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MacDill Air Force Base

MacDill to build reef to protect its shore

The Air Force base has state approval to plant 910 reef balls in about 2 feet of water in the spring.

By RON MATUS

Published July 11, 2003

Another artificial reef is headed to South Tampa.

MacDill Air Force Base won approval from state environmental officials last week for an 800-foot reef planned along the base's heavily eroded southeastern shore.

Base officials hope the \$60,000 structure will not only sap energy from incoming waves, but will protect an American Indian burial site and create habitat for marine life.

If it works, they plan to expand the reef over the next five years.

Instead of a wall, MacDill opted for a "creative restoration project," said Peter Clark, executive director of Tampa BayWatch, which will help build the reef in spring 2004.

The reef will be made from 910 reef balls - concrete structures that resemble upside-down punch bowls and weigh about 75 pounds each. They'll be positioned in 2 feet of water about 200 feet from shore.

Erosion in the area is accelerated by the wake of big ships that cruise to and from the Port of Tampa. The result: Mangroves have washed away, and large live oaks cling to the coast. Even parts of the base golf course could fall into the sea.

Years ago, the base tried planting marsh grasses to grip the shore, but that approach didn't work, said Jason Kirkpatrick, the base's conservation



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program manager. With a reef in place, the base might try replanting to further stabilize the area.

MacDill officials still need a final okay from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Corps officials say that should come in a week or two.

The Air Force and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plan to split the cost of the reef.

MacDill officials say they won't build the reef until next spring, when oysters colonize, attracting fish and birds.

After that, they anticipate adding to the reef every spring through 2008.

For the initial phase, reef balls will be arranged in five patterns 10 to 18 feet wide. Officials with MacDill and the state Department of Environmental Protection will monitor the reef to determine which arrangements work best.

The MacDill reef will be the third built in South Tampa in a year.

In March, more than 80 volunteers planted 125 reef balls off the southern end of the Bayshore Boulevard balustrade. In April and May, volunteers stacked several tons of oyster shell in the waters off the east end of the Friendship Trail Bridge.

Yet another reef, this one at Ballast Point Park, has been postponed until next year so the city can remove concrete rubble along the shore.

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