

## Proposed Revised Amendment II

to

### Louisiana's Artificial Reef Plan

#### Special Artificial Reef Sites

#### Introduction

Since the development of Louisiana's Artificial Reef Program, several unforeseen and seemingly beneficial opportunities have arisen that involve the creation of artificial reefs outside of designated planning areas. For example, a large drilling rig, owned and operated by ODECO located in South Timbalier 86, collapsed in 1986 during Hurricane Juan. This very large structure has become a very popular diving and fishing spot, but not located within one of the nine Louisiana Artificial Reef Planning Areas. While program coordinators and council members believe inclusion of the structure in the reef program is desirable, they also feel expansion of an existing planning area to encompass the ODECO structure would set a bad precedent.

The creation of a "Special Artificial Reef Site" (SARS) program category would provide the council and program the flexibility of establishing selected artificial reefs under such "unusual" circumstances. Each SARS in offshore waters of Louisiana would have to meet the following qualifications and criteria.

## Definition

A Special Artificial Reef Site (SARS) is an artificial reef site created and maintained by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries under the Louisiana Artificial Reef Program located outside designated planning areas that would provide beneficial habitat with minimum negative user group impacts.

## Purpose

SARS allow the Louisiana Artificial Reef Program to take advantage of materials of opportunity when one or more of the following conditions are met:

- A. There is a historical or biological significance associated with that site. For example, if a particular area is a favorable fishing spot frequented by fishermen and/or divers, or if the site provides beneficial fishery habitat,
- B. the site is part of a cooperative effort between the Louisiana Artificial Reef Program and other state, federal, or private groups,
- C. the site contains shipwrecks or other derelicts which cannot be practicably removed or relocated, and provide benefits to the Louisiana Artificial Reef Program,
- D. the site forms an integral part of experimental or demonstration projects undertaken by the Louisiana Artificial Reef Program,
- E. the site benefits the Louisiana Artificial Reef Program by providing ability to use materials in suitable areas

## Criteria

For a site to be considered as a SARS it must meet the following criteria:

- 1) development of a SARS would provide benefit to recreational and/or commercial

- fishing, or fish habitat,
- 2) removal of existing material from that site would have a negative impact on fish populations,
  - 3) designation as a SARS would not pose unreasonable interference with navigation,
  - 4) minimizes user conflicts based on information available for such evaluation,
  - 5) inclusion of the special artificial reef site in the Louisiana Artificial Reef Program would have an overall positive impact on user groups,
  - 6) for every offshore "SARS" constructed, an area of equal size would be eliminated from an existing planning area, and
  - 7) except for possible trace amounts, the structure would be free and clear of any hydrocarbons or other hazardous materials as listed in current regulations promulgated by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency.

#### Procedure

The following steps will be taken to establish a Special Artificial Reef Site:

- 1) For proposed SARS that meet the guidelines of the Louisiana Artificial Reef Plan and criteria in this amendment, the Louisiana Artificial Reef Coordinator will submit a proposal to establish a SARS to the Artificial Reef Council. The proposal shall include:
  - a) proposed reef boundaries
  - b) proximity to known features, including but not limited to safety fairways, offshore structures, existing reefs\planning areas, natural banks, and pipelines
  - c) clearance over structures

- d) proposed reef profile
  - e) stability of structure(s)
  - f) list of potential hazardous materials
  - g) final reef configuration
  - h) justification that the criteria outlined above are met
- 2) The Louisiana Artificial Reef Council will establish an ad hoc SARS Advisory Committee composed of representative user groups of the Gulf of Mexico (i.e. commercial trawlers, commercial reef fishermen, charter boats\head boats, recreational anglers, scuba divers, oil & gas industry, research institutions, conservation organizations, LA offshore terminal authority, MMS, & USCG) to assist in establishing criteria and evaluating SARS proposals. Once the Louisiana Artificial Reef Council has provided initial review of a SARS proposal, the SARS Advisory Committee will meet, review the proposal, and advise the Louisiana Artificial Reef Council as to the merits and/or deficiencies of the SARS proposal. Based upon that advice and upon any additional information available, the Louisiana Artificial Reef Council will make a determination on whether to proceed with the SARS proposal.
- 3) If a SARS proposal is accepted by the Louisiana Artificial Reef Council, the intent to create a SARS will be announced through a Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries News Release.
- 4) Thirty days following news releases, if no objections are received by LDWF or the Louisiana Artificial Reef Council, the SARS proposal is considered to be approved by the Louisiana Artificial Reef Council for further action. In the event objections

are received and determined to be significant by LDWF or the Louisiana Artificial Reef Council, a public meeting will be held before a final SARS determination is made by the Louisiana Artificial Reef Council.

- 5) For SARS approved by the Louisiana Artificial Reef Council, the Louisiana Artificial Reef Coordinator will commence artificial reef establishment procedures for the approved SARS which include but are not limited to obtaining permits and developing donation agreements between LDWF and the donor. All reef sites require a Corps of Engineers permit which provides a minimum 15 day public comment period.