Artificial Reefs Offer Fish Refuge at Local Lake

As the ice starts to form on Stoney Lake, first noticed by Rochester, the fish in the lake are snuggling down in a new artificial reef system placed in the lake this year by the divers at US Scuba Center.

Reef Diver refers to the structures as Fish Condos. The idea to place the fish condos in Stoney Lake came from Beck, president of US Scuba Center that also runs the scuba park at Stoney. The project is part of an experimental program that is being tried for the first time in fresh water.

Tim Sellick, manager of US Scuba, and Ron Beck, president, dives prepare a fish condo for the lake.

The fish condos are Reef Balls, a type of artificial reef that have been proven to re-establish marine ecosystems in salt waters. In salt water the Reef Balls provide stable habitat for fish of all sizes and increases their numbers and size, allowing the waters to support a greater variety of fish.

Tim Sellick, manager of US Scuba Center has been overseeing the program with the Department of Natural Resources and the Reef Ball Developers Group of Atlanta. US Scuba Center applied for an epsilon grant through the Reef Ball Group, to try these unique, cold shaped concrete balls in the fresh inland lakes of Michigan. "This is the first time, the reef balls have been used in fresh water lakes," according to Sellick. "If they prove as successful as they have in salt waters, they could provide a means of increasing marine life in Michigan's inland and great lakes."

"If a fish lives inside the reef, he has a very small territory to protect," Sellick said. "This means he does not have to waste much energy competing with other fish for a limited food source, this should allow them grow bigger and for the lake to support a greater variety and number of fish."

Mike Evans of American Aggregates in Oxford, has been an important supporter of the project. American Aggregates, owners of the lake, are lake conservationists who are conscientious in preserving the lake's ecosystem and the fish habitat of Stoney Lake. American Aggregates were another major supporters of the project. W.R. Grace Chemical Products of Toledo, Ohio also supported the program with a sufficient mixer used to pour over 5 tons of concrete to build US Reef Balls. Mark Kraus of Kraus Brick was one of the divers and provided technical support and transportation of the Reef Balls from US Scuba Center to the lake.

The project started this summer, with divers from US Scuba Center participating in a special Research Diver Certification Course. They mapped the lake and took the coords of the substrate, the soil types of fish in a given area of the lake. This baseline data will help determine if the reef balls increase the amount of fish the lake can support.

The Reef Balls were made by pouring the concrete into specially prepared fiberglass molds. The divers made four sizes of Reef Balls ranging from mini reef balls to the largest, measuring 4 feet tall and five feet wide. The Reef Balls are shaped like a dome and filled with holes that allow fish to swim in and out easily.

The team of Research Divers coordinated by Sellick used lift bags to place the Reef Balls in the lake. Preliminary following up counts indicate that the fish already find the Reef Balls an attractive and safe haven. Scuba have already set up bookkeeping on the reef balls as well as algae that provide food for the fish.

Divers who take the Research Course taught by Sellick are given these basic skills on the bottom of the lake: counting the numbers and types of fish, catching and tagging the trapped fish. Research Course divers in the future will collect follow up data, noting the type, size and number of fish who have established the Reef Balls as home and a feeding habitat. The study will continue over the next three years. The data will be submitted to the Detroit Reef Ball Group for evaluation.

Ray Eck, a diver from Oakland Township, has participated in the Project through the summer and fall. Kaufer observed large-mouth bass, crappie and a variety of sunfish at the Reef Balls. At night he has seen wood duck and sunfish at the fish condos.

Joe Stadt of US Scuba and Mike Evans of American Aggregates their companies are to improve the variety of Stoney Lake. This project is just a continuation of local fish saving efforts initiated so far in their environmental conservation projects.

US Scuba Center sponsors a diver and snorkeler Wish and Mastercard for a week of all expenses paid trip to Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, to dive the world's most colorful underwater sanctuary and meet the life.

Educational [illegible] important incentives for this project for the divers and local school systems, according to Ray. The Stoney Lake schools will be participating in the program by making mini-future reef Ball's that they will place in Stoney pond in the Lake. Underwater video will exhibit a hand made habitat providing a new home for fish. A elementary class in Fort Dearborn already making plans to design a Reef Ball.

"The educational value of this project alone makes it worthwhile," said Ray. "And the potential for improving Michigan's lakes is exciting beyond words."

US Scuba Center offers a variety of educational programs from the Discover Scuba Class (a one night introduction course), Beginning Scuba Lessons, Advanced Classes and over 20 Specialty Courses including the Research Diver Course. A Skills Sharpening Class is even offered which stresses preservation of the underwater environment. US Scuba teaches classes through the Rochester, Troy, Avondale and Waterford Community Education. [illegible]

US Scuba Divers under the direction of Tim Sellick, place a 900 pound Reef Ball in Stoney Lake.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CONGRATULATIONS!

Anne Howarth, a fifth year student at Oberlin College and Oberlin Conservatory, was recently elected to the Ohio Beta Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. Howarth, who will graduate in May 1997 with degrees in Horn Performance and in Environmental Studies, is a 1990 graduate of Adams High School. She is the daughter of Mary and David Howarth of Rochester Hills.

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