

Artificial Reefs in Texas

Artificial reefs enhance fishery resources as well as fishing and diving opportunities off Texas

Dotting the vast expanses of mud and sand covering the floor of the Gulf of Mexico, artificial reefs rise like oases in the desert. These underwater havens provide hard surfaces for attachment by habitat-limited sessile invertebrates such as barnacles, corals, sponges, clams, bryozoans and hydroids. These encrusting organisms are the beginnings of an interactive food web which supports a host of reef fish species. By providing food and shelter, artificial reefs can enhance overfished populations of resident reef fish like snapper and grouper. Transient species like mackerel, shark and billfish can benefit by feeding on the resident fish.

And, of course, people can also benefit. Artificial reefs not only enhance fishery resources but also fishing and diving opportunities off Texas. Hundreds of thousands of anglers and divers travel offshore each year and most visit one of the artificial reef sites managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department or the even more numerous unintentional artificial reefs in the form of petroleum platforms scattered throughout the Gulf. In fact, the heart of the Texas Artificial Reef Program is the recycling of obsolete petroleum platforms into permanent artificial reefs rather than allowing them to be taken ashore as scrap. Rigs make ideal artificial reefs because they are environmentally safe, are constructed of highly durable and stable material that withstands displacement or breakup, and already support a thriving reef ecosystem.

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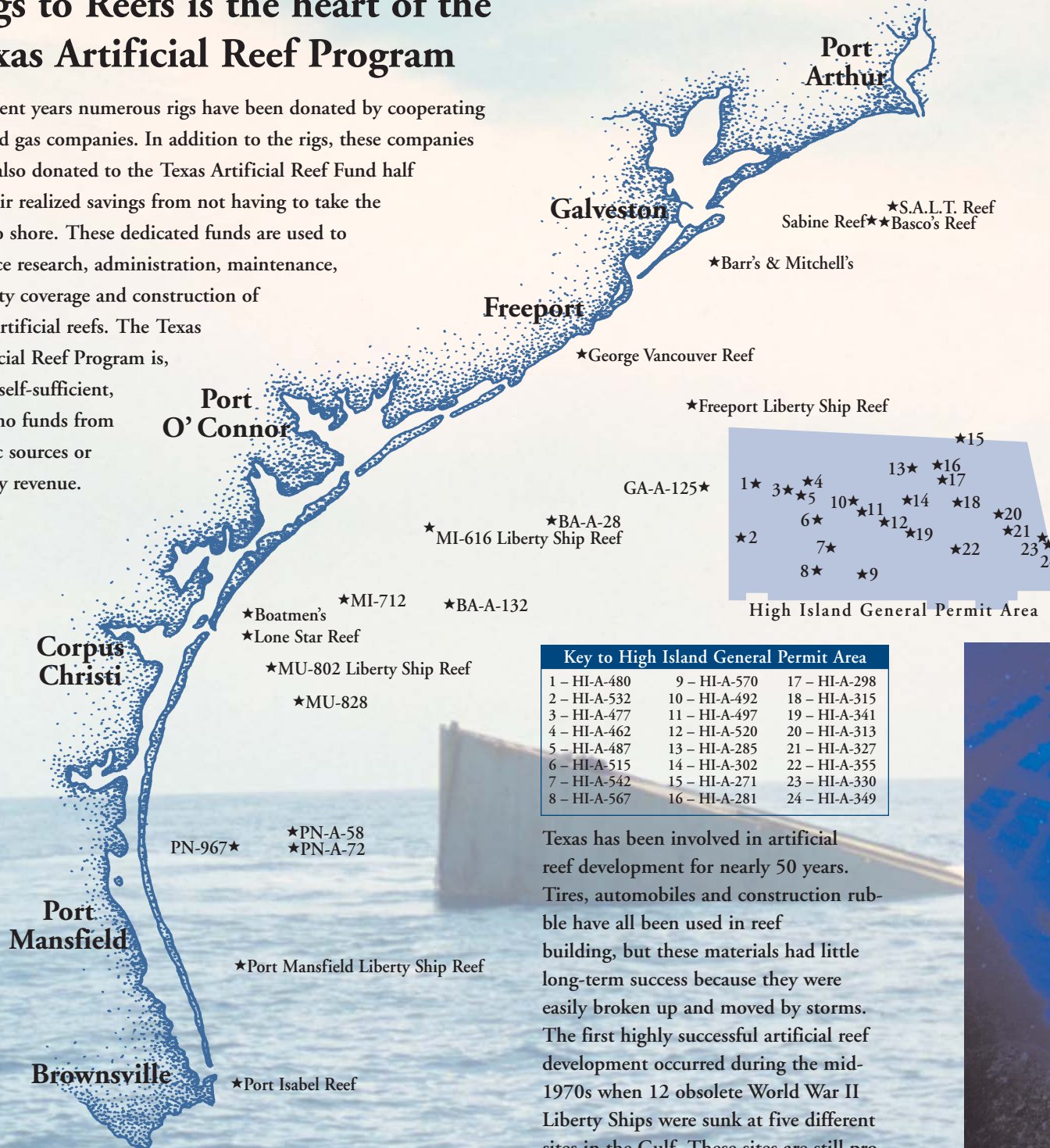
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Rigs to Reefs is the heart of the Texas Artificial Reef Program

In recent years numerous rigs have been donated by cooperating oil and gas companies. In addition to the rigs, these companies have also donated to the Texas Artificial Reef Fund half of their realized savings from not having to take the rigs to shore. These dedicated funds are used to finance research, administration, maintenance, liability coverage and construction of new artificial reefs. The Texas Artificial Reef Program is, thus, self-sufficient, with no funds from public sources or agency revenue.



| Key to High Island General Permit Area | | |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| 1 - HI-A-480 | 9 - HI-A-570 | 17 - HI-A-298 |
| 2 - HI-A-532 | 10 - HI-A-492 | 18 - HI-A-315 |
| 3 - HI-A-477 | 11 - HI-A-497 | 19 - HI-A-341 |
| 4 - HI-A-462 | 12 - HI-A-520 | 20 - HI-A-313 |
| 5 - HI-A-487 | 13 - HI-A-285 | 21 - HI-A-327 |
| 6 - HI-A-515 | 14 - HI-A-302 | 22 - HI-A-355 |
| 7 - HI-A-542 | 15 - HI-A-271 | 23 - HI-A-330 |
| 8 - HI-A-567 | 16 - HI-A-281 | 24 - HI-A-349 |

Texas has been involved in artificial reef development for nearly 50 years. Tires, automobiles and construction rubble have all been used in reef building, but these materials had little long-term success because they were easily broken up and moved by storms. The first highly successful artificial reef development occurred during the mid-1970s when 12 obsolete World War II Liberty Ships were sunk at five different sites in the Gulf. These sites are still pro-

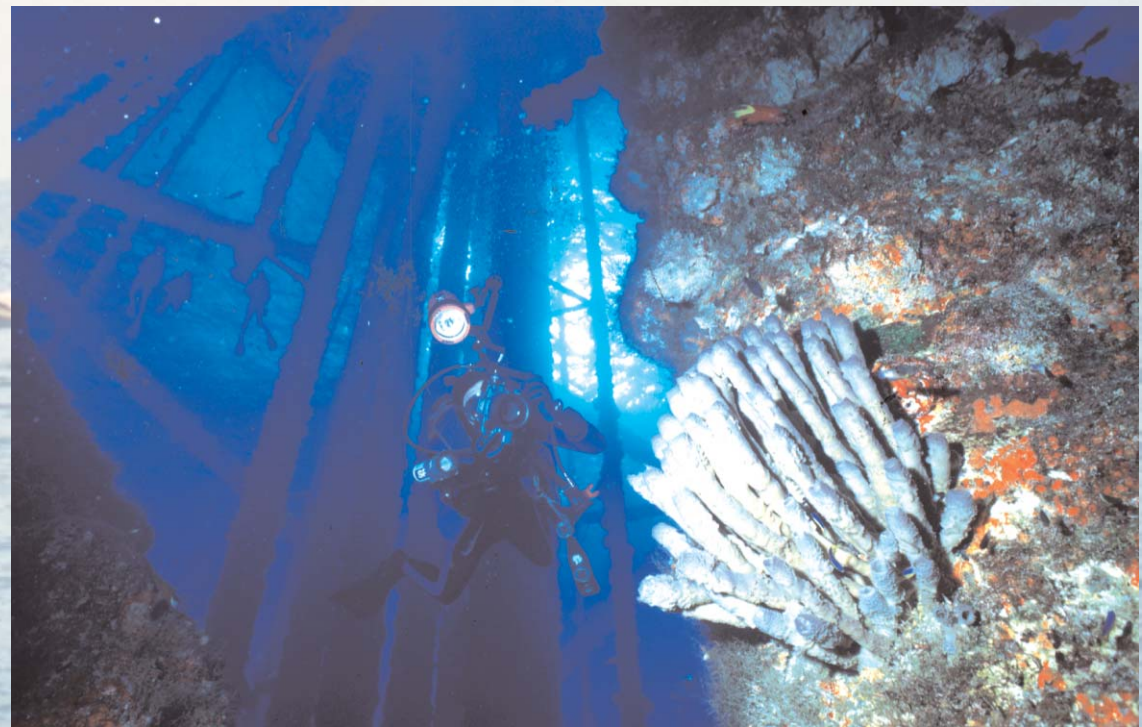
ductive today and, in fact, are being enhanced with additional durable and stable materials.

The slow-down in oil and gas activity in the Gulf in the 1980s resulted in an increase in the number of rigs being scrapped. The recognition that the valuable habitat provided by these de facto reefs should be preserved led to the creation of comprehensive planning guides for artificial reef development. In Texas, the Artificial Reef Act of 1989 directed the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to promote and enhance the artificial reef potential off Texas. To fulfill this purpose, Texas Parks and Wildlife developed the Texas Artificial Reef Plan which was adopted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission in 1990. The Artificial Reef Program is guided by that Plan as well as recommendations from a citizen-based Artificial Reef Advisory Committee.

The Program is constantly acquiring new reef material in various forms such as tugboats, barges, concrete reef balls and of course, petroleum rigs. The future of artificial reefs off Texas is bright indeed!



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