



<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/programs/coral/updates/>

Artificial reef programs surge forward despite economy

Jupiter Courier / By Alex Boerner / October 2, 2009

Clockwise from lower left, Dave Powell, Vice President of the Artificial Reef Fund, Nick Neuman, Kerry Dillon, Joe Emmick and Bob Wehrman, hoist the Glasrud Reef sign over the side of the tugboat, Big Al, Tuesday afternoon at American Custom Yachts in Stuart. The sign is going to be welded to the top of the wheel house on the boat, which is going to be towed out by another tug boat and sunk in 195 feet of water to form an artificial reef. Built in 1954, it is 69 feet long with a 19-foot beam. It was donated by American Custom Yachts.

TROPICAL FARMS —

Amongst scores of boats on a back lot at American Custom Yachts, one vessel is undergoing a dramatic makeover.

The tugboat Big Al has been scrubbed, de-rigged and stripped to prepare it for a final resting place — in 180 feet of water about eight miles off the St. Lucie Inlet.

Tuesday, the former work vessel received its new name as part of the makeover. From now on, the 69-foot long tug will be known as Glasrud Reef.

Even in this economic downturn, supporters of artificial reef programs on the Treasure Coast have maintained momentum to enhance offshore underwater habitat. The result has translated into a steady flow of concrete and steel bound for the bottom of the sea.

The goal is to create more places for fish and other marine organisms to live in an effort to produce sustainable fisheries.

Kerry Dillon, a diver and consultant who works locally with artificial reef programs, said that goal is being met with unexpected success.

“Last weekend on the Clifton S. Perry Memorial Reef (in 65 feet of water off Martin County) we counted 52 species of fish — the highest number we ever counted,” Dillon said. “When we do these fish surveys, we hope to get as high as 30 or 35, but never have we even come close to 52.”

Dillon has observed and documented other biological indicators.

In two reef locations, Dillon has taken photos and video of growing young pieces of protected, deepwater *Oculina* coral.

Last weekend, he saw large schools of yellowtail snapper in 95 feet of water off St. Lucie County — well north of the species' usual range. Over the past few years, he has seen a ballooning population of genuine red snapper on these structures — south of their normal range.

St. Lucie County deployed four reefs this summer made of various concrete rubble donated by companies that save the cost of hauling these unwanted materials to a landfill. Martin County placed three reefs in late August.

Neither county would have been able to do so without financial support from its fishing, diving and boating community.

“Private donors are stepping in and providing important funding necessary to continue these projects,” said Keith Mille, of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Artificial Reef Program. “None of these programs would survive without funding from all corners such as private, county, state and federal sources.”

Mille said that the FWC receives 75 percent of its funding from federal programs such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Sport Fish Restoration, with taxes on boat fuel and fishing tackle/equipment a major revenue producer. Other money comes from the Marine Resource Trust Fund, with state fishing license sales the source.

Because of its successes here — and around the state — legislators have not shut down the FWC program even in these budget-cutting times. Still, Mille pointed out that each year money requests are discussed as part of the state budget process. 2

John Burke of the Martin County Artificial Reef Committee said the growing expense of processing materials and vessels for sinking puts an increasing demand on limited funds.

“It’s expensive to clean a vessel like the Glasrud Reef — more expensive than we anticipated,” said Burke, estimating the prep cost at \$40,000, much of which was paid for by developer Ted Glasrud. “We have to be inspected by the Coast Guard, FWC, Department of Environmental Protection, Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers before we can go to sea.

“But it has been gratifying to see the communal effort put forth — like Mr. Glasrud’s contribution — to get these projects done.”