

Readying reef balls for the water



Finished reef balls of differing sizes to accommodate a range of marine life

LISA MACNEIL

On August 4th, The Hernando Sun published an article featuring 19 year old Cole Kolasa and his family. Cole kayaked 788 miles from Pensacola to the Everglades to raise awareness for artificial reefs, and raise money to purchase reef ball molds to create new artificial reefs off the coast of Hernando County. According to the Reef Ball Foundation, "Reef Balls are made of a special, marine friendly, concrete and are designed to mimic natural reef systems. They are used around the world to create habitats for fish and other marine and freshwater species."

This past week, Cole's father, Keith Kolasa, who is also the Hernando County Aquatics Services Manager, led the attendees of the Hernando County Parks & Recreation Outdoor Adventure Camp in putting the reef ball molds to use. Mr. Kolasa said, "Having the molds available that Cole purchased is exciting since we now have the means to make our own reef balls of various sizes." The molds were filled at Cemex's Quarry Family area, where the campers took turns preparing the concrete mixture to fill the reef balls.

James Morris, Regional Environmental Manager with Cemex, oversaw the concrete mixing process, and explained how different mixtures and additives to concrete affect hardness and density. Mr. Kolasa further explained that the reef ball concrete mixture depends on the addition of W.R. Grace's Force 10,000 micro silica "to create a super high strength, abrasion resistant, concrete that has a pH similar to natural seawater." Natural seawater has a pH of 8.3, and a regular concrete mixture has a pH as high as 12. According to The Reef Ball Foundation, higher pH "can inhibit the settlement and growth of many species of marine life including some larval corals." The concrete was donated by Cemex's Tampa Division – Brooksville Ready-Mix.

After the molds are filled, they harden for 24 to 48 hours, and they're ready to be deployed in two to four weeks. Three projects are currently underway to deploy the reef balls, the closest area to receive the reef balls in shallow water is between five and six nautical miles offshore from Hernando Beach and Jenkins Creek.

Some of the reef structures that the outdoor campers helped make at Cemex will be deployed at the Bendickson reef, which is twenty nautical miles offshore, and features ten Sherman Tanks in a one-quarter-mile radius currently serving as reef material. Hernando County has a contract with Colleen Marine located in Port St. Joe to complete this project by October of this year.



Campers mix the cement in preparation to pour into the reef ball molds.

The third project will be an oyster reef in Centipede Bay, just north of Hernando Beach. The County acquired permits for this project from both Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the U.S. Army Corps. The project will be constructed through a partnership with UF/IFAS, and is expected to be completed at the end of this fall.

The Parks & Recreation Outdoor Adventure Camp featured activities such as kayaking, offshore fishing, inshore fishing, tubing, Florida Spring trips and hiking. The camp was sponsored by the local businesses, Big Frog, Terlep Chiropractic, MGM American Executive Tax and Financial Services, H.E.L.P (Hernando County Land Protectors) and 4 Corners Pharmacy.

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Awesome work the kids and the county are doing for the marine environment. We are proud to be a part of this and will continue to support their efforts for many years.

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