Artificial Reefs and Coastal Fishery Resources

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Fishes congregate around coral reefs, rock outcrops and other areas with irregular, hard bottom. These areas provide shelter, food, orientation, and spawning grounds for fishes and are vital to the existence of encrusting organisms. However, much of the continental shelf area off the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States is relatively barren.

Studies by National Marine Fisheries Service biologist from the Atlantic Estuarine Fisheries Center, Beaufort, North Carolina, on reefs off New Jersey, South Carolina and Florida have demonstrated that artificial reefs effectively provide additional food and cover for fishes. Artificial reefs have a great potential as a management tool that States and the Federal Government can use to conserve and develop recreational and commercial fishery resources.

INTRODUCTION

In 1970, over nine million salt water anglers (age 12 and over) spent 1.3 billion dollars catching nearly 1.6 billion pounds of fish (Deuel, 1973). With projected population growth and increases in leisure time, we can expect the number of anglers to more than double by the year 2000. This increase in the number of marine sport fishermen plus the continuing pressure by U.S. and foreign fishing fleets may tax our fishery resources beyond their ability to sustain present yields unless adequate management practices based on sound research are developed and implemented. Artificial reefs appear to be an important management tool that can be used by States and the Federal Government to conserve and develop recreational and commercial fishery resources. However, some questions remain that need definitive answers before the full potential of artificial reefs can be realized. The most important problem is the determination of how artificial reefs affect the stock size of fishes. We are now gathering quantitative information to answer this question.

REFERENCES

