



New England Fishery Management Council

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New England Council Selects Coral Amendment Preferred Alternatives for Gulf of Maine, Continental Slope and Canyons

In preparation for a round of public hearings in May, the New England Fishery Management Council on April 18 selected “preferred alternatives” for its Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment, which contains proposals for protecting corals in the Gulf of Maine and on the Continental Slope south of Georges Bank.

The amendment covers:

- The inshore Gulf of Maine – Outer Schoodic Ridge and Mt. Desert Rock;
- The offshore Gulf of Maine – Jordan Basin and Lindenkohl Knoll on the edge of Georges Basin; and
- South of Georges Bank – Continental Slope and canyons region.

Inshore Gulf of Maine Preferred Alternative

The Council’s preferred alternative for the inshore Gulf of Maine would prohibit mobile bottom-tending gear (trawls and dredges) within both the Schoodic Ridge and Mt. Desert Rock areas. While an option to prohibit *all* bottom-tending gear, including lobster traps/pots, is still in the amendment, it is **NOT** the Council’s preferred alternative. The Council recognized the economic impact associated with preventing the lobster fishery from working within the inshore areas and acknowledged that shifts in effort to other locations could be problematic.

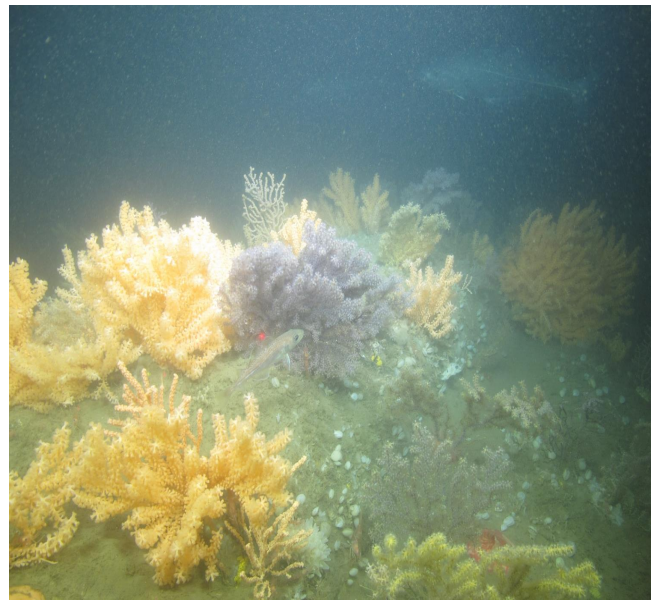
Offshore Gulf of Maine Preferred Alternative

The Council’s preferred alternative for the offshore Gulf of Maine would prohibit bottom-tending mobile gear within Jordon Basin and/or Lindenkohl Knoll “**if coral zones are adopted**” for either or both areas.

Under the preferred alternative, if offshore Gulf of Maine areas are adopted following public hearings, lobster traps and gillnets could continue to be fished within Jordon Basin and/or Lindenkohl Knoll.

IMPORTANT: *The Council often selects preferred alternatives prior to public hearings to give stakeholders an indication of which direction it is leaning at that particular point in time.*

*However, the Council is **NOT OBLIGATED** to adopt preferred alternatives when it takes final action. The Council will consider all public comments before making any final decisions related to the Omnibus Coral Amendment.*

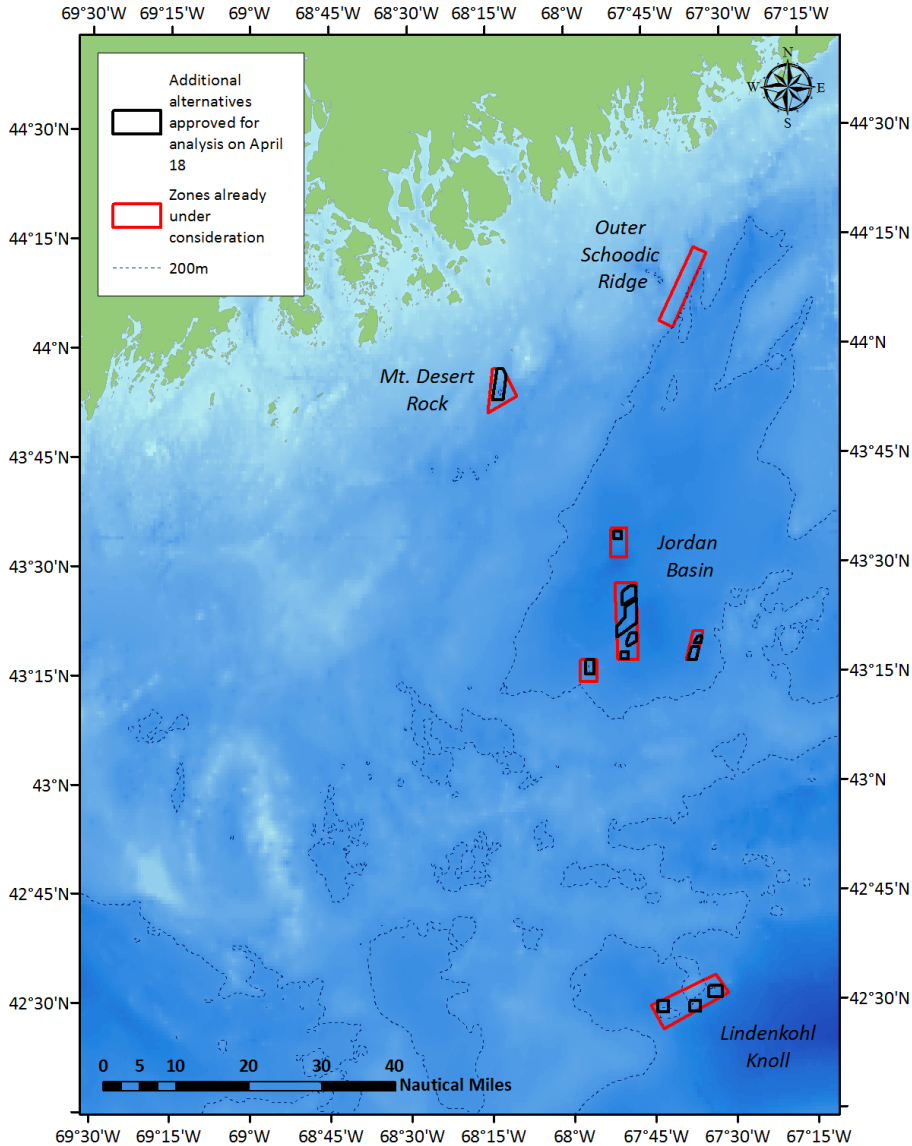


Soft corals and fish in Jordan Basin. – Image courtesy of Peter Auster



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Gulf of Maine Boundary Alternatives



For the Gulf of Maine, the Council is considering multiple **boundary alternatives** for coral protection zones.

- The Council previously adopted the larger **red boundaries** in the map at left for inclusion in the amendment.
- On April 18 at its meeting in Mystic, CT, the Council directed the Habitat Plan Development Team to analyze the smaller **black boundaries** as an alternative to send to public hearings.
- The Council has not yet identified preferences between the larger vs. smaller areas.

Note: See next page for Continental Shelf map.

Frameworkable Items

Under the amendment’s “Framework Provisions for Coral Zones,” the Council selected all of the alternatives except “no action” as preferred. These alternatives would allow the Council to make specific coral management changes through framework adjustments, which often can be developed more quickly than amendments.

Frameworkable items selected as preferred include:

- Add, revise, or remove coral zones;
- Change fishing restrictions; and
- Allow development of exempted, special access, or exploratory fishing programs.



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South of Georges Bank – Continental Slope/Canyons Region Preferred Alternative

The Council selected a broad coral protection zone boundary of 600 meters minimum depth, equivalent to roughly 325 fathoms, as its preferred alternative for the Continental Slope/canyons region, which is south of Georges Bank. The use of all bottom-tending gear would be prohibited within the zone. However, the Council's preferred alternative provides a pot gear exemption for the deep-sea red crab fishery, which is the only fishery using bottom-tending gear known to take place deeper than 600 meters.

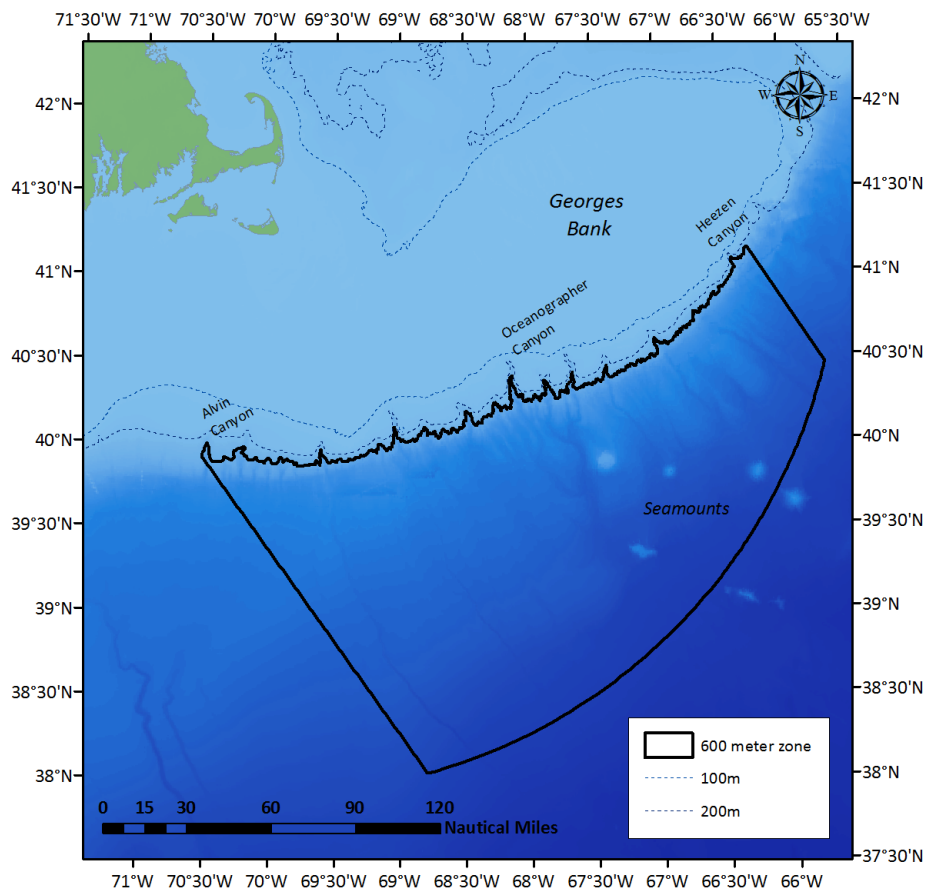
The amendment also contains 300-, 400-, 500-, and 900-meter broad zone alternatives, which will be included in the public hearing document.

The Council will announce the public hearing schedule, including dates and locations, in early May. Late-May public hearings are anticipated.

The Council recognizes the importance of additional scientific research to understand the distribution and ecological importance of coral habitats.

As such, the amendment will include a detailed list of research priorities, as well as a provision to help the Council and National Marine Fisheries Service track coral-related research projects occurring within and around the designated management zones.

Through this Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment, the Council is attempting to “freeze the footprint” of fishing activity in designated coral protection zones to prevent the expansion of fisheries in sensitive coral areas that currently are unfished.



- Documents used during the Council's April 18 Coral Amendment discussion are available at:
<http://www.nefmc.org/library/april-2017-habitat-committee-report>.
- The draft coral amendment is available directly at:
http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/2a.-170410_Draft_Coral_Amendment.pdf
Note: This is a large document and may take time to download.
- For more information, contact Habitat Coordinator Michelle Bachman at (978) 465-0492 ext. 120, email mbachman@nefmc.org.