



**DESTIN  
FORT  
WALTON  
BEACH  
FLORIDA**

For Immediate Release

## **Destin-Fort Walton Beach Continues Its Mission of Becoming One of Florida's Best Diving Destinations with the Deployment of the R/V MANTA**

*Adding to the over 400 artificial reefs, this expansion will continue to add to the destination's offshore efforts creating a habitat that will be enjoyed by divers and fisherman alike*



**January, 17, 2023 - OKALOOSA COUNTY, Fla** – The Okaloosa County Tourist Development Department (TDD) [Destin-Fort Walton Beach](#) Tourism continues to focus their efforts on ecotourism with the deployment of the research vessel R/V MANTA. This expansion supports a long-term vision of continuing to grow as a sought-after destination for those seeking premier fishing and diving opportunities. The deployment of R/V MANTA took place approximately 16 nautical miles offshore on January 15, 2023. The sister ship, R/V DOLPHIN is set to deploy in the weeks ahead.

This important milestone for the artificial reef expansion project was fully funded by the TDD, inclusive of the purchase of both vessels. Under the direct oversight of the Coastal Resource team, Tri-Native Contractors performed the extensive cleaning and preparation to eliminate environmental impacts and transported the ships from Lafite, LA to Orange Beach, AL. The vessel

was then moved from Orange Beach to the deployment location offshore Destin-Fort Walton Beach by Walter Marine.

“This is an exciting new addition to our growing artificial reef system, and we are extremely proud of the work the Coastal Resource team has done with this effort,” says Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners Chairman Trey Goodwin. “Not only will it offer additional fishing and diving opportunities, but it will continue to sustain vital ecosystems in the Gulf of Mexico.”

R/V MANTA was deployed in approximately 110 feet of water (N 30° 8.630' W 86° 39.192'). It features a statue of Jesus known as the “Christ of the Gulf,” paying homage to the series of other statues throughout the world. The statue is situated on the top deck at a depth of about 50 feet making it very accessible to even beginner divers. Christ of the Gulf was created by Glenn Camplejohn who is part of the Deepwater Mafia, a Christian based dive club from Mississippi that dives in the area, regularly.

“These deployments of the R/V MANTA and R/V DOLPHIN in the coming weeks, are not only significant in terms of the recreational opportunities they present, but they also provide habitat for vital species of fish that inhabit our region,” commented Alex Fogg, Coastal Resource Manager. “We are now home to more than 400 artificial reefs, and it’s been remarkable to see how our efforts are not only contributing to valuable experiences out on the water, but also to the protection of these delicate environments. The addition of both vessels mark the start of what we hope to be a celebratory year of even more impactful costal efforts ahead.”

The two sister ships were designed as seismic and bottom cable recording vessels for oil exploration, built by North American Shipbuilding. Standing at over 50 feet tall, R/V MANTA (180') was built in 1976, followed by R/V DOLPHIN (192') in 1978. Both vessels will join the region’s “Wreck Alley” as the second and third largest ships in the artificial reef network. Recently, the Coastal Resource team was able to modify their offshore artificial reef permits, allowing for vessels greater than 60ft in length to be deployed. Since the revision, several unique vessels have been deployed alongside reefs ranging from concrete piles to specifically designed modules. These unique and innovative deployments now offer an opportunity for first timers to explore closer to shore and experienced divers to take in new sites which are all viewable via [an interactive map](#).

Additional photos and video can be found by [clicking this link](#)

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### **About Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida**

[www.destinfb.com](http://www.destinfb.com)

Captivating sugar-white sand beaches and emerald- green waters await in Destin-Fort Walton Beach. Located in Northwest Florida, the destination is not only an ideal place to unwind and experience total relaxation along a 20-mile stretch of beach, but to uncover the adventurous side within. The family-friendly locale offers an environment of discovery to play and explore, inviting kids to get on the water and give their adventurous side room to grow. Visitors enjoy pristine beaches, Gulf-to-Table seafood, abundant watersport activities, championship golf, lively nightlife, and numerous attractions, festivals and events designed to thrill all ages.

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