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July 10, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Zinke and Secretary Ross:

In April, President Trump issued an executive order directing his administration to conduct a review of nearly all national monuments designated since 1996 under the Antiquities Act of 1906. Many presidents – from Theodore Roosevelt to modern-day presidents like George W. Bush and Barack Obama – have used this law to permanently protect some of our country's most precious environmental, historical and cultural treasures for future generations. I understand the administration is considering dramatically scaling back the protections afforded by the law. I strongly support the continued preservation of the areas protected under the Antiquities Act, and I write specifically in robust support of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. Rolling back the protections afforded to our national monuments – especially the canyons and seamounts area – would be an unwise, unwarranted and unjust action that would undermine our environment and economy and significantly stall scientific progress.

The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument is the first national monument in the Atlantic Ocean. It is a spectacular underwater seascape that is both precious and priceless. It contains underwater mountains that are higher than any of those east of the Rockies, and its size and scale rival that of the Grand Canyon. The biodiversity in its nearly 5,000 square miles is matched by few other locations and hides secrets that we are only beginning to understand. A multitude of fish, seabird and marine mammal species live in or rely on the canyons and seamounts area and new and rare species continue to be discovered in its depths.

It is critical to Connecticut's economy that we preserve this biodiversity and pristine marine ecosystem. My state has a vibrant and storied coastal economy, and the continued health of this area is critical to thousands of jobs in the tourism, fishing and recreation sectors that depend on clean ocean water and healthy and abundant fish and wildlife. Weakening or removing the protections afforded by the monument designation would jeopardize the health of our oceans and Connecticut's economy.

We must also protect the monument designation for the sake of science. The canyons and seamounts serve as important study sites for researchers based at numerous academic institutions, including the University of Connecticut and Mystic Aquarium. The data collected by these institutions provide advances in scientific knowledge and insight as well as new understandings of ecological relationships in the deep sea and of how humans affect our oceans. The importance of this research will only grow as our oceans are harmed by climate change.

This monument was established with proper public outreach and input. Setting the boundaries and uses of this monument took a full year and the final designation incorporated much of the strong public feedback the previous administration received at multiple public meetings and numerous direct meetings with essential stakeholders, including fishermen from around New England. Moreover, the monument conforms to all the requirements of the Act – the boundaries were crafted to carefully and concisely contain only those areas being protected and the overall area is the smallest possible to accomplish this goal. As a result, the protected area advances our environmental aims while simultaneously ensuring that the fishing, tourism, and recreational jobs dependent on the area will remain for generations to come.

Our country's public lands and waters are our most precious natural resource. We cannot fail to recognize the importance of protecting areas like the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, and I urge you leave firmly in place all the protections afforded to this unique area, as well as the many other important monuments nationwide.

Thank you for your consideration of my views.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate