seamounts”) – the only ones in the 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 cold-water corals – some of the size of small trees and more than 1,000 years old. Corals form the foundation of deep-sea ecosystems. 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.

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. 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 seamounts, and fueled new appreciation of the uniqueness of these deep-sea ecosystems.

Why Permanent Protection?

A combination of partial fishing restrictions and natural protective features has kept these special places in God’s creation remarkably healthy up to date. The integrity of God’s web of creation in these places is important to not only to God’s creatures, but also to people in New England, for 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.**

We can and must answer our Genesis call to till and keep creation. Permanent protection of God’s intricate web of New England marine life from all commercial extractive activity will preserve them as thriving biodiversity hot spots and living marine laboratories for years to come. Such protections can also build resilience against the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.

The United States 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 in God’s creation.



“To protect the oceans is to do God’s work. To harm them, even if we are ignorant of the harm we cause, is to diminish His divine Creation. We can stop over-fishing and destructive fishing methods so that the miracle of the fishes will endure for future generations. We can establish sanctuaries in the sea where we agree to do no harm of any kind.” Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, World Oceans Day 2003



Creation Justice Ministries equips, educates, and mobilizes 38 Christian communions -- including Baptist conventions, mainline Protestants, Historically Black Churches, Peace Churches, and Orthodox communions. Together, we reach more than 100,000 congregations and 45 million people nationwide. Learn more about how you can work with the Creation Justice community to protect New England’s Ocean Treasures at www.creationjustice.org/ocean-treasures