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DMR Uses 'Reef Balls' For Fishing Reefs

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PASS CHRISTIAN (WLOX) -- They look like some sort of alien pods from outer space. But the 4500 pound concrete cones lined up at Matthews Marine will become artificial offshore reefs.



"These are reef balls. These are goliath size reef balls. These are the largest ones we make. They're fish attracting devices. We use them underwater for fish housing. It also grows coral," said Robert Duke of Reef Innovations.

The DMR contracted with the company to build 315 goliath reef balls. Matthews Marine in Pass Christian is the location for the unique production line.

The strange structures will be deployed about eight miles south of Horn Island, at offshore Fish Havens 1 and 2. Once they land on the sea floor, the reef balls can start attracting fish.

"Fish such as red snapper, grouper, trigger fish; they'll use these reef balls as habitat for foraging. So, it will become its own little colony," said Kerwin Cuevas with the Department of Marine Resources.

The holes inside the reef balls are created by attaching tether balls and rubber buoys to the fiberglass form. They're sprayed down with a mixture of sugar and water to keep the concrete from sticking.

Playing the form like a drum also prevents sticking. Reef balls were created in the early 90s and have been deployed successfully in waters around the world.

"They have been very effective in quite a few different areas we've used them at," said Duke.

They'll be dropped into Mississippi waters early next month.

DMR is using grant money from the National Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation to pay for the project. The state tidelands fund is also providing financial support.

By Steve Phillips

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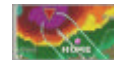
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