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Osborne Reef Tire Removal Program Set to Begin

Innovative Pilot Project Combines Efforts of Federal, State, and County Governments

Federal, State and Broward County governments are set to begin a monumental project to remove hundreds of thousands of tires from the Osborne Reef in the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of Fort Lauderdale Florida.

It's estimated that nearly two-million tires were placed into the ocean in the 1970's by private organizations hoping to create an artificial reef. Over the years, the successful formation of an artificial reef did not occur; the tires loosened and moved, damaging the nearby natural coral reefs. The tires cover more than 34 acres on the seafloor in 60-70 feet of water about 1.3 miles off the coast of Fort Lauderdale beach.

For the month of June, divers from the U.S. Army, Navy and Coast Guard will be working in 70' of water off the coast of Broward County recovering tires from the seafloor and determining the most efficient techniques that will be applied to the next several years' cleanup efforts. The goal is to ultimately remove an estimated 700,000 tires from the seafloor. Removing the failed artificial reef will protect adjacent living corals from further damage from the tires and it will provide a large scale salvage opportunity as training for the military.

“Without the cooperation and synergy of Federal, State and County governments, removal of the tires and restoration of the coral reef would be impossible,” said Broward County Mayor Josephus Eggelletion. “The government partnerships create a win-win situation for all parties involved in the project. We are most thankful that the state agreed to finance the recycling of the tires and the military has provided the labor and skill necessary to get this job done. It's unprecedented.”

The Army is providing a 175' landing craft utility (LCU) that will crane the bundles from the surface, deposit them into cargo containers, and transport them to Port Everglades in Broward County. "As part of the Department of Defense's Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) program, this project allows these military divers and Army LCU crew members real-world training. And perhaps, more importantly, it exercises interoperability with federal, state and county agencies and these skill sets could have the most significance in the aftermath of a Katrina-type natural disaster," said Navy Chief Warrant Officer Donovan Motley, officer in charge Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit Two, Det Six.

To accomplish the failed tire reef cleanup, a host of agencies with a diverse expertise were brought together to accomplish a cleanup job that has languished for over 30 years. The military is providing the salvage expertise. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is addressing the transportation and processing of the recovered tires. Broward County's Environmental Protection Department's marine biologists and Port Everglades's donated dock space are ensuring all the pieces come together at the local level. Coastal America, a federal process that brings together multiple agencies to tackle complex environmental restoration and protection projects, spearheaded the effort. Will Nuckols, Coastal America Project Coordinator and Military Liaison, said "We're saddled with a number of large environmental cleanup projects around the nation. It is important that we look to the resources we have to determine the efficient mix that solves these seemingly insolvable environmental challenges."

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's contractor will haul the tires to a waste tire processing plant in Georgia where they will be processed into tire-derived fuel (TDF) and sold to a recycled paper plant. TDF is burnt to produce energy, offsetting the need for burning fossil fuels.

"The DEP is proud to partner with local and federal agencies to protect and preserve our marine resources," said DEP Secretary Michael W. Sole. "The two million dollars in State funding for the removal of the waste tires will help prevent further damage to our coral reefs and restore natural marine habitats."

"Participating in the tire removal project is another example of Port Everglades' commitment to protecting the environment. Depending upon the project's success, we

hope to continue to be a partner in this endeavor," says Port Everglades Director Phillip C. Allen.

As the cleanup continues, Nova Southeastern University (NSU) Oceanographic Center scientists from its National Coral Reef Institute will evaluate recovery of the injured reef.

The NOAA-funded NSU study will provide resource managers valuable information on restoration effects and reef recovery times.

"Florida's coral reefs provide jobs, income, and recreation for millions of people" said Timothy Keeney, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and co-chair of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force. "NOAA is very pleased to be a partner in this important marine debris removal effort to restore these valuable reef habitats."

Broward County enjoys an economic impact of more than \$60 million annually (according to a research study by the Cline Group in 2000) from visitors flocking to an array of dive sites and marine life. There are 69 miles of a unique natural three-tiered reef system which begins in 20 feet of water just 100 yards from shore at its closest point. Several successful artificial reefs have been placed on the ocean's floor over the past 20 years as magnets for fish and reef life with permanent mooring buoys to reduce anchor damage.

Beginning in depths of 30 feet, there are more than 100 dive sites with permanent mooring buoys to reduce anchor damage. Broward County was named one of the ***Top Ten World's Best Wreck Diving, Marine Life and Value Dive Destination*** by the readers of ***Scuba Diving*** magazine.

Broward County's Environmental Protection Department is the project manager overseeing the project.

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