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SouthCoast
TODAY



Reef madness

Up to 100 man-made homes for marine life to be deployed off South Dartmouth

By Jack Stewardson, *Standard-Times* staff writer

FAIRHAVEN -- They look a little like oversized, sawed-off Whiffle balls, but they will soon become hearth and home to a variety of marine life off Salters Point in South Dartmouth.

"Fish will be able to swim both inside and out," said Karen Rypka, a state fisheries biologist coordinating a unique project to create new fish habitat. "Some of these holes are dead ends -- they'll make good lobster cavities."

The state Division of Marine Fisheries, in conjunction with UMass Dartmouth's Center for Marine Science and Technology, plan to create an artificial reef along 3.5 acres of sea bottom off Salters Point.

The reef site will be situated in about 30 feet of water, with largely flat bottom and a layer of silt over sandy clay.

Last week Larry Beggs, a representative of Reef Innovations and Diving Specialists Inc. of Florida and the Reef Ball Development Group Inc., was at Linberg Marine Inc. in Fairhaven to supervise casting the reef units in fiberglass molds.

Fish like to congregate around reef-like structures that become encrusted with vegetation and invertebrates. The state is hoping the Salters Point site will become a magnet for such species as tautog, black sea bass and possibly striped bass and bluefish, along with lobsters and other shellfish.

The project got off the ground when state Rep. William M. Straus, D-Mattapoisett, managed to get \$75,000 set aside in the state budget a few years ago for the project.

Ms. Rypka said it is hoped as many as 100 reef units can be molded and placed at the site, which will be periodically monitored by UMass Dartmouth scientists.

"We will try to (video)tape some just to see how the organisms attach," she said. "We'll be placing some up current, some down current and some in mid-current."

The state originally zeroed in on a site 75 yards of Naushon Island last summer, but later switched to Salters Point after islanders raised some concerns and after deciding the Dartmouth site would be closer to a new marine science center at Fort Rodman and better sheltered than the Naushon location.

The reef balls, weighing 3,000 to 3,500 pounds, are about 4 feet high and 6 feet in diameter. Smaller reef pallets weigh 1,200 to 1,400 pounds and run about 3 feet high and 4 feet in diameter.

Mr. Beggs said over a two-year period artificial reefs grow to resemble a natural reef.

"Four or five years and you won't be able to tell a man-made



reef from a natural reef," he said.'

The concrete features a micro silica for added strength, is abrasive resistant and has a PH content similar to natural sea water. The fiberglass molds are primed with sugar water to make them sticky and more receptive to the cement.

A bladder and inflated balls are used inside the molds to govern thickness of the walls and create openings.

Ms. Rykpa said the first units should be deployed by mid-July, and by the end of summer a healthy crop of vegetation should take root.

She said the units should not interfere with marine travel.

"They are low-profile and are not going to be a navigation hazard," she said. But she suggested anglers might want to avoid anchoring inside the reef areas because the anchors could catch on the balls.

More than 10,000 reef balls have been deployed throughout the world over the past four years, according to Mr. Beggs. Reef Ball Innovations and Diving Specialists Inc. has been involved in projects in the Persian Gulf, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and the Caribbean. It is currently working on a year-long project to replace a damaged natural reef off Puerto Rico.

The reef units currently being molded at Linberg Marine will be barged to the site next week.

Staff photos by Mike Valeri

After a few years in the water, a man-made reef will grow to resemble a natural reef. "Fish will be able to swim both inside and out," said Karen Rykpa, state fisheries biologist, standing over a completed artificial reef at Linberg Marine in Fairhaven. Crouched inside is Florida reef ball developer Larry Beggs.



Staff photo by Mike Valeri

Workers prepare the molds before the concrete is poured for new artificial reefs being made at Linberg Marine in Fairhaven. The reef balls will be barged to a site off South Dartmouth and deployed next week.

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