



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES

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News Feature

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MDMR, Stennis Partner to Deploy Offshore Artificial Fishing Reef

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources' (MDMR) Artificial Reef Bureau and NASA's Stennis Space Center recently teamed up to continue efforts to enhance deep-water fishing in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Since Hurricane Katrina—when nearly 100 percent of Mississippi's artificial reefs were destroyed—the MDMR has conducted 113 artificial reef deployments and, most recently, with the help of a unique tank donated by Stennis Space Center in Hancock County, added three additional structures to Fish Haven 13.

Back on June 17, employees at Stennis Space Center began preparing a 107,000-gallon hydrogen sphere to be deployed south of Pascagoula.

The final destination was 85-feet of water in the popular Fish Haven 13, which is located 23 miles south of Pascagoula.

On Oct. 27, the mission was successful along with two smaller tanks also donated by Stennis.

The sphere was built in the 1960s and used as a reservoir for liquid hydrogen in case of an emergency during testing at the second stage of Saturn V. Since no emergencies unfolded, the end result will benefit anglers for years to come.

"The sphere no longer was needed after the Saturn V Program ended," said Bryon Maynard, a lead system engineer in the NASA Engineering and Test Directorate at Stennis. "A lot of people forgot what it was or what it had been built for. It became known as the 'big round thing,' the BRT. Everyone who visited out here would ask about it."

The BRT, which weighs 98,000 pounds, sank in less than 10 minutes with the help of air bags attached to the top by Matthews Brothers of Pass Christian to make sure the container sank in an upright position on the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico.

To ensure safety—proper clearance for passing shipping vessels—the tank was sank in 85 feet of water to gain enough clearance for the vessels.

Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR Artificial Reef Bureau director, said the BRT has a safe clearance of 50 feet. Cuevas also said the new structure will immediately attract baitfish that ultimately will attract predators like red snapper, mangrove snapper, grouper and trigger fish.

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“The BRT and other two tanks were donated by Stennis Space Center and we want to thank them for their generosity,” Cuevas said. “The BRT is an aluminum 107,000-gallon tank that is 37 feet tall by 45 feet wide. It was deployed in Fish Haven 13 in 85 feet of water and has a relief of 35 feet off the bottom.

“The funds used to deploy the BRT were the Emergency Disaster Relief Program funds from NOAA due to Hurricane Katrina. This was a joint effort between Stennis Space Center, Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks and the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. We would like to thank Mr. Bryon Maynard from Stennis Space Center, who was instrumental in getting the tanks donated for reef material. The BRT and the other two tanks will provide excellent reef fish habitat fish for a long time. This new habitat will also offer our fishermen of Mississippi more offshore fishing opportunities.”

Partnerships such as these, along with federal funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) after Katrina and continuous effort by the MDMR’s Artificial Reef Bureau have helped to restore over 100 percent of Mississippi’s inshore and offshore artificial reefs.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the state by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the MDMR online at www.dmr.ms.gov.

PHOTO CREDIT: Photos courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources.



Photo A cutline: The Big Round Tank being prepared to be sank at Fish Haven 13. The tank was donated by NASA and sank by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources in Biloxi in 85 feet of water.



Photo B cutline: The Big Round Tank is partially submerged at Fish Haven 13. The tank was donated by NASA and sank by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources in Biloxi in 85 feet of water.

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