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Outdoor notebook

Artificial reefs hold real promise for bay anglers

By Bill Burton

So much in fishing is artificial these days: Artificial flies, artificial baitfish, even artificial nightcrawlers, bloodworms, crabs, squid, eels; you name it and it can be poured into plastic molds. The phonies are sufficiently realistic that if worked properly they attract fish to the hook.

And, then there are artificial reefs, man-made fish attractants, a place where smaller marine life prospers, smaller fish go to feed - and in turn bigger fish go to eat them.

In the Chesapeake and its tributaries, artificial reefs have been around for probably a couple of centuries or more, beginning when man dumped things into the water, sometimes just to get rid of them or perhaps in hopes that things stuffed on the bottom would create uneven contours that would attract fish.

Artificial reefs are relief from natural flat and even bottoms - in such instances, there is little natural structure where small fish can escape larger predatory fish. The baitfish are fair game, out in the open, with no place to hide.

When an artificial reef is created, whether it be unintentional like a sunken vessel, or intended when one is made up of debris, reef balls and such, small marine life sprouts, smaller fish seek sanctuary and larger fish follow to dine. And fishing is enhanced.

The Department of Natural Resources began to get interested in artificial reefs about 50 years ago; some of the first reefs were made of worn out tires and the remains of bridges; today the building of artificial reefs involves old bridges, worn out vessels, even man-made concrete fish balls with holes in them where smaller fish move in quickly to feed on the aquatic growth that follows.

Reef building has become rather sophisticated as fisheries managers

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learn more about what better attracts marine life and what can have an adverse environmental impact. For example, tires, once the backbone of reef programs, are no longer acceptable in many places, including here, due to possible pollution consequences as they break down.

Artificial reefs play an increasingly important role in enhancing fishing opportunity as old natural reef-like bottoms become silted in and eventually covered. Many skippers of the mid-bay attribute the declining catches at the Summer Gooses, once one of the best chumming areas, to silting of that natural reef.

Not far from the Gooses is the Stone Rock off Tilghman Island, created when large stones, some reportedly that served as ballast for ships, were dumped in the vicinity of Sharps Island. The Stone Rock continues to be a fairly good angling opportunity.

Properly designed and sited artificial reefs, as they mature, should function similar to natural reefs of the same size in the same general area. The number of attracted species might be low for the first few months, the number of fish could be high depending on the numbers of larval or juvenile fishes in the area that find the reef. Within a year, one can expect similar numbers of different species as in similar natural reefs in the area.

Artificial reefs are just not created at random; they must be in an area that fish will frequent - and also man. Important in the site selection process are land and water access points, existing fishing grounds and areas to be avoided because of navigational traffic, water depth, unsuitable bottom and such.

Reefs are of little value if they're not convenient to fishermen who use them. But they must also have a suitable bottom, something that will support a reef. Soft mud is a poor choice since the reef will soon be silted over.

Following is a list of many existing artificial reefs in the Chesapeake, worthy of checking out. Mark them on your charts, keeping in mind that any reef should offer better fishing than flat bottom. In parenthesis is the date the last additions to the reef were made. Some info on the reefs is scant. (Materials of opportunity, refer to hard materials that are allowed under guidelines)

BAY ARTIFICIAL REEFS

Cedar Point, Mid Bay: 115 acres. Established 1986, (2004) sandy bottom, reef is of rock piles, concrete, fiberglass units and reef balls. Now permitted; reef balls, materials of opportunity.

Gales Lumps, Upper Bay: 1,550 acres. Established 1989, (2004) silt

with shell bottom, reef is of quarry stone, concrete culverts and concrete rubble. Now permitted; reef balls.

Holland Point, Mid Bay: Established 1986 (2004), mud, silty sand bottom, reef is of concrete rubble, monotubes and other fish aggregating devices. Now permitted; materials of opportunity.

Hollicutt's Noose, Mid Bay: 50 acres. Established 1966, (2006) Sandy bottom, reef is of concrete rubble, tire units, steel tugboat. Now permitted; reef balls, materials of opportunity.

Little Cove Point, Mid Bay: 74.6 acres. Established 1968, (2004) silty sand with shell and mud bottom, reef is of tire units, concrete, rubble, bridge pilings, reef balls. Now permitted; reef balls, materials of opportunity.

Love Point, Upper Bay: 50 acres. Established 1967, (2005) silty clay and sand bottom, reef is of bridge decks and tire units. Now permitted; reef balls, materials of opportunity.

Plum Point, Mid Bay: 3,443 acres: Established 1993, (2004) sand, silty sand and clay bottom, reef is of concrete rubble, cubes, rip-rap, steel vessels, tire units. Now permitted; reef balls, materials of opportunity.

Taylor's Island, Mid Bay: 155 acres. Established 1986, (2003) mud bottom, reef is of barge and bridge decking. Now permitted; nothing planned unless reef is expanded.

Tilghman Island, Mid Bay: 107 acres. Established 1987, (2004) sandy bottom, reef is of materials of opportunity. Now permitted; reef balls, materials of opportunity.

Pooles Island and Cedarhurst, Upper Bay: Concrete rubble, Now permitted; reef balls and materials of opportunity.

Hackett's Point, Upper Bay: Concrete pipe, Now permitted; reef balls and materials of opportunity.

Tolchester, Upper Bay: Concrete rubble. Now permitted; reef balls.

Severn River, Upper Bay: 30 acres. Established 1995. Now permitted; reef balls.

Chesapeake Beach, Mid Bay: Tire units. Now permitted; reef balls, materials of opportunity.

Choptank River, Mid Bay: Bridge materials. Now permitted, reef balls.

Point No Point, Lower Bay: 1,050 acres. Established 1995, reef is of barges, vessels and shell piles. Now permitted; reef balls and materials of opportunity.

Point Lookout, Lower Bay: Now permitted; reef balls.

Tangier Sound, Lower Bay: Now permitted; reef balls, materials of opportunity, old vessels.

Janes Island, Lower Bay: Reef is of tire units. Now permitted; Reef balls, materials of opportunity.

Not Listed In Report: Magothy River, near Dobbins Island, reef balls.

OUTDOORS CALENDAR

Today: Last day of the annual Pasadena Sportfishing Flea Market, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., Earleigh Heights Fire Hall. Severna Park.

Tomorrow: It will be rigging for rockfish at the 7:30 p.m. meeting of Broadneck/Magothy Beach chapter of MSSA at the American Legion post, Manhattan Beach Road, Severna Park. A chance to learn how to make daisy chain rigs, tandem rigs, umbrellas and much more. Call Skip Zinck at 410-551-55024.

Thursday: Annual banquet and fund-raiser of Annapolis Chapter of Ducks Unlimited, 6 p.m., Navy Football Stadium featuring auctions of guns, wildlife art, decoys and such. Call Bonnie Chew,

410-286-3036 .

March 2-4: Thirty fifth annual Sportfishing & Outdoor Expo, Wicomico Youth and Civic Center, Salisbury. Call Ed Arvey,

410-742-2871 .

March 3: Rockfish Seminar, 8:30 to 2, American Legion Post 175, Manhattan Beach Road, Severna Park. The panel will include Capts. Bruno Vasta, Chris Dollar and Walleye Pete. Call Brian at

410-991-8090 , or Skip at 410-551-5024 .

March 3: Wild Turkey seminar starts at 8 a.m. at Meyerstation Road, Odenton - covers all aspects of turkey hunting, \$5 registration fee, free for those under 7. Sponsored by Central Maryland Chapter of National Wild Turkey Federation. Call Buz Meyer,

301-261-6996 .

March 3: Free State Fly Fishers free fly fishing swap meet, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Davidsonville Family Recreation Center, Queen Annes Bridge Road, Davidsonville. To reserve table or for more info call John Scarborough at 410-757-6411 .

March 3-4: Fishing seminars at Tri-State Marina, Deale. Saturday morning: Capt. Richie Gaines and Bill Burton, Fishing Chesapeake Bay; Saturday afternoon, Light Tackle Fishing and Jigging, Capt. Skip Slomski. Sunday morning, Trolling Chesapeake Bay, Capt. Wayne Morgan; Sunday afternoon, Rockfishing the Bay January through December, Capt. Skip Zinck. Reservations a must, Call Dawn Yoder, 410-269-0716 .

March 13: Beginning of five part (Tuesdays and Thursdays) Coast Guard Auxiliary Maryland Safe Boating Course, Hillsemere Elementary School, Annapolis. Call Michael Prokopchak.

410-798-5952 .

Mail calendar items to Bill Burton, P.O. Box 430, Pasadena, MD, 21122-0430, or fax to 410-360-2427. For fishing, hunting or other news e-mail burtonoutdoors@yahoo.com In ALL communications, please include your phone number.

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