

National Parks and Wildlife Service

Conservation Objectives Series

Southern Canyons SAC 002278



NPWS

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Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife
Service

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Introduction

The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives and Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated to afford protection to the most vulnerable of them. These two designations are collectively known as the Natura 2000 network.

European and national legislation places a collective obligation on Ireland and its citizens to maintain habitats and species in the Natura 2000 network at favourable conservation condition. The Government and its agencies are responsible for the implementation and enforcement of regulations that will ensure the ecological integrity of these sites.

A site-specific conservation objective aims to define favourable conservation condition for a particular habitat or species at that site.

The maintenance of habitats and species within Natura 2000 sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing, and
- the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Notes/Guidelines:

1. The targets given in these conservation objectives are based on best available information at the time of writing. As more information becomes available, targets for attributes may change. These will be updated periodically, as necessary.
2. An appropriate assessment based on these conservation objectives will remain valid even if the targets are subsequently updated, providing they were the most recent objectives available when the assessment was carried out. It is essential that the date and version are included when objectives are cited.
3. Assessments cannot consider an attribute in isolation from the others listed for that habitat or species, or for other habitats and species listed for that site. A plan or project with an apparently small impact on one attribute may have a significant impact on another.
4. Please note that the maps included in this document do not necessarily show the entire extent of the habitats and species for which the site is listed. This should be borne in mind when appropriate assessments are being carried out.
5. When using these objectives, it is essential that the relevant backing/supporting documents are consulted, particularly where instructed in the targets or notes for a particular attribute.

Qualifying Interests

** indicates a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive*

002278 Southern Canyons SAC

1170 Reefs

Supporting documents, relevant reports & publications

Supporting documents, NPWS reports and publications are available for download from: www.npws.ie/Publications

NPWS Documents

Year :	2024
Title :	Reef Habitat in Irish offshore waters – A synthesis of current knowledge
Author :	Forde, J., Alcock, L. & Grehan, A.
Series :	Irish Wildlife Manuals No. 152
Year :	2026
Title :	Southern Canyons SAC (site code 002278) Conservation objectives supporting document - Marine Habitats Version 1
Author :	NPWS
Series :	Conservation objectives supporting document

Other References

Year :	2002
Title :	Report of the survey in zone 3 of the Irish National Seabed Survey, volume 1: Describing the results and the methods used
Author :	Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI)
Series :	GOTECH, Dublin
Year :	2010
Title :	Atlas of the deep-water seabed: Ireland
Author :	Dorschel, B.; Wheeler, A.J.; Monteys, X.; Verbruggen, K.
Series :	Springer, Netherlands
Year :	2013
Title :	High-resolution habitat suitability modelling can improve conservation of vulnerable marine ecosystems in the deep sea
Author :	Rengstorf, A.M.; Yesson, C.; Brown, C.; Grehan, A.J.
Series :	Journal of Biogeography, 40: 1702-1714
Year :	2018
Title :	SEAROVER 2017 Deep Water Reef Habitat & Species Video Analysis Full Report
Author :	Ross, R.E.; La Bianca, G.; Howell, K.L.
Series :	Report commissioned by Marine Institute, Rinville, Oranmore, Co. Galway
Year :	2020
Title :	SEAROVER 2019 Deep Water Reef Habitat & Species Video Analysis Full Report
Author :	La Bianca, G.; Ross, R.; Howell, K.
Series :	Report commissioned by Marine Institute, Rinville, Oranmore, Co. Galway
Year :	2021
Title :	Sensitive Ecosystem Assessment and ROV Exploration of Reef (SeaRover), Synthesis Report
Author :	Picton, B.E.; Morrow, C.C.; Scally, L.; Pfeiffer, N.
Series :	Report prepared by MERC Consultants Ltd. On behalf of the Marine Institute, Galway.

Spatial data sources

Year : 2026

Title : Internal NPWS data

GIS Operations : Potential habitat distribution created from spatial references supplied by NPWS expert. Expert opinion used as necessary to resolve any issues arising

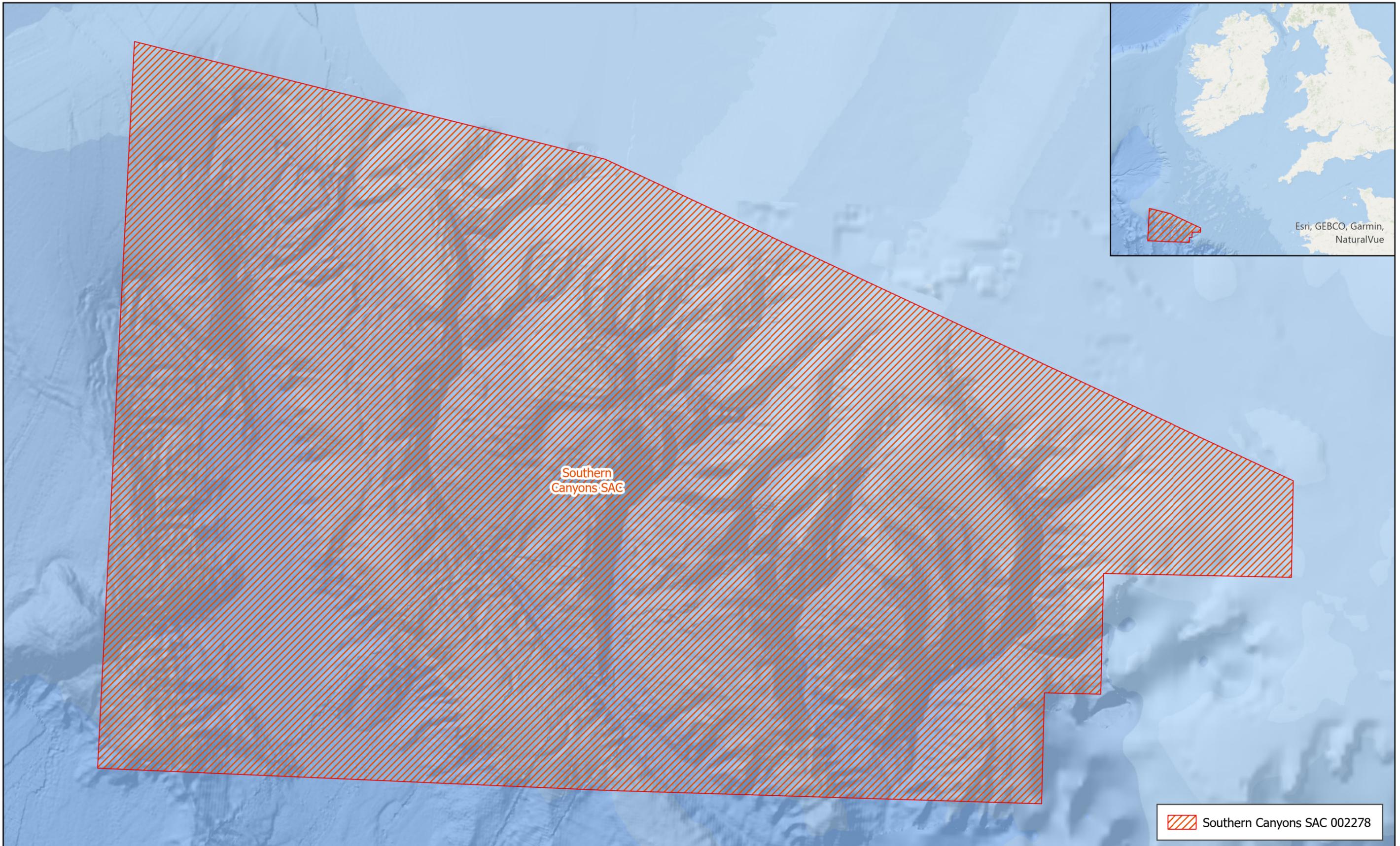
Used For : 1170, Marine Community Types (Map 2, Map 3)

Conservation Objectives for : Southern Canyons SAC [002278]

1170 Reefs

To restore the Favourable conservation condition of Reefs in Southern Canyon SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

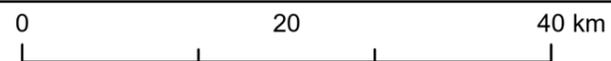
Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Habitat area	Hectares	The permanent area is stable or increasing, subject to natural processes. See map 2	Habitat area estimated as 33,783ha based on information from the national seabed mapping programme INFOMAR (Dorschel et al., 2010) and the Irish National Seabed Survey (Geological Survey of Ireland, 2002). See the Southern Canyons SAC conservation objectives supporting document for marine habitats for further details (NPWS, 2026)
Distribution	Occurrence	The distribution of reefs is stable or increasing, subject to natural processes. See map 2	Based on information from the national seabed mapping programme INFOMAR (Dorschel et al., 2010) and the Irish National Seabed Survey (Geological Survey of Ireland, 2002). Map 2 shows the mapped geological features, which are used as indicators for the distribution of the reefs habitat. See the marine habitats supporting document for further details (NPWS, 2026)
Physical structure: habitat-forming species	Presence and structure	Maintain the structural integrity of the Southern Canyons Reef Community Complex, subject to natural processes. See map 3	Based on information from Rengstorf et al. (2013), Ross et al. (2018), La Bianca et al. (2020), Picton et al. (2021) and Forde et al. (2024). See the marine habitats supporting document for further details (NPWS, 2026)
Community structure	Biological composition	Conserve the Southern Canyons Reef Community Complex in a natural condition, subject to natural processes. See map 3	Based on information from Rengstorf et al. (2013), Ross et al. (2018), La Bianca et al. (2020), Picton et al. (2021) and Forde et al. (2024). See the marine habitats supporting document for further details (NPWS, 2026)



Southern
Canyons SAC

 Southern Canyons SAC 002278

**MAP 1: SOUTHERN CANYONS SAC
CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES
SAC DESIGNATION**
SITE CODE: 002278 SAC; Version 1; MARINE



The mapped boundaries are of an indicative and general nature only.
Boundaries of designated areas are subject to revision.
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Féadfar athbhreithnithe a déanamh ar theorainneacha na gceantar
comharthaithe. Macasamhail d'ábhar na Suirbhéarachta Ordonáis
le chead ón Rialtas (Ceadunas Uimh. EN 0059208)

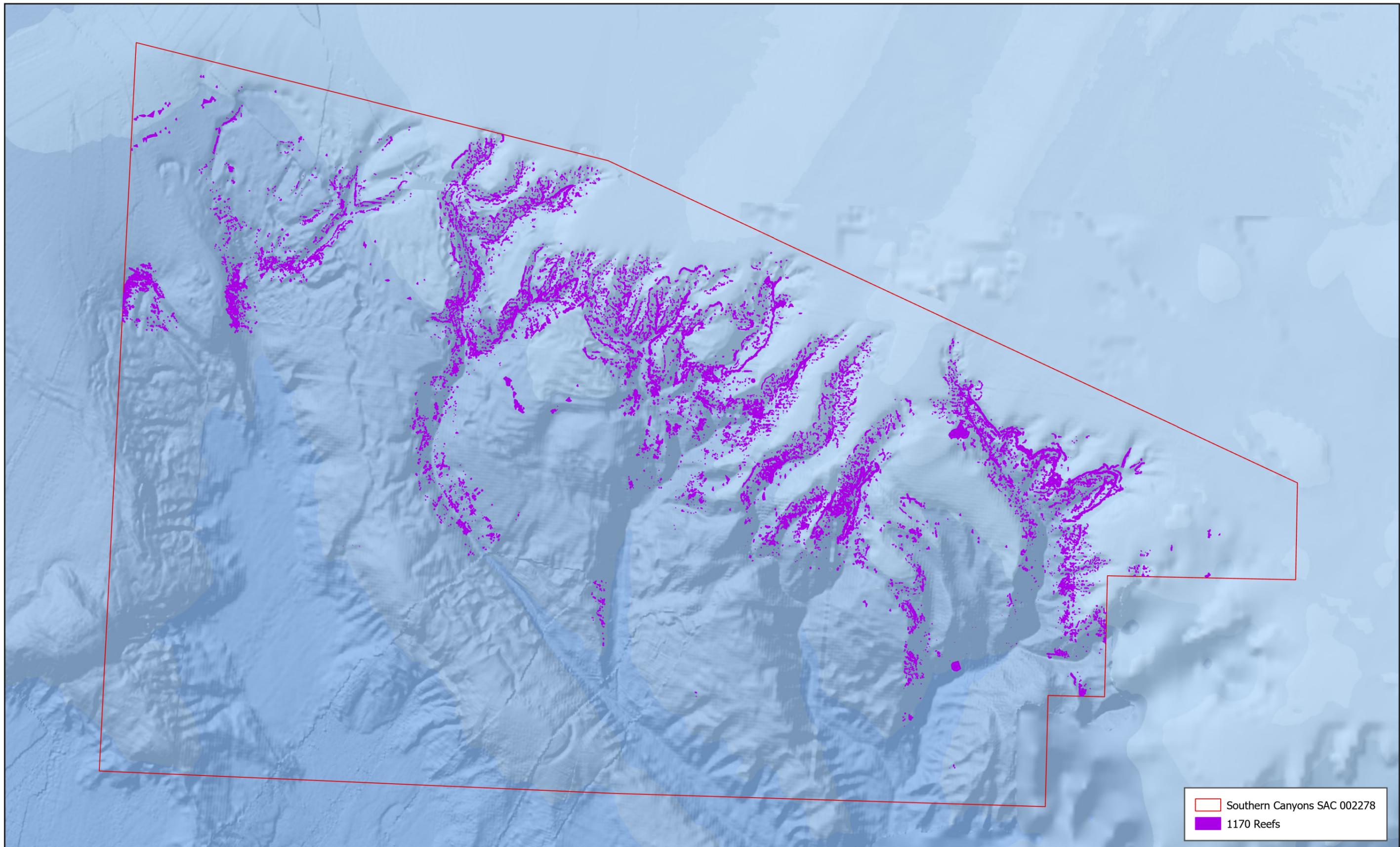


Map Version 1
Date: January 2026



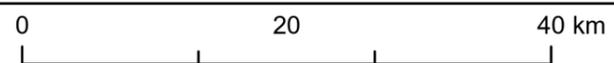
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**MAP 2: SOUTHERN CANYONS SAC
CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES
REEFS**

SITE CODE: 002278 SAC; Version 1; MARINE



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le chead ón Rialtas (Ceadunas Uimh. EN 0059208)

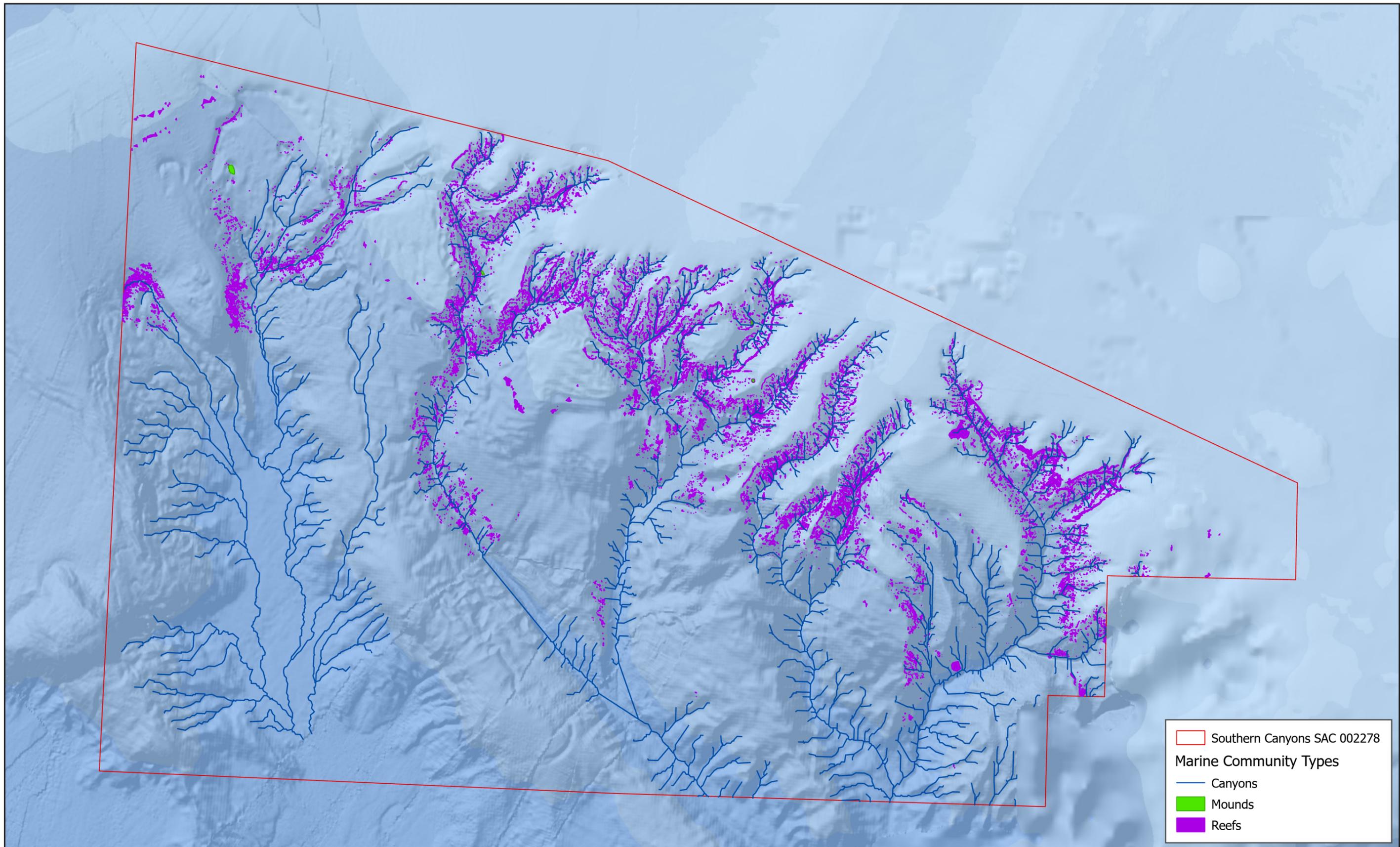


**Map Version 1
Date: January 2026**



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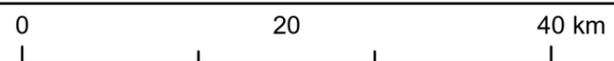
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**MAP 3: SOUTHERN CANYONS SAC
CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES
MARINE COMMUNITY TYPES**
SITE CODE: 002278 SAC; Version 1; MARINE



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Map Version 1
Date: January 2026