



Jacksonville Waterways Commission

Don Redman, Chair

JACKSONVILLE WATERWAYS COMMISSION ARTIFICIAL REEF SUBCOMMITTEE
Wednesday, March 28, 2012
City Council Conference Room A
9:30 a.m.

In attendance: Commissioners Scott Shine (Chairman), Lane Burnett, Ralph Hodges, Raymond Pringle; Waterways Coordinator Captain Jim Suber; Dr. Quinton White, Jacksonville University; Kathy Barco, Chairman, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission; Kristina Nelson, Office of General Counsel; Jody McDaniel, Planning Department; Gary Weise, Environmental Quality Division; Joe Kistel, Executive Director, Think It Sink It Reef It (TISIRI); Ed Kalakaukis, Chuck Darner, Mike Murphy, Bill Wilderotter, Jacksonville Offshore Fishing Club; Theo Mitchelson; Jessica Stephens, Legislative Assistant; John J. Jackson, Council Research Division.

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 9:37 a.m. and indicated that the mission of the subcommittee was to explore the potential of artificial reefs. The federal government's restrictions on off-shore fishing have impeded recreational fishing. The subcommittee would be exploring means of managing fishing in light of the off-shore closures, restrictions in the river and restrictions resulting from security factors (U.S. Navy restrictions at Naval Station Mayport).

The Chairman welcomed Kathy Barco, Chairman, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission and invited her to offer any remarks. The Commissioner indicated that she was attending the meeting to largely listen and answer questions.

The first item on the agenda was a presentation on the Jacksonville Artificial Reef program by Joe Kistel of TISIRI (Think It Sink It Reef It). The PowerPoint presentation depicted local, off-shore successful artificial reef projects and the process that leads to deployment of reefs. The Spike was a vessel that was sunk off the coast of Ponte Vedra Beach in 2009; 700 tons of concrete was deployed off the Ponte Vedra Beach coast in 2009. A look at both sites a year later, in 2010, showed how both projects were attracting schools of fish.

The reef development process entailed:

- (a) Site selection. User groups such as the recreational fisherman are consulted; user access is a significant factor that is considered.
- (b) Starting the permitting process with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for off-shore artificial reefs.
- (c) sea floor survey to determine whether the floor for the

reef site is suitable. (d) material selection; selecting material that is environmentally friendly (e) regulatory approval from the City, Coast Guard and other appropriate authorities (f) deployment.

Jody McDaniel, Planning & Development Department, remarked on the process of permitting and deploying off-shore and inshore artificial reefs. On the map of locations of inshore artificial reefs that had previously been distributed, she discussed the selection of the two sites in the St. Johns River in San Marco. The Coastal Conservation Association has committed to paying for the permitting fees. (The Waterways Commission has consistently noted that the artificial reef program has to be a public-private partnership endeavor). The permit applications would then be submitted to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. In six to twelve months, a permit will be issued. Reef balls and concrete would be the materials used for the river (inshore) reefs to avoid clearance issues.

Ms. McDaniel noted that the discussions on near-shore artificial reefs are just getting underway.

Commissioner Ray Pringle asked Ms. Daniels why sites #2 & 3 in the San Marco community were selected for artificial reefs in the river. She replied that the Coastal Conservation Association made that suggestion since there is a natural hole in the river at those particular sites.

Commissioner Ralph Hodges wanted to know how long a wait there is for an inshore permit. Ms. Daniels replied that it can be up to 12 months.

Captain Suber observed that the economic impact is the main engine behind the drive for the artificial reefs. The impact included bait shops, ice operations, hotel rooms, boats, marinas and more.

Commissioner Lane Burnett wanted to know if we had the material for the reefs on hand right now. Ms. Daniels replied that we do not have the material on hand at the moment.

Commissioner Scott Shine shared his findings from his own research on the economic impact of artificial reefs that result from recreational and commercial fishing.

Assistant General Counsel Kristina Nelson reviewed Florida Statute 328.66 – County and Municipality Optional Vessel Registration Fee. Commissioner Scott Shine had previously floated the idea of a vessel registration surcharge as a potential source of revenue to fund artificial reef programs.

Assistant General Counsel Nelson explained what the vessel registration surcharge fee entailed. A typical fee for a vessel under 26 feet is \$18.50 a year. The fee is based on the length of a vessel. Broward, Lee, Martin and Monroe are Florida counties that impose a vessel registration fee.

Captain Suber indicated that we are already collecting a fee for waterways projects maintenance. These fees are deposited into a special funds account in the Parks & Recreation Department. Assistant General Counsel Nelson is going to research the ordinance that created and regulates the special account that Captain Suber alluded to.

The next item on the agenda addressed the concept of establishing a public/private partnership that would promote and support artificial reef programs. The partnership would consist of the City of Jacksonville, the Jacksonville Off-Shore Fishing club and the Coastal Conservation Association. The Chair suggested that the partnership could be recognized as the Jacksonville Artificial Reef Strategic Habitat Project: S.H.I.P. The item evoked no discussion.

Under general discussion by Commissioners and staff, Commissioner Hodges referenced an on-line economic impact study that was a cogent, easy to read summary.

Commissioner Pringle asked Chairman Barco if the Fish & Wildlife Commission had done any economic impact studies on artificial reef programs.

Chairman Barco remarked that the costs for artificial reefs should be lower; construction firms had concrete to donate and would contribute whenever asked. She advised the Commission that when a permit application is submitted the economic impact and aspect should be underscored ; the negative impact of off-shore fishing restrictions and closures should be cited.

Chairman Barco was not keen on the notion of a registration fee for vessels as a means of revenue for artificial reef programs. She was skeptical of any support from the many who are not boaters or recreational fishing enthusiasts.

In the Public Comment segment, the Chair read into the record a letter e-mailed to the Commission from Mr. Ron Carr who was unable to attend the Subcommittee meeting. As an avid fisherman, Mr. Carr wanted to express his support for the artificial reefs inside the 3-mile line and in the St. Johns River, as well. Mr. Carr indicated that he was also supportive of the local shrimping industry.

Janie Thomas, Executive Director of the Shrimp Producers Association spoke for the area's shrimpers who are opposed to the artificial reefs. She said that putting reefs within the three-mile line was harmful. Artificial reefs interfere with the life cycle of shrimp. The current number of reefs deployed off-shore should be enough. She took issue with Jody McDaniel's points raised during an artificial reef program presentation at a previous Waterways Commission meeting, particularly opportunities for diving.

Chuck Darner spoke in favor of the artificial program. He cited the federally mandated off-shore fish closures as an impediment to recreational fishing that necessitated artificial reefs. He said that recreational fishing is a multi-billion dollar industry. Mr. Darner indicated that the Jacksonville Off-shore Fishing Club wanted to work with the shrimpers; the recreational

fishermen do not put reefs in shrimping lanes.

Ed Kalakaukis, Jacksonville Off-Shore Fishing Club, is supportive of the artificial reef program because it serves the recreational fishing industry well. He wants to work co-operatively with the shrimping industry. Mr. Kalakaukis warned that there were legislative bills currently pending in the Congress that would be exceedingly harmful to the fishing industry. He noted Senate Bill 1916 in particular.

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission Chairman Barco put the fishing industry in a national context and shared insights she brought back from meetings in Washington and Savannah, Georgia with fishing industry representatives from throughout the country. She said that she learned that the major commercial fishing centers in the country are Alaska and the Northeast. The national fishing industry viewed Florida's fishing as "boutique" fishing. Chairman Barco noted that the federal government was not at all hesitant in meting out punitive measures on those states or jurisdictions that sought to undermine or ignore federally imposed fishing restrictions.

Theo Mitchelson, a recreational fisherman, spoke in favor of the artificial reef program.

There being no further business, the Subcommittee meeting adjourned at 10:58 a.m.

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Posted: 5:00 P.M.