



Saltwater Fishing: **ARTIFICIAL REEFS**

Artificial Reefs have long been used to attract marine organisms for harvest. The reefs simulate the habitat of particular species of fish, crustaceans or molluscs with materials ranging from old tires and derelict ships to manufactured plastic, steel and concrete modules. Reefs provide new fish habitat and more accessible fishing grounds for anglers and the fishing industry. Fishermen and resource managers recognize the value of a properly designed, constructed and managed artificial reef system.

How Reefs Work. An artificial reef is only artificial in the sense that humans place the structure in the marine environment. Everything occurring after that is a natural process, leading to the formation of a community of encrusting organisms and associated fish, molluscs, worms and crustaceans. Filter-feeding animals, like mussels, barnacles, hydroids, sponges, tube worms, bryozoans and soft corals attach themselves to nearly any stationary hard surface in the water. Some of these animals look like plants, but no seaweed grows and the depths of most of New York's reefs. This living mini-forest forms a shelter for small free-living animals, such as amphipods, isopods, shrimps, crabs, snails and worms. Both the attached and free-swimming creatures are a potential source of food for certain fishes that live on or frequent the reefs. Reef fish are not entirely dependent upon the reef for food, however. Many forage on open bottom away from the reef, then return to the reef for shelter.

In addition to this food supply, fishes and large crustaceans, like lobsters, find cracks and crevices in which to shelter. Structures also block currents, providing another type of shelter for fish that rest in current shadows and eddies. Baitfish, such as menhaden (bunker), round herring and anchovies school

around structures, although it is not clear exactly why. The reefs may offer a visual reference point in an otherwise featureless environment, or perhaps current upwelling caused by the obstruction concentrates the plankton on which these fish feed. Whatever the reason, these baitfish attract pelagic predators like striped bass, bluefish, cod, mackerel, sharks and tunas.

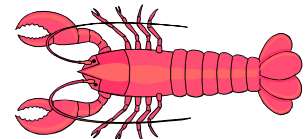
DEC's Artificial Reef Program. Since 1962, the Department of Environmental Conservation's program of marine artificial reef construction has provided new fishing and diving opportunities and enhanced fishery resources and associated habitat. Working with local anglers, commercial fishermen, and party and charter boat captains, DEC selects sites close to inlets or access points with strong fish-producing potential. After obtaining the proper permits, DEC oversees construction of the reefs using rock, scrap concrete and steel vessels. Other materials (tires, wooden vessels, auto bodies) were used in the past but their use has been abandoned in favor of the more stable and durable items. Most materials, their preparation and transportation to the reef sites are donated to DEC. Recently, several private funds have been established to help defray some costs and encourage donations of steel vessels. The result of this program is a system of eight reef sites which have been partially or fully developed.

All reef construction is done under permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and, for state waters, DEC. Because of DEC's role in managing marine resources and the State's ability to assume liability for its actions, only DEC is issued permits for reef construction in New York.

How You Can Help. If you are planning on fishing or diving on one of DEC's reefs, please contact us about becoming an Artificial Reef Volunteer Angler or Diver. Call (631) 444-0438 and request a survey form. By filling out a survey form and telling us what you see or catch, you are helping us collect important data which enables us to monitor the condition of the reefs and make improvements.

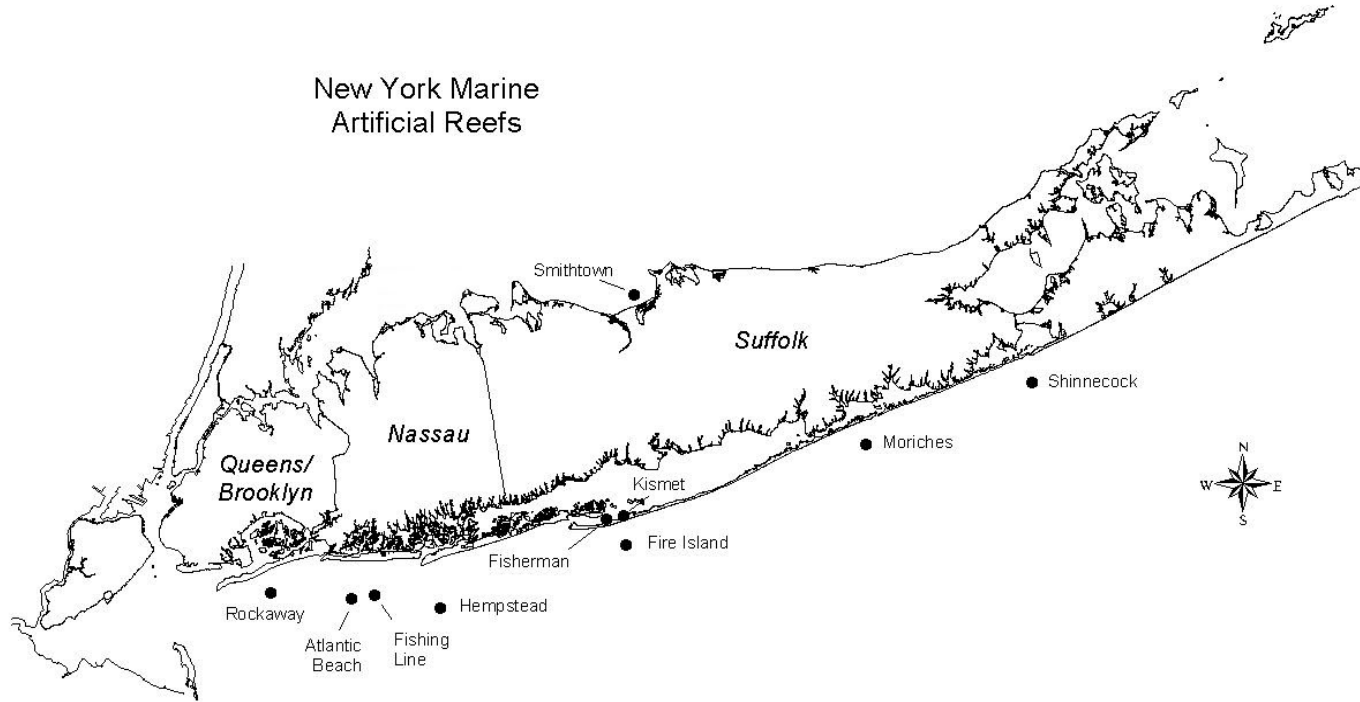
Tips for Fishing and Diving the Reefs

- Exercise self-restraint and practice good conservation; don't take more fish than you need.
- Obey size and possession limits; check with DEC at (631) 444-0435 for updates.
- Use no more than two hooks on your fishing rigs; one is best.
- Keep leaders short; lessen the chance of tangling in the structure.
- Use caution when anchoring; don't get snagged in the structure.
- Use the coordinates (available from DEC) as a starting point; drop one marker on the numbers and do a systematic search until the structure is found, then drop another marker.
- Be courteous; don't dive where others are fishing and don't fish where others are diving.
- Divers beware! Wrecks and reefs could be unstable and potentially dangerous.





New York Marine Artificial Reefs



For detailed information about any of the reefs, or to become a Volunteer Reef Angler or Diver: Chris LaPorta, Artificial Reef Program Manager
NYSDEC Marine Resources
205 N Belle Mead Rd, Ste 1
E Setauket, NY 11733-3400
(631) 444-0438
www.dec.state.ny.us
cjlaport@gw.dec.state.ny.us

