

An underwater photograph of a woman surfing. She is lying on her stomach on a white surfboard with a colorful design (pink, green, and blue). The water is crystal clear and turquoise. Bubbles are visible around her head and the surfboard. The text 'DESTIN FORT WALTON BEACH FLORIDA' is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font in the center of the image.

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TOURISM WORKS FOR YOU

Marketing + PR
Coastal Resources
Destination Stewardship
Destin-Fort Walton Beach
Convention Center
Public Beach + Parks Maintenance

Public Safety
Museums/Chambers
Local Event Marketing
Partner Program
Capital Projects



Destin–Fort Walton Beach Coastal Resources

APRIL 6, 2023

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Coastal Resources Team

- Embedded in Tourism Development Department
- Funded through lodging tax paid by visitors



Overview

PROJECT UPDATES

- Artificial Reefs
- Lionfish
- Have Critters, Will Travel
- Sea Turtles
- Other Projects



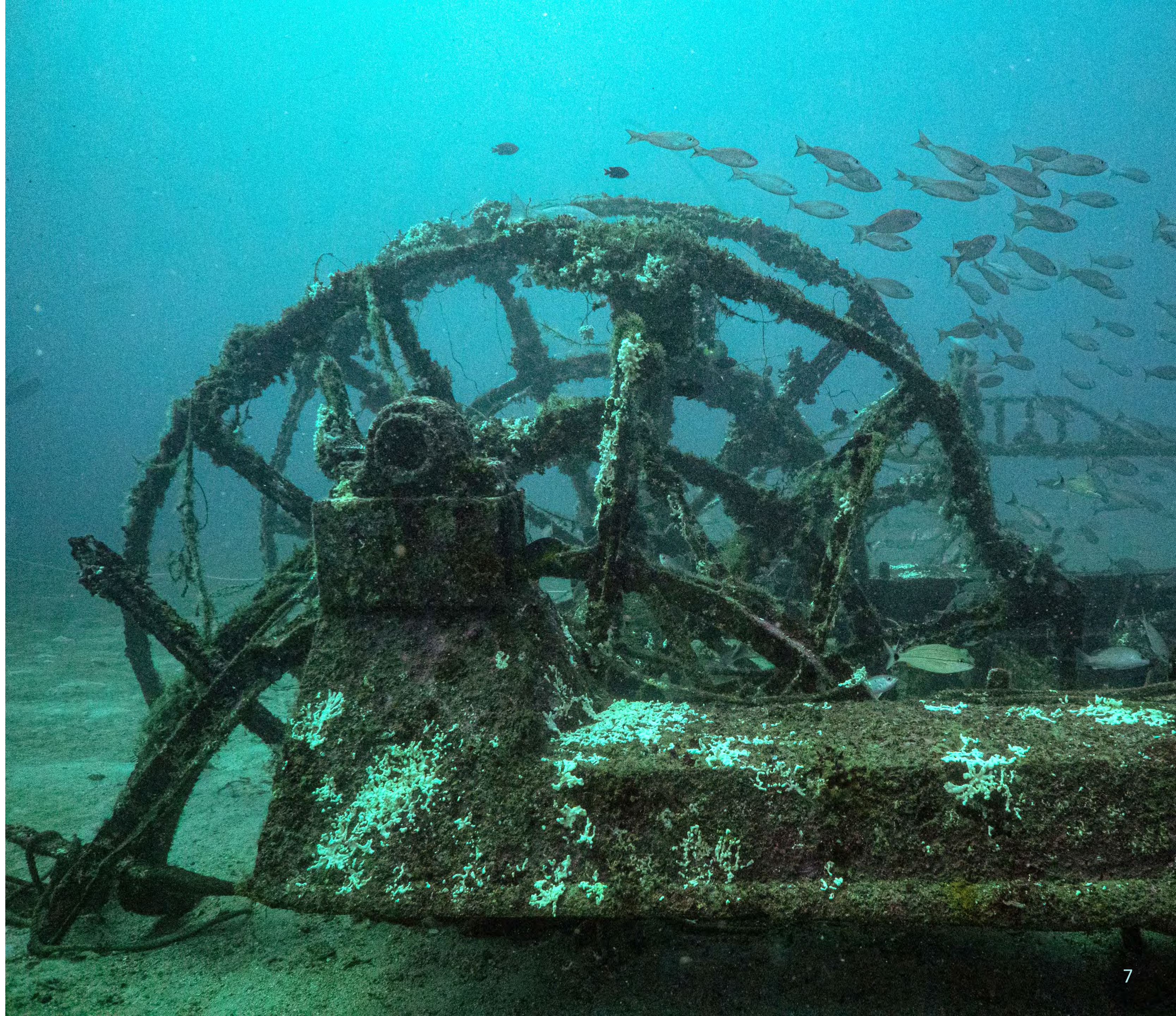
An underwater photograph showing a large, dark, cylindrical artificial reef structure in the center. The structure is covered in green and brown marine life, including coral and algae. Several fish are visible swimming around the structure. The water is a deep blue-green color, and the overall scene is dimly lit, suggesting an underwater environment.

Artificial Reefs

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Background

- 183 PUBLIC and 404 PRIVATE artificial reef sites created since 2019
- Nine vessel deployments since September 2020
- Favoring vessel deployments in shallow water to increase accessibility
- Leading the State in artificial reef activity
- Leveraging collaborations with other public, private and corporate entities



Recent Activity

- Two 190ft Offshore Research Vessels
 - R/V MANTA – Deployed Jan 2023
 - R/V DOLPHIN – Deployed Mar 2023
- 125ft and 110ft Supply Vessels
 - RMS ATLANTIS – April 2023
 - RMS CYCLOPS – April 2023
- \$1.26mil and \$60k grant from FWC for 400+ module deployments
- \$900k RESTORE funding for additional reef deployments
- Began permit planning for Choctawhatchee Bay Reefs



Year Two Projects

- M/V CRIMSON WHITE - 135ft x 40ft
Tugboat in Mobile, AL
- Oil Rig Jacket and Barges - 90ft x 40ft
rig jacket (frame) mounted to two
100ft barges from Texas
 - Potential \$50-100k partnership
- 360ft coastal freighter
 - Significant federal funding



M/V DEEP STIM III

- 240ft Oil Exploration Vessel
- Tri-County partnership possible
 - Significant cost savings (~\$500k)
 - Benefit multiple communities
 - Okaloosa, Bay, and Walton Co
- Accessible to beginner and expert divers



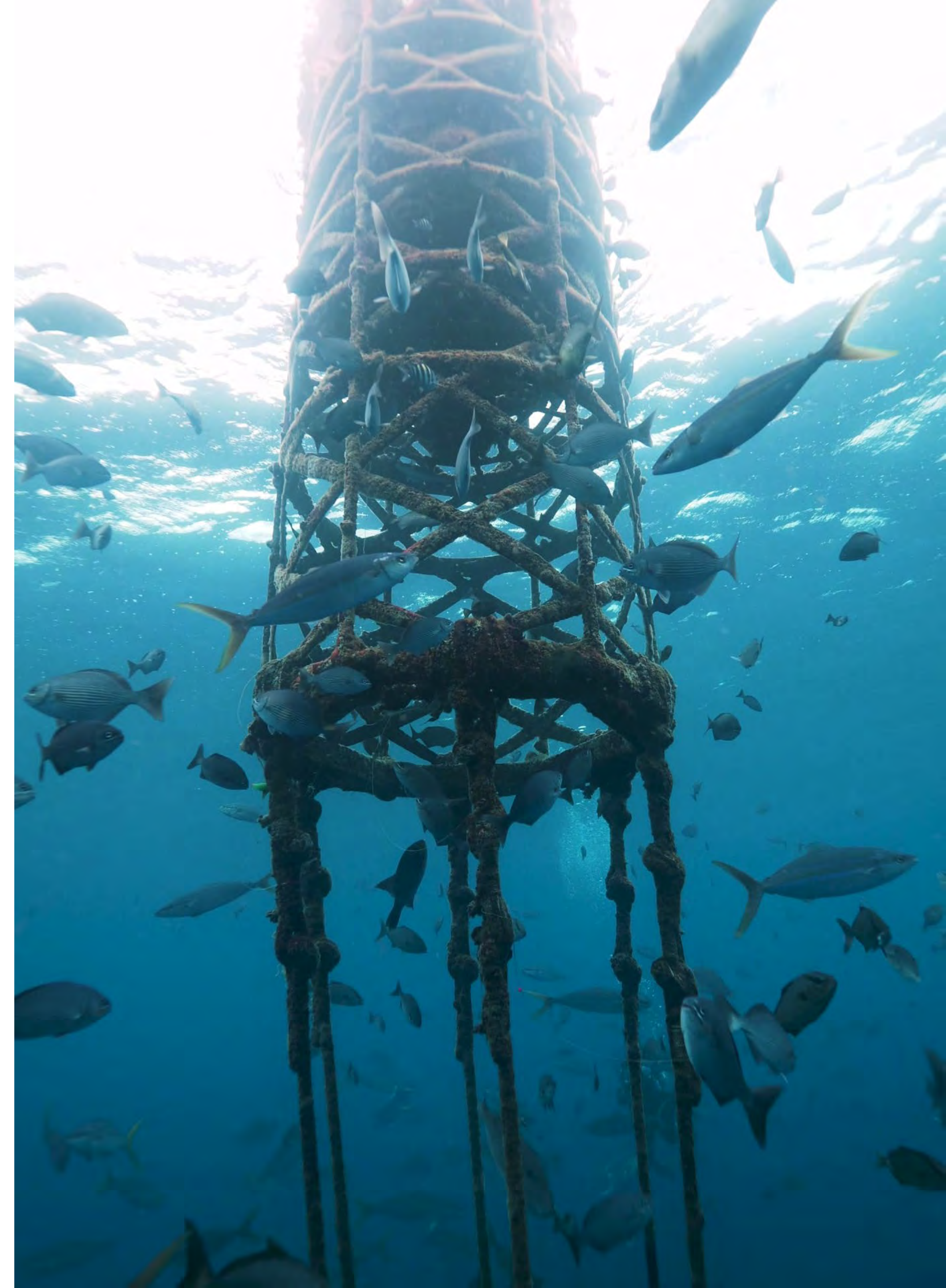
Collaborative Artificial Reef Project 2023

- Destin High School Reef
- Crab Trap Offshore Reef
- Emerald Coast Reef Association Kickoff Reef
- Starborough Wine Conservation Reef



FADs

- Captain Kelly Windes Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) Buoy Network
 - Four 15 ft. Okabe FADs deployed August 2020
 - Four 18 ft. chamber buoys deployed January 2021
 - Acoustic dataloggers installed to track fish movement
- Estimated \$56 million economic impact





Invasive Lionfish

Lionfish

- Native to Indo-Pacific region
- First detected in U.S. in 1985
- First report in Gulf of Mexico in 2010

Coastal Resources Initiatives

- Survey and calculate densities and recolonization rates at natural and artificial reefs
- Evaluate detectability during different times of day
- Assist with removals, and outreach and education
- Test innovative removal methods (traps and ROVs)
- Monthly monitoring of population densities
- Monitor novel disease impacting lionfish in Gulf
- Tracking of lionfish in Choctawhatchee Bay
- Encourage lionfish removal efforts, tournaments, and events



Emerald Coast Open

- World's Largest Lionfish event
- Held at AJ's and HarborWalk Village since 2019

2019

- 5,046 harvested during pre-tournament, 14,119 during main event
- 186 registered participants

2020

- 4,640 lionfish harvested during pre-tournament
- Main event and festival canceled due to COVID

2021

- 2,505 harvested during pre-tournament and 7,745 during main event
- 145 tournament participants
- More than \$48,000 in cash prize and \$25,000 in gear prizes

2022

- 2,582 harvested during pre-tournament and 11,253 during main event
- 145 participants (again!)

MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH MANY SPONSORS,
DONATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS



Lionfish Restaurant Week

- Eight participating restaurants
- Each receive ~30lbs of fillets at no cost
- All sold out!
- Most of these restaurants are purchasing lionfish from divers and include on menu when available
- Brotulas was crowned champion this year





RESTAURANT WEEK 2023

Sample lionfish at one of Destin-Fort Walton Beach's featured restaurants during the Emerald Coast Open Lionfish Restaurant Week! Local chefs will highlight lionfish in unique dishes to help bring awareness to the lionfish invasion in the Gulf of Mexico.

- May 12 ● Boathouse Landing - VALPARAISO
- May 13 ● Harbor Tavern
- May 14 ● Dewey Destin Harborside
- May 15 ● Crab Trap - DESTIN
- May 16 ● La Paz
- May 17 ● Harbor Docks
- May 18 ● Brotula's Seafood House & Steamer
- May 20 ● AJ's Seafood & Oyster Bar - DESTIN



Have Critters, will Travel

- Concept of traveling with critters started back in 2019 with just a few lionfish
- Expanded into a larger activation with more than 30 lionfish in a 100gal tanks
- Now, we are bringing starfish, urchins and even lobster to let kids and families hold some of the critters they may see in the destination
- Traveled to 7 locations including their first international trip (Canada) last weekend



Sea Turtles

Nesting Season: May 1 – October 31

Coastal resource staff surveys beach daily looking for sea turtle nests.

How you can help protect our turtles:

- No white lights on beach at night
- Fill in holes
- Knock down sandcastles
- Remove all belongings from beach

Red turtle-friendly flashlights available at Destin-Fort Walton Beach Welcome Center.



Other Programs

BOATING SAFETY ZONES

- 18 zones and more than 250 signs throughout county
- Maintenance of Crab Island Emergency Vessel Corridor

DERELICT VESSELS

- Coordination with FWC to identify and remove derelict vessels
- 12 removed last year. Another 12 in the works.

BEACH MANAGEMENT

- Renourishment
- Dredge spoil uses
- Innovative project development

COLLABORATIONS

- Scientific Research
- Environmental monitoring
- Media



Thank you!

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