

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of County Commissioners

May 10, 2021



### Okaloosa County Sinks Retired US Air Force Vessel for Artificial Reef Program

**Destin, Fla.** – Okaloosa divers and fishermen have a new artificial reef to enjoy as of Friday, May 7, 2021. The large 93-foot US Air Force steel-hull water training vessel, BIG DAWG was sunk to the seafloor in 104 feet of water, 14 miles southwest of the Destin Pass.

Alex Fogg, Okaloosa County Coastal Resources Manager with Destin-Fort Walton Beach TDD managed the acquisition, preparation and deployment. After many months of preparation to ensure the vessel was clean and environmentally friendly, a local contractor, DreadKnot was hired to prepare (clean), tow, cut holes and pump water into the vessel sinking it to the bottom.

Once the mission was complete, divers inspected the new reef and reported a perfect, upright landing with sea life already starting to gather. Details on the Okaloosa County Artificial Reef Program can be found at [destinfb.com/explore/ecotourism-hotspots/artificial-reefs/](https://destinfb.com/explore/ecotourism-hotspots/artificial-reefs/)

“Our destination is unique and we’re fortunate to have the opportunity offer diverse recreation options for our citizens and visitors, through the Artificial Reef Program,” said Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners Chairman Carolyn Ketchel.

Additional agencies onsite for the deployment included representatives from Okaloosa County Sheriff’s Office, Hurlburt Field, Eglin Air Force Base, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and US Coast Guard.

**Background:** The vessel was offered to Okaloosa County Staff in June 2020, soon after the official request was made. The County worked with Hurlburt Field and a local contractor to transport the BIG DAWG to its final resting spot at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico.

In the months before the reef was deployed, Okaloosa County worked with DreadKnot Charters in transporting BIG DAWG to Choctawhatchee Bay for deployment preparations following National guidance of preparing artificial reefs, County processes for vessel deployment and guidelines specified in the Army Corps of Engineers permit. Once regulatory agencies were notified of final preparations, a 14-day pre-deployment notice was issued, providing the opportunity for final inspections. A pre-deployment survey was conducted of the seafloor to ensure there were no natural bottom features, historic resources or existing artificial reef material.

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