

Emerald Coast Reef Association

*The Emerald Coast Reef Association is a Non-Profit 501 c3 corporation dedicated to Reef Building and Research.
Our goal is to improve the fishery in the Gulf of Mexico by providing habitat and evaluating the effectiveness of Artificial Reefs*
P.O. Box 273 Niceville Florida 32588 www.ecreef.org

To Whom It May Concern:

January 14, 2008

The Emerald Coast Reef Association is seriously concerned that the ACOE's proposed changes to artificial reef permitting requirements will have a negative impact on the ability of Okaloosa County to deploy affordable and effective Artificial Reefs the future. It is vital to maintain and improve the fishery off the Coast of Destin by providing habitat for fish through Artificial Reef building.

Requiring 1/2" steel will severely limit the available reef materials that the county could deploy and the sheer weight could drive up the cost of deployment beyond their budget. With the tremendous increase in costs for reef materials, deployments and the limited funds provided to our County by the Federal and State Government, we believe this would have a negative effect on our fishery and ultimately, our local economy.

Due to the fact that the majority of the sea floor off Okaloosa County's coast is barren, sandy bottom, Artificial Reef Building off our coast is not an option, it is a necessity.

At a time when fish catch limits are being reduced and Open Seasons are being shortened in an effort to protect the fishery in the Gulf of Mexico, it seems dangerous to institute regulations that restrict Reef Building Activities that have been proven to be successful in improving the health of our fishery.

Any changes in the rules that affect availability or affordability of Reef Building in our area should be carefully studied and thoroughly justified before being implemented. If changes are made, without considering the negative impact they will have on our fishery, we believe that our economy will suffer in direct proportion to the damage to our fishery that will result from limiting Okaloosa County's ability to build reasonably priced and effective Artificial Reefs.

While it is easy to think that only fishermen and divers are affected by changes in our fishery, nothing could be further from the truth. Our area sustains a large tourist industry and almost every resident in our area is either directly or indirectly affected by our local fishery.

The Professional, Charter and Recreational Fishing industries in our area generate a substantial amount of income into our economy. Including but not limited to:

Boat Sales, Boat Parts & Supplies, Boat Mechanics & Electricians, Boat Detailers & Painters, Boat Builders, Gas & Diesel Sales, Marinas & Boat Yards, Fishing supply stores & Bait Shops, Dock Builders, Boat Lift Sales, Dive Shops, Diving Instructors, Fishing Charters, Diving Charters, Banks and Savings & Loan companies, Insurance agencies, Truck Sales, Hotel, Motel & Condo's, Travel Agencies, Airlines, Car Rental Companies, Retail Seafood Outlets, Seafood Restaurants, etc...

We're also concerned about the possibility that the 1/2" steel restriction could be expanded to restrict private reef deployments in the future. This would, in effect, kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. The private reef building efforts by Recreational Fishermen and Charter Boat owners provide our fishery with a constant supply of legally permitted reefs and reef replacements at no cost to the County, State or Federal Government.

We believe these efforts by private individuals have a tremendous and positive impact on the health of the fishery off our coast. Any change in the rules that further restricts the available reef materials or greatly increases the cost of private deployments would be a detriment to our fishery.

We respectfully request that the steel thickness requirement remain 1/8th inch.

Thank You for your Time and Consideration,

Candy Hansard

Emerald Coast Reef Association
Member, Board of Directors
Director of Reef Deployment
P.O. Box 273 Niceville, FL 32588
www.ECReef.org
candy@valp.net