

NEED FOR OUTREACH CAMPAIGN FOR ARTIFICIAL REEF SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONE (SMZ) REGULATIONS

From Jim Oppenborn - St. Lucie County Coastal Resources Supervisor (July 2011)

St. Lucie County Offshore and Nearshore Artificial Reef Sites

Background

- 1980s (onward) Artificial reef building is commonplace on the Treasure Coast and is designed to create recreational opportunities.
- 1987 - The Special Management Zone Monitoring Team (Jim Bohnsack, Rod Dalton, and Gregg Waugh) met to discuss the gear restrictions proposed by the Fort Pierce Sportfishing Club on its permitted artificial reef sites:
 - Prohibit fish traps
 - Prohibit hydraulic and electric reels
 - Prohibit bottom longlines
 - Prohibit hydraulic and electric reels on both reefs for fishing for species in the snapper grouper fishery unless mounted on a hand-held rod
 - Prohibit all spearfishing on the inshore site and allow spearfishing by all gear on the offshore site
 - Prohibit possession or harvest of jewfish (later renamed to Goliath grouper) on both reef sites
- 1989 – Final Regulatory Impact Review (FRIR) and Implementation of Artificial Reef SMZ Regulations
 - Problem Statement – “Artificial reefs are expensive to create and maintain and the benefits can be rapidly extracted by the use of overly efficient gear ... permittee does not realize the socio-economic benefits that were anticipated.”
 - Approved Gear Restrictions
 - Prohibit bottom longlines on both reef sites
 - Prohibit fish traps on both reef sites
 - Prohibit hydraulic and electric reels on both reefs for fishing for species in the snapper grouper fishery unless mounted on a hand-held rod
 - Prohibit possession or harvest of jewfish (later renamed to Goliath grouper) on both reef sites Prohibit all spearfishing on the inshore site and allow spearfishing by all gear on the offshore site
- 1999 – Artificial Reef SMZ regulations amended to prohibit the use of powerheads on artificial reef sites
- 2002 – A compilation of Federal regulations to include those regulations on artificial reef sites (including St. Lucie County artificial reef sites) is produced in a NMFS document. Restrictions include:
 - Prohibition against trawling for brown shrimp, Pink shrimp, or white shrimp

Problem

- **Knowledge of SMZ regulations is non-existent and should be promoted throughout the community before regulations can be enforced. An informal survey of boats**

trailed to St. Lucie County Boat Ramps in 2010-11 revealed boats from 20 Florida counties and 17 other states use St. Lucie County waters.

- The 1989 FRIR noted that these artificial reef sites were built on barren sand bottoms and would not have supported sufficient quantities of fish to sustain commercial fishing prior to placement of the artificial reefs. The FRIR also assumes that the Fort Pierce Sportfishing Club as permittees of the artificial reef sites would assist in “self-policing” of the sites, minimizing Federal enforcement costs.
- The Fort Pierce Sportfishing Club is no longer capable of fulfilling this role.
- St. Lucie County has developed techniques for building relatively large artificial reefs which have attracted large numbers of various species (black grouper, gag, Goliath grouper, lemon shark, permit, red snapper, snook, spotted eagle ray)
- Large reefs may be providing spawning habitat for many species of fish, relieving a potential bottleneck to recruitment-limited species. Knowing spawning locations of regulated species would assist regulators in propagating these species (assuming enforcement of existing regulations were possible).

Possible Solutions

- **An advertising campaign to promote the knowledge of SMZ regulations, broken down in short, easy to understand, bullet points should be initiated to notify boaters of regulations:**
 - **Coastal Angler Magazine**
 - **Fishing charts (Homeport Charts, Florida Sportsman, Top Spot, etc.)**
 - **FWC Artificial Reef Program web site**
 - **Local bait and tackle shops**
 - **Local newspapers**
 - **Local seafood wholesalers**
 - **Regional fishing magazines (i.e. Florida Sportsman)**
 - **SAFMC web site**
 - **Snook Foundation website**
 - **Southern Shrimp Alliance web site**
 - **Sportfish Conservation Alliance web site**
 - **St. Lucie County Artificial Reef Program and Tourism web sites**
- The St. Lucie County Sheriff’s Office has a marine unit. If the Sheriff’s Office could be deputized by NOAA to enforce Federal laws (the artificial reef sites are in Federal waters), the County could then look for grant funding for enforcement on the water.
- Creation of a “Treasure Coast Artificial Reef Marine Sanctuary” based on the use of artificial reefs in helping to propagate fish species would provide an impetus for additional enforcement resources. The sanctuary concept has already been discussed with:
 - St. Lucie County Marine Resources Advisory Committee – sanctuary designation might be acceptable as long as it doesn’t involve additional regulations (enforcement of existing regulations OK)
 - Billy Causey – Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (sanctuary based on artificial reef deployment is possible but would likely take a number of years to develop)

