

# Partners Try to Turn Gulf Into Fishing Holes

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There isn't any money to reduce the chance of a major spill, but the idea of building artificial reefs is a "very, very, very" viable idea. "If you can get 100 miles of artificial reefs, you can get 100 miles of fishing holes," says Mr. Minnick. "If you can get 100 miles of fishing holes, you can get 100 miles of fishing holes." Mr. Minnick says he has been talking to other people about the idea of building artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

These grand plans have made a big impression on Mr. Minnick. He and Mr. Carson, 51, spent a weekend in one of the artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

They still haven't made any money in the investment of \$2.5 million for a project, but they still have a good chance of making it. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

Thanks to the partnership in the Gulf of Mexico, Mr. Minnick and Mr. Carson have been able to make a living off the water. The first job out of high school was as a boat captain and for 10 years he did that. He then went to work for a boat captain and for 10 years he did that. He then went to work for a boat captain and for 10 years he did that. He then went to work for a boat captain and for 10 years he did that.

Mr. Minnick studied the case had given for nearly a decade before deciding to build the artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

But they've got a big problem. The artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico are not working. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

Reefs of Plenty  
After the partners and their dozens of investors on the sea floor, Mr. Minnick

has seen the crowds public meals at the DeWolfe in the summer, with lines of people waiting for a parking lot on weekdays dozens of fishing boats waiting for a spot in the small area. The case is on these reefs could be a good idea. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

Mr. Minnick also agrees that his plans can serve as an economic boon to local charter boats, hotels and others in the coastal area. The lack of artificial reefs is one reason why about a dozen charter boats run out of Pensacola, compared with more than 100 based in neighboring Tampa Bay. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

To draw in tourists for the project, they also plan to build North America's largest artificial reef, a 100-mile-long, 100-mile-wide, 100-mile-deep reef. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

But cost estimates they'll get approval from the government for such the public-private effort. Currently, the partners' request is being shot at by state environmental officials, who are debating what if anything Coastal Reef Builders should pay for use of the prime real estate. The state's environmental and dock owners' interests are a question for more than a dozen state officials. State officials have suggested that they could apply to Coastal Reef Builders for the 100-mile area, which would require a \$50-million annual lease.

"Maybe the state could allow that but not us," says Chris Brown, an environmental consultant working for Coastal Reef Builders. "That is a real problem." A more reasonable approach, says Mr. Minnick, would be charging only for the 30 square miles south of Fort Walton Beach, the Corps that would total \$2.08 a mile for the more manageable run. He has also suggested charging one Reef dot at a public rate for every 10 or 20 feet of reef.

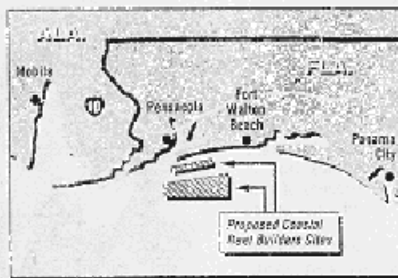
Mr. Minnick is willing to work out a compromise even though he doesn't think he should have to pay anything, but he says the public can't be denied access to these reefs. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

stumbling upon a Reef Ball by accident, or getting down the location after seeing someone else find the spot.

And their permit application doesn't prevent other groups from seeking government approval to dump materials other than Reef Balls in the same area. "We aren't blocking anyone from doing anything," Mr. Minnick says.

Nevertheless, the state still insists it deserves a cut from the money-making venture. "It seems to be a private activity done for profit for private use," says Bob Kruegel, environmental manager for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection office in Pensacola. "The not certified this regulatory process access to the public."

Mr. Kruegel acknowledges that this innovative proposal doesn't fall under a strict interpretation of agency rules for setting the costs of the lease. Instead, he predicts the plan's fate could rest with the gov-



ernor and state cabinet, who try the final arbiter on issues concerning state lands.

Coastal Reef Builders has also faced questions from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which must approve the plans since they extend into federal waters 10 miles offshore. Agency officials say they have signed off on nearly every aspect of the project except how much liability coverage the company must carry in case its Reef Balls do any damage during a major storm or hurricane. A major storm surge can push artificial reefs into shipping channels, shrimp nets or even on shore, though scientists consider Reef Balls far more stationary than other materials.

"Bring in Tourists"

The plan does have allies. Several Panama City leaders share Mr. Minnick's hopes of improving the area's lure for fishermen. "In my opinion, it would increase the recreational opportunities and there," says Jack Nobles, a Pensacola City Council member and president of a local community bank. "It would bring in tourists."

And some who make their living on the sea figure the more reefs the better. "I

wouldn't care if they had a good fishing hole in the Gulf," says Chip Blackburn, a charter boat captain in Mexico Beach near Panama City. He has been fishing his boat, Miss Mary, over the past few years in Reef Balls for people who come with children and families of the area. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

"They gather up a lot of money, there is a lot of money down there," he says. "There are definitely lots of people who are going to come up here for a good fishing hole."

If the regulatory hurdle can be cleared in Florida, Mr. Minnick says, he'll be looking for other states to join in the artificial reef effort. He has already signed up with the public Reef Balls. "We'll try to get others," he says. "We'll try to get others."

In fact, he says, there is a lot of interest among Alabama officials to build Coastal Reef Builders near the Gulf of Mexico, since Alabama officials have banned the dumping of cars and home appliances in recent years. Artificial reef developments off the Alabama coast have dropped as much as 85% in the past five years due to the high cost of the materials, officials there report.

Meanwhile, there are others in Florida who may try to drive the artificial reef business. For Mark Roberts, a former small owner in the area, the idea is a good one. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "I would like to see a lot of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico."

## Fish Tales

For now, the Reef Ball partners are content to wait. State and federal regulators are expected to make their decision in the coming weeks. If denied, the two partners vow to learn from it and try again. If anything, they say, the Reef Ball business has taught them patience.

Mr. Minnick's first attempt at putting a Reef Ball in the Gulf of Mexico resulted in a failure because, under its normal weight and too heavy to use. He had to call a trawler in just to move it.

And then there was the time they were attempting to cross the Gulf in a tug boat and lunge on their way to Reef dot job in Tarpon Springs. That was very close when they started their 10-hour, 10-mile journey, but halfway across the Gulf a 100-foot storm brought strong rain, lightning and 12-foot waves crashing over their bow. The barge they were pushing broke loose from its cables and the tug was thrown. Mr. Minnick into a calm sea. They turned back and pulled the barge close.

"You can't be in a hurry when you're out on the sea," Mr. Minnick says. "If you're out on the sea for a long time, you're out on the sea for a long time."