ARTIFICIAL REEFS

AND THEIR LOCATIONS

BROWARD COUNTY
INTRODUCTION

Just as our beaches attract tourists, our offshore marine environment draws diving and fishing enthusiasts from all over the world. This represents an important asset to Broward County, it also creates significant pressures on our natural resources. Boat anchors and scuba divers can do actual physical damage to natural reefs by breaking coral or “uprooting” other attached marine animals. Commercial and recreational fishing, spear fishing or lobster-taking can also seriously deplete fishery resources.

Since 1982, the Broward County Department of Natural Resource Protection (DNRP) has created over 75 artificial reefs offshore of Broward County. The reefs, which are designed to create a new stable substrate, are made from a variety of materials, including ships, barges, oil rigs, limestone rock, airplanes, concrete culverts, engineered concrete artificial reef modules and other environmentally suitable artificial reef materials. These materials are deployed into various depths of the Atlantic Ocean offshore of Broward County where they quickly become habitat for a myriad of marine life. Through the artificial reef program, DNRP is not only creating additional habitat for various marine organisms and fish but is also helping to decrease user pressure on our natural reefs. This will benefit both our environment and our economy for years to come.

Inside are reef locations and G.P.S. coordinates for artificial reefs offshore of Broward County. As more reefs are constructed, additional coordinates will be made available.

When utilizing an artificial reef, it is important to practice conservation and courtesy so that the reef can continue to be of benefit to others.

The construction of artificial reefs has been a joint effort among government agencies, corporations, foundations, and individuals. Tax deductible donations of material, services, and transportation costs have been the keys to the success of the Artificial Reef Program. Donations to the Artificial Reef Program are always welcome and these donations will help to make Broward County a better place to live, work, and visit.

DIVING ON AN ARTIFICIAL REEF

Many SCUBA Divers have found artificial reefs to be a beautiful and exciting dive. The diving-oriented artificial reefs in Broward County are diverse in type, depth, and level of diving difficulty. As with any wreck dive, inherent safety concerns are paramount. Wreck Diver Certification is extremely beneficial and is available through most dive facilities in Broward County. There are many days off Broward County where there is 100% visibility and no current, where snorkelers can paddle around and view a massive ship lying in 110' of water. There are also days where visibility is bad, the current is strong, and the ocean is rough. It pays to assess the situation before leaving the dock and again at the wreck site. It is better to abort a planned dive than to end up in trouble. The wreck will be there many decades.

When over an artificial reef, a prudent skipper will always leave someone aboard the boat who can operate the boat in an emergency. This person should maintain a watch for divers surfaced downstream of the artificial reef. Of course, a dive flag (the bigger the better) should always be flown when divers are in the water. Remember to lower the flag when all divers are back in the boat. Tying a safety line with a float to a stem cleat is always a good idea.

Another precaution when diving an artificial reef is to be aware of the hazards of mono-filament fishing line and other snags. The buddy system is crucial to wreck diving. Each diver should carry a knife and/or wire cutter to avoid entanglement. Penetration of any wreck is not recommended. The most colorful and beautiful corals, sponges and fish are on the outside of the wreck where sunlight enhances the growth. Divers should always maintain their dive profile and should be aware that some dive oriented artificial reefs rise sixty feet off the ocean floor. Pre-dive planning and staying with that plan is important to avoid barotrauma. Finally, only dive within your capability. Make diving on Broward’s artificial reefs a safe and enjoyable experience.

FISHING THE ARTIFICIAL REEFs

Many different species of fish can be caught over or near artificial reefs. Reefs deeper than 200' are especially productive for large pelagic predators. Amberjack, strong, fighting fish that can weigh over 100 lbs., are one of the most common reef residents. The amberjack school over the artificial reefs from January to July, with May being the peak month. During this period, the fish are spawning and there is the potential for over harvesting. Because of their relatively poor table value, amberjack should be released whenever possible. It is best to keep the fish in the water while removing the hook or cutting the leader. When caught, the amberjack’s air bladder often inflates and the fish is not able to descend after being released. The gentle insertion of an ice pick or
large hypodermic needle, into the air bladder will deflate the air bladder without hurting the fish. Other species of wreck dwellers are black, gag, war saw, and snowy groupers. Giant jewfish also make many of the wrecks their home. Anglers should remember that grouper are extremely slow-growing fish and conservation of these species is critical.

Fishermen need not be directly on top of an artificial reef to benefit from it. Many species, including sailfish, kingfish, Spanish mackerel, barracuda, mutton snapper, and cobia appear to use the artificial reefs as the center for their feeding forays. These bluewater roamers can be caught in abundance many hundreds of yards from the artificial reef. Cold, plankton-rich waters are forced by the Gulf Stream up and over the top of the wreck. Often, in strong currents, an eddy can be seen on the surface, down current from an artificial reef. Gamefish often lurk in this “disturbed” water, feeding on baitfish and pelagic crustaceans.

The Artificial Reef Program needs data regarding the artificial reefs. Please report catches (species, size, date, reef name where caught) and any unusual sightings or events by calling (954) 519-1230 or by writing to Broward County Artificial Reef Program, 218 S.W. 1st Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301. This information will help us to plan future reefs to better the environment and fishing.