



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Ships-2-Reefs Program 2018-19 Annual Report

Ships-2-Reefs Program

In 2008, the Florida Legislature passed “Ships-2-Reefs” Program legislation (SB 432), Chapter 2008-100, *Laws of Florida*, whose guiding language and objectives were incorporated in sections 379.249(8) and 379.2495, *Florida Statutes*. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) was authorized to establish a matching grants program, in partnership with local coastal governments and eligible nonprofit corporations, for purposes of securing, cleaning, and placement of appropriate, available U.S. Navy and U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD) inactive reserve fleet ships as artificial reefs in state coastal and adjacent federal waters. Implementation of the program is subject to available appropriations. Section 379.2495(6), *Florida Statutes*, requires FWC to submit an annual report to the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives detailing the expenditure of the funds appropriated to FWC for the purposes of carrying out the military “Ships-2-Reefs” program. This report is submitted to fulfill that requirement.

For Fiscal Year (FY) 2018-19, there were no funds appropriated by the Florida Legislature to support any new MARAD or Navy Ships-2-Reefs projects under section 379.2495, *Florida Statutes*.

NATIONWIDE SHIPS-2-REEFS DEVELOPMENTS

MARAD Ships

U.S. Navy Ships

Naval Museum Ships

FWC Ships-2-Reefs Technical Assistance

Non-Military Commercial Vessels

Nationwide Ships-2-Reefs Developments

MARAD SHIPS

Nationwide, large military noncombatant auxiliary ships (at least 300-feet in length and displacement of 1,500 gross tons or greater) with title held by the U.S. Navy or the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration (MARAD) are not currently available for shallow water artificial reefing (less than 500-foot depth), nor do they appear to be available in the near future. For MARAD, continued emphasis will be on domestic ship scrapping. On May 29, 2012, MARAD issued a policy that will not allow the reefing of any ship in their disposal inventory that was built prior to 1985, the year that polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were prohibited from use in ship board materials, and other applications. This policy considers the elevated value of recycled steel and non-ferrous metals, like copper and aluminum, creating high demand for decommissioned military ships by the domestic ship scrapping industry. Additionally, there were non-governmental organizations voicing environmental concerns about the presence of PCBs in older decommissioned military vessels. As of October 2019, the MARAD National Defense Reserve Fleet Inventory does not list any non-retention vessels built during 1985 or later, effectively eliminating MARAD as a source for ships for reefs in the near-term. As the inventory of pre-1985 ships decline through sales and subsequent scrapping, the hope is that newer ships will be decommissioned and MARAD will again offer these ships for reef projects as they have in the past. In addition, cleanup costs for the newer ships may be significantly less since PCB remediation has been a major cost in ship preparation for the older vessels.

During a Spring 2013 meeting of the artificial reef subcommittee of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), the subcommittee drafted a letter requesting MARAD to reconsider its new ship reefing policy of only allowing MARAD vessels newer than 1985 to be released for use as artificial reefs. The case was made that with sufficient funds and resources to completely mitigate all PCB materials on an older MARAD ship, as was demonstrated for the USS VANDENBERG sunk off Key West in 2009, a state should have the option to request and take title to any MARAD inactive reserve fleet ship available for disposal. The letter was sent out by the ASMFC on June 5, 2013. MARAD replied to the letter on October 31, 2013, stating that they would pursue the most cost-effective methods for ship disposal available at the time. As of 2019, although scrap steel prices have slightly dropped, scrapping continues to be more cost effective than reefing for MARAD due to higher scrap steel, copper, and aluminum prices. Additionally, contract development and



vessel transfer for scrapping has historically required less time to process and approve applications for reefing a vessel, compared to waiting until all funding is in place to complete a reefing project and executing a title transfer.

U.S. NAVY SHIPS

In 2004, legislation was passed by the United States Congress and signed by the President of the United States authorizing the Navy to transfer vessels stricken from the Naval Vessel Register to states for use as artificial reefs as stated in Title 10 United States Code Section 7306b.

If obsolete Navy vessels become available, the Naval Sea Systems Command Inactive Ships program will offer them to states for reefing through an application process. The office evaluates applications according to established criteria such as: whether the site has an Army Corps of Engineers permit; whether the state has an authorized reefing program; and if there is strong support from the state government for the reefing program. The Navy also requires that states obtain and bear all responsibility for complying with all federal, state, interstate and local regulations for using, siting, constructing, monitoring, and managing the vessel as an artificial reef.

After choosing the ship's recipient and executing a donation transfer contract, the ship must be environmentally prepared in accordance with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) document "*Best Management Practices for Preparing Vessels Intended to Create Artificial Reefs*" developed by the EPA and MARAD. This document establishes both pre-sinking environmental preparation requirements, as well as methods for achieving these requirements. It requires the vessel to be environmentally cleaned, which includes the removal and disposal of liquid hydrocarbons, loose debris, floatable materials, and materials containing PCBs. Additionally, vessels must be approved by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) for seaworthiness.

Only two Navy ships have been transferred under this authority: the USS ORISKANY (CVA 34) donated to the State of Florida and sunk in May 2006, after environmental preparations were conducted by the Navy in accordance with EPA requirements; and the USS ARTHUR W RADFORD (DD 968) transferred to the State of Delaware in June 2010 and sunk in August 2011, after environmental preparations were conducted in accordance with EPA requirements. All other U.S. military vessels transferred for reefing to date have been from MARAD.



As of October 10, 2019, the Navy does not have any other inactive ships available for transfer to states for use as artificial reefs.

The Navy continues to pursue non-reefing ship disposal and utilization options over the option of designating vessels available for artificial reefs. These alternative uses in addition to domestic scrapping, include prolonging the active life of ships prior to decommissioning, donation of suitable ships to allied governments, museum donations, and sinking of vessels in depths greater than 6,000 feet during military training operations. Navy ships decommissioned will continue to be evaluated by the Navy Inactive Ships program on a case-by-case basis, but Navy preference for non-reefing ship disposal significantly limits availability for reefing in the future. If a Navy vessel does become available for reefing it would most likely be a vessel built after 1985 and expected to be PCB free.

NAVAL MUSEUM SHIPS

The vessel museum donation program may be an option for future reef vessel candidates, based on the successful cleaning and sinking of the USCG Cutter USS MOHAWK on July 2, 2012, off Lee County, Florida. Local funding sources covered the \$1.6 million cost of this project. There are about 164 vessel museums nationwide. Navy reservists make annual inspections of these museums and write up reports, noting any safety or structural integrity concerns. Occasionally, a museum ship can no longer be financially justified for use as a floating museum as was the case with the MOHAWK and is currently the case for the USS Clamagore.

During Fiscal Year 2018-19, FWC staff continued to be in contact with a Florida Corporation, Artificial Reefs International (ARI) who was actively fundraising and acting as the agent for the state of South Carolina Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum for potential reefing opportunities for the submarine USS Clamagore since June 2016. Built in 1945 for the United States Navy, the Clamagore is 311 feet in length and is the only surviving GUPPY type III submarine in the US. Serving 30 years in the Navy, the Clamagore was used to perform patrols in the Caribbean and Mediterranean Sea during the Cold War. The Clamagore was decommissioned on June 12th, 1975 and has been at the Patriots Point Maritime Museum in Charleston, South Carolina since May 1981. The Museum officials have deemed the maintenance costs too high and are considering reefing as a removal option. In 2017, Palm Beach County entered into a contract with ARI to fundraise, plan and deploy the vessel as a reef off Palm Beach County, pledging \$1million towards the project. Unfortunately, despite two contract extensions, ARI was unable to raise the remaining funding and the Palm Beach County contract



expired on September 30, 2019 with no plans to be further pursued. In the meantime, the state of South Carolina allocated \$2.7M in June 2019 with the intent of sinking the USS Clamagore as an artificial reef off South Carolina.

FWC SHIPS-2-REEFS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

FWC has a program, along with policies and guidance in place, to assist any local government wishing to pursue a large military ship artificial reef project. Section 379.249, *Florida Statutes*, and Chapter 68E-9, *Florida Administrative Code*, currently authorize FWC to execute grant agreements to fund artificial reef development activities for authorized local coastal governments. FWC staff has experience with several large military ship artificial reef projects, most recently in May 2009 with the successful sinking of the 520-foot former missile tracking ship, USS VANDENBERG, off Key West.

During FY 2018-19, no Florida coastal local government made a formal request to FWC to obtain a large MARAD or Navy military ship.

Should a U.S. Navy combatant ship or MARAD auxiliary vessel become available from the inactive reserve fleets in the future, both the U.S. Navy and MARAD will require that all the necessary funding to fully complete a large military ship reefing project and a valid artificial reef permit already be in place prior to FWC's submission of a complete application for a military vessel donation. Lack of readily available funding, including a required county cash match for a military vessel project continues to be a limiting factor for most Florida coastal counties. Some counties are limited by not having an artificial reef permitted area with water depths deep enough (at least 100-130 feet) to sink a large military ship and still achieve suitable navigational clearance. The federal government's increased focus on domestic ship scrapping to take advantage of best dollar return on inactive reserve fleet vessel disposal options while scrap metal value remains high, also continues to be a limiting factor.

NON-MILITARY COMMERCIAL VESSELS

In addition to Navy and MARAD ships, smaller non-military commercial steel hulled vessels, such as coastal cargo freighters (up to 375 feet long) or tugboats (75-130 feet long) continue to periodically become available to county reef programs and are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The expense involved in securing and properly preparing these smaller vessels as artificial reefs is considerably less than the cost of



preparing a large military ship. During FY 2018-19, two non-military commercial vessels were deployed off Florida for reefing; 1) 144-foot aluminum former casino vessel (the El Dorado) sunk at a depth of 103 feet off the coast of Bay County; and 2) 180-foot cargo ship (the Voici Bernadette) sunk at a depth of 102 feet off the coast of St Lucie County.

The El Dorado was deployed on May 3, 2019 to create a new high-relief public fishing and SCUBA diving destination within the LAARS-A Artificial Reef Permitted area located in federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Bay County. The El Dorado was a derelict vessel grounded in St. Andrews Bay, Panama City, a casualty of Hurricane Michael on October 10, 2018. Close coordination between the FWC Derelict Vessel Program, the FWC Artificial Reef Program, Bay County, and the US Coast Guard was critical in the successful salvage, preparation and deployment of this vessel as an artificial reef. After salvage, the total reported cost to the County for the cleaning, preparing for reefing and deployment of the vessel was \$35,815, which did not include any state or federal funds.

The Voici Bernadette was deployed on June 23, 2019 to create a new fishing and assessable dive attraction within the Fort Pierce Sportfishing Club Permitted area located in federal waters in the Atlantic off the coast of St Lucie County. The Voici Bernadette was donated to the county by the U.S. Customs Service. The total cost for the purchase, cleaning, and deployment was \$153,000. Project costs were paid for jointly by using local donations and County funds. No state or federal funds were utilized.

