

August 5, 2024

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

Dear President Biden,

The below organizations, and their millions of members and online activists, urge you to permanently protect a network of important habitats on the Blake Plateau, a remarkable underwater ecosystem roughly 80-200 miles offshore the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida.

The Blake Plateau is a hotspot of ocean biodiversity. Identified earlier this year as hosting the world's largest deep-sea coral habitat, the Blake Plateau's fragile and ancient deep-sea coral mounds—some taller than the Statue of Liberty, its floating *Sargassum* seaweed meadows, and waters provide food and shelter for a wide array of valuable 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 and ultimately sustaining the region's fish populations. From endangered black-capped petrels to unique methane seep communities of mussels, from colossal sperm whales to juvenile threatened and endangered sea turtles, the Blake Plateau nourishes a wealth of ocean life.

The Blake Plateau has importance as a cultural, spiritual, and historical site. Not only is the plateau a treasure-trove of biodiversity, but the region holds cultural, spiritual, and historical significance as the final leg of the Middle Passage, the seafaring route by which enslaved West and Central Africans were transported to America. The plateau's protection should highlight the role that the Blake Plateau played as part of the Middle Passage, and its cultural and spiritual importance to Gullah/ Geechee communities as the ancestral graveyard for enslaved relatives who did not survive its crossing.

The Blake Plateau will play a key role in the future of deep-sea coral ecosystems. Several of the Blake Plateau's specific coral "neighborhoods" like the Central Blake Knolls and the Stetson/ Richardson Complex will serve as important refuges for deep-sea corals as ocean temperatures increase, potentially securing the future of the region's reef-building *Lophelia* coral. Scientists surmise that thriving ecosystems like these have repopulated ocean areas thousands of miles away via ocean currents after past climate disruptions.

We appreciate your administration's commitment to conserving a geographically representative, ecologically connected, and climate-resilient set of marine areas off all U.S. coasts. Currently, the Southeast is among the U.S. regions with the fewest marine

protections—less than 1 percent of its waters strongly protected. Using the power of your office to safeguard a network of key areas on the Blake Plateau would ensure the rich life of this region is conserved for this and future generations.

Now is the time to conserve the Blake Plateau—the world’s largest deep-sea coral reef habitat—and to highlight the area’s cultural and spiritual importance. While still largely pristine, the Blake Plateau lacks strong, durable conservation measures to prohibit commercial extractive activities and protect the biological abundance of the Blake Plateau. We urge you to safeguard this important and sacred Southern seascape by permanently protecting key features on the Blake Plateau.

Sincerely,

AQUANAUTS ADAPTIVE AQUATICS
Azul
Birds Georgia
Californians for Western Wilderness
Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World Program
Carolina Ocean Alliance
Center for a Sustainable Coast
Center for Biological Diversity
Conservation Law Foundation
Creation Justice Ministries
Cultivating Lives Educational Services, Inc.
Defenders of Wildlife
EarthEcho International
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Florida Wildlife Federation
Forest Keeper
Friends of the Mariana Trench
FutureSwell
Georgia Conservancy
Georgia Interfaith Power and Light
Georgia Representative Gullah/Geechee Nation
Goldwater Ventures
GreenLatinos
Greenpeace USA
Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association
Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition
Healthy Ocean Coalition
Hispanic Access Foundation

Inland Ocean Coalition
Interfaith Power and Light
International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)
Jewish Climate Action Network, Georgia
Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo (KUA)
Latino Outdoors
League of Conservation Voters
López-Wagner Strategies
Marine Conservation Institute
Minorities in Shark Sciences
Mission Blue
National Ocean Protection Coalition
National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Ocean Defense Initiative
Ocean Reef Conservation Association
Ocean Rescue Alliance International
Ocean River Institute
Ocean Sewage Alliance
Oceans Connect Inc.
Okhtapus
One Hundred Miles
Port Royal Sound Foundation
Precovery Labs
Satilla Riverkeeper
Science for Georgia
Sierra Club
Society of Conservation Biology North America
Sol Margin Fishing & Conservation Foundation
South Carolina Coastal Conservation League
South Carolina Wildlife Federation
Sustainable Ocean Alliance
Sustainable Ocean Alliance, Boston University
Sustainable Ocean Alliance, UNC Chapel Hill
The Ocean Project
The Wilderness Society
Union of Concerned Scientists
Wild Cumberland
World Ocean Council
Youth Environmental Alliance