

# Citrus County plans concrete reef in Gulf

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOMOSASSA - Recreational boosters are hatching a plan to use concrete "reef barks" to create an underwater metropolis for marine life and snorkelers in the Gulf of Mexico off Citrus County.

The county, especially the springs around Crystal River, draws scuba divers and snorkelers to watch manatees in winter. Tourism officials hope the reef will boost summer business.

"We can't duplicate places like Key Largo," said Sam Lyons, tourism committee chairman for Citrus County's tourist development council. "But we can develop something closer to home on a smaller scale."

The county is asking Sarasota's Reef Ball Development Group for ideas using concrete reef sections that have been used to build artificial habitats from Sarasota to Malaysia.

Company founder Todd Barner, who has worked on 250 projects worldwide, and tourism officials envision a reef five to seven miles out in the Gulf of Mexico between Homosassa and Crystal River.

The 100-by-100-yard reef would sit in 7 feet of water at low tide.

"Water clarity in the Gulf near here is very good under most conditions," Lyons said. "And the reef should attract grouper, snapper, porgy, rock bass and angelfish, as well as scallops, stone crabs, starfish and brain coral."

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