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Development of Virginia's Artificial Fishing Reefs
A Historical Outline (1959-1977)

By

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Development of Virginia's Artificial Fishing Reefs*
A Historical Outline (1959 - 1977)

I. Early Efforts

A. Tidewater Artificial Reef Development Association (1959 - 1964)

- planned a reef site in Bay and in ocean
- 1959 - established ocean reef site 12 miles offshore Virginia Beach - 150 car bodies (known on charts as "Fish Haven")
- established Bay site 1 mile N Thimble Shoal Light in 1961; water depth 15'
- sought to place 1000 junked car bodies on bottom but only 8 in place
- Sand Sharks diving club surveyed reef and on different occasions speared sheepshead weighting 13-16 lbs. each
- VIMS assisted in identifying organisms retrieved by divers
- car bodies remained in place through Ash Wednesday storm in 1962

B. Old Dominion College Reef - 1967/68 (just west of Little Creek approximately 1000 yards offshore)

- 600 junk auto bodies placed in parallel rows about 300 yards long and 50 yards apart for research

C. 1968/69 Chincoteague Reef (Winter Quarter Shoal and Blackfish Bank (108°, 5.7 nautical miles from Assateague Beach CG Lookout Tower; 10 nautical miles from Chincoteague Inlet)

- supported by citizens in Chincoteague and Coast Guard auxiliary in same area
- permit application initiated in 1969 to use scrap car bodies, tires, and scrap barges
- 2 menhaden boats sunk at site in 1970

D. 1969 - Onancock Creek Reef (3900 yards westerly of Onancock Creek, Channel Light)

- supported by Eastern Shore Anglers Club
- several thousand tires ready in spring 1969 to dump on site but held up by Corps of Engineers
- lost load of tires being hauled to reef but landed near site (1970)

II. Tidewater Artificial Reef Association of Virginia (TARAV)

- A. Created in 1970 as a biproduct of the Boating and Sportfishing Committee of the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce
- B. Two offshore reef sites established in 1970 (permitted by Corps)
 1. Tower Reef - area 500 x 800 yards located 4,050 feet on bearing 240⁰M from Chesapeake Light Tower - SE of tower); clearance 51'
 - May 1970 sunk hulk of menhaden trawler (donated by Standard Products Company of Kilmarnock)
 2. Offshore Reef # 2 (8 miles from V Buoy on bearing 119⁰M); clearance 66'
 - 1970 - Corps permit to sink two menhaden hulls
- C. 1971 - applied to Corps for permits on 6 reef sites
 1. ODU Reef - opposed by American Institute of Merchant Shipping in 1973
 2. Bridge Tunnel Reef (on the Middle Ground north of the Baltimore Channel opening in the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel); clearance 22' - opposed by Bridge Tunnel Authority because of potential scouring problems and proximity to Bridge in 1971
 3. Rudee Reef (approximately 12,500' due E of 26th Street and Ocean Front, Virginia Beach, with area 2400' x 3000'); clearance 26' - initially opposed by American Institute of Shipping but when location shifted away from proximity to shipping lane, opposition removed (1972); VIMS concerned that storm surge would move tire units and offered to monitor test tire units; monitoring effort explored with VMRC and VIMS
 4. Triangle Wrecks (area 3 miles x 2 miles located 16 miles bearing 072⁰T from Chesapeake Light Station); clearance 66'
 - Corps permit granted in 1971
 - World War II wrecks on site
 - John Morgan - a Liberty ship sunk as a result of collision on June 6, 1943; the northern most wreck
 - Lillian Luckenbach - twin screw bulk carrier sunk in collision March 23, 1943 less than 2 miles from John Morgan; southern most wreck
 - 127 Navy landing craft were to be added to site along with tire units
 5. Tiger Reef (immediately west of V Buoy marking site of American tanker Tiger torpedoed by German submarine April 3, 1942; 15 miles offshore Dam Neck) clearance 39-50'

- Navy opposed construction because located in Danger Area and vessels not to linger in such areas; also opposed by Virginia Pilots and Maryland Pilots associations
- 6. Offshore Reef # 2 (8 miles from V Buoy on bearing 119⁰M); clearance 66'
 - Navy opposed because in Air Space Warning Area where air-to-air missile firing exercises regularly scheduled
- D. Tower Reef - applied for dumping Navy landing craft, tire units and other materials
- E. 1972 - TARAV and SSIA
 1. TARAV initiated attempt to secure mothballed Liberty ships for use in constructing Triangle Reef
 2. Worked with Dick Stone, NMFS, NAVY, VMRC and legislators, particularly Virginia's Tom Downing to set wheels in motion
 3. Tom Downing was chief sponsor of legislation making surplus Liberty ships available to states for use in construction of artificial reefs (P.L. 92-402)
 4. Seaside Sports Fishing Improvement Association (originated in fall 1971) applied for and received permit for reef site 8.7 miles 102⁰T from Parramore Coast Guard Tower immediately NW of Buoy R "10P" (Parramore Bank Lighted Whistle Buoy); clearance 44'
 - site of American tug Minominee sunk March 31, 1942 by shell-fire from German submarine along with two large steel barges
 - tire units to be dumped on site (7000 tires)
- F. 1973-Virginia applied to Department of Commerce for six surplus Liberty Ships (project administered by VMRC)
 - EIS cleared
- G. 1974
 - Virginia's application approved
 - Contract for dismantling and towing vessels awarded to Peck Iron and Metal Company, Portsmouth
 - Navy agrees to help in sinking vessels
 - Virginia Legislature allocates up to \$50,000 annually to VMRC from unrefunded marine fuel taxes to conduct artificial reef program
- H. August 28, 1974 - first ship sunk on Triangle Reef U.S.S. Webster

- total of 6 ships sunk from 1974-1977, last being sunk in April 1977; 2 ships on Parramore Reef and 4 on Triangle Reef

I. Ship Sinking Procedure

- all deck gear and valuable metals removed by private firm which receives percentage of sale of this material as payment for services
- VMRC did not have to expend funds for cutting up ships
- ships cut down to just above second deck level so that only bare hull remains with a vertical relief of 28'
- all storage and fuel tanks as well as holes cleaned of residual materials to prevent contamination of environment with pollutants
- ships towed to site, anchors set bow and stern, Navy Harbor Clearance Unit sets charges blowing holes in bottom and sides of hull

* This information was compiled in 1978 through personal communications with Mr. Dick Stone (NMFS), Mr. Dave Stormont (TARAV), Dr. John Merriner (VIMS), Mr. Mike Castagna (VIMS), Mr. Phillip McCaleb (SSIA), Mr. Mike Meier (VMRC) and from notes on shipwrecks compiled by Mr. J.C. Robinson (Peninsula Salt Water Sport Fisherman's Association)
