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Board of County Commissioners

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FORT
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Okaloosa County Tourist Development Department Expands “Boat Yard” Artificial Reef Site

Okaloosa County, Fla. – Okaloosa County Tourist Development Department (TDD) Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism expands fishing and diving opportunities with the upcoming deployment of a decommissioned tugboat (M/V MISS JOANN). The 64-foot vessel will be an addition to nearly 400 artificial reef sites offshore Okaloosa County. The deployment is scheduled for Wednesday, March 2, 2022, by Morgan Marine with oversight from the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Coastal Resource team.

“We are fortunate to have a Coastal Resource Team dedicated to the continued growth of the artificial reef program,” said Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners Chairman Mel Ponder. “Fishing and diving are important coastal activities to our county and reefs like this offer such a unique underwater experience for divers and snorkelers, not to mention an excellent opportunity for anglers.”

In 2021, Morgan Marine was notified by the US Coast Guard that their tugboat would require significant retrofits to bring it into compliance. Rather than invest significant funds in an older vessel, Morgan Marine donated the vessel to Okaloosa County to deploy as an artificial reef. Okaloosa County funded the remaining preparations and costs associated with the deployment.

“Artificial reefs are essential to our community that depends heavily on fishing and diving as a recreational activity and tourism product. We lack the offshore natural reef habitat; therefore, artificial reefs are even more important here. The MISS JOANN will be a great addition to our artificial reef program and we hope it will be visited by divers and fisherman for years to come,” said Alex Fogg, Coastal Resource Manager, Destin-Fort Walton Beach.

M/V MISS JOANN will accompany two previously deployed vessels, the M/V DYLAN (61 feet) and the M/V BRANNON (65 feet). Due to the smaller sizes of these existing artificial reefs the MISS JOANN will be deployed in close proximity to the existing vessels in 119 feet of water but with 40 feet of relief, will provide a shallower option to the site if visitors don’t wish to dive the deeper wrecks. The additional relief will also provide habitat that supports prized fish species such as Amberjack and Cobia. The vessels will be secured to each other for increased stability and to provide additional complexity to the site that has been named the “Boat Yard.” M/V MISS JOANN is prepared and ready for deployment 16.43nm SE of Destin Pass in the Okaloosa County Large Area Artificial Reef Site A (LAARS A).

Coordinates for all Okaloosa County artificial reefs can be found [here](#). For more information on [Destin-Fort Walton Beach](#) or the Artificial Reef Program contact Stacey Young, Community & Media Relations Strategist (850) 606-5389 SLYoung@MyOkaloosa.com or Alex Fogg, Coastal Resource Manager (850) 609-5394 afogg@myokaloosa.com.

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