

May 31, 2024

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of our organizations and their millions of members and online activists, we urge you to permanently protect key habitats on the remarkable Blake Plateau.

Roughly 80-200 miles off the coasts of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida, the Blake Plateau is a globally important wonder in our own backyard. Recently identified as the *world's* largest deep-sea coral habitat, the plateau's ancient deep-sea coral mounds, some towering higher than the Washington Monument, support an abundance of marine life not only on the seafloor, but throughout the water column. A place also of cultural and spiritual significance for many Gullah/Geechee, the Blake Plateau is the ancestral resting place for enslaved relatives who did not survive crossing its waters as part of the Middle Passage.

Fueled by the powerful Gulf Stream, the Blake Plateau displays dynamic ocean ecosystems from seabed to sea surface: its deep-sea corals, unique methane seeps, and pervasive floating *Sargassum* seaweed meadows feed and shelter a wide diversity of marine life. Fish like tuna, sharks, endangered and threatened sea turtles, elusive seabirds like the highly endangered black-capped petrel, and colossal sperm whales all rely on a healthy Blake Plateau.

The Blake Plateau contains specific important coral "neighborhoods" with spectacular and unique features: the "Million Mounds" for example is believed to be the largest continuous deep-sea coral reef on Earth, forming a roughly 200-mile-long coral highway from Georgia to central Florida. Other areas like the Central Blake Knolls and the Stetson/ Richardson Complex will serve as important refuges for deep-sea corals as our ocean warms, potentially securing the future of the region's reef-building coral, *Lophelia*.

In addition to providing important habitat for fish and marine life, the plateau's deep-sea corals and Gulf Stream work together to process essential nutrients and pump them from the deep back up to the surface, supporting the ocean's wildlife. These nutrients ultimately help sustain the region's fisheries, which support all who rely on them.

This dramatic and critical seascape is still largely pristine, but without durable protections it could be quickly devastated by rapid ocean industrialization. Deep-sea corals grow just

millimeters a year and are highly vulnerable to disturbance; coral formations on the Blake Plateau took hundreds of thousands of years to form and if harmed would not return in any meaningful period of time. The Blake Plateau currently has no lasting protections from commercial extractive industries. Now is the time to conserve this precious ecosystem to ensure it is enjoyed by Americans for generations to come.

Your administration is committed to conserving a geographically representative, ecologically connected, and climate-resilient set of marine areas off all U.S. coasts. The Southeast is among the regions of the United States with the fewest marine protections, with less than one percent of its waters strongly protected. Your administration has a unique opportunity to make history by protecting this world-class area. We urge you to safeguard this important and sacred Southern treasure by permanently protecting key features on the Blake Plateau now.

Sincerely,

Amelia Island Whale Ambassadors, Inc.
Cape Fear River Watch
Carolina Ocean Alliance
Center for a Sustainable Coast
Charleston Climate Coalition
Charleston Surfrider Foundation
Chirping Birds Society
Coastal Naturalist Productions
Conservation Voters of South Carolina
Creation Justice Ministries
EarthEcho International
Environment Florida
Environment Georgia
Environment North Carolina
Georgia Aquarium
Georgia Conservancy
Georgia Conservation Voters
Georgia Interfaith Power and Light
Georgia Representative Gullah/Geechee Nation
GreenLatinos
Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association
Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank
Harambee House, Inc. / Citizens for Environmental Justice
Healthy Ocean Coalition
Hispanic Access Foundation
National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council

Next 100 Coalition: Ocean Equity Collective
Oceans Connect
One Hundred Miles
Satilla Riverkeeper
Science for Georgia
Sierra Club
Smalls Cultural Resources
South Carolina Aquarium
South Carolina Coastal Conservation League
Susie King Taylor Women's Institute & Ecology Center
Sustainable Ocean Alliance, Duke University
Sustainable Ocean Alliance, UNC Chapel Hill
Tybee Island Marine Science Center
Union of Concerned Scientists
Wild Cumberland
Wilderness Southeast