

DNREC Division of Fish & Wildlife's artificial reef program sinks retired cruise ship as addition to Redbird Reef

Newest reef addition will be 'magnet' for fish and other marine life

ATLANTIC OCEAN 38° 40.494'N 74° 43.726'W – DNREC's artificial reef program within the Division of Fish & Wildlife today enhanced the state's renowned artificial reef system by sinking a retired cruise ship on Delaware's Redbird Inshore Artificial Reef Site #11 located 16.5 nautical miles off Indian River Inlet. The newly-reefed ship, which cruised the Chesapeake Bay and coastal waters for more than 15 years, will provide angling opportunities and exciting dive trip possibilities on the Redbird Reef. Delaware's most diverse marine habitat as home to 997 retired New York City subway cars and a variety of vessels including decommissioned tugboats, trawlers, barges, and military armored vehicles. At 215 feet in length, the former cruise ship sunk today becomes the largest component of the Redbird Reef.



The retired cruise ship's sinking was carried out by Norfolk, Va.-based marine contractor Coleen Marine, which has performed reef vessel and material preparation and deployment for Delaware, most prominently the Del-Jersey-Land Inshore Artificial Reef's submerged fleet. Among the Del-Jersey-Land reef fleet are the ex-destroyer *USS Arthur W. Radford*, which

was deployed in 2011 as the longest ship reefed on the East Coast; *the Zuni/Tamaroa*, the one-time harbor tug and World War II Battle of Iwo Jima survivor turned US Coast Guard cutter that plied Atlantic waters for almost 50 years, which was added to the reef two years ago; and the *MV Twin Capes*, the 325-foot-long retired Lewes-Cape May ferry that was sent to the ocean floor in 2018.

“Delaware’s artificial reef system continues to grow in both its renown and disparate natural resources,” said DNREC Secretary Shawn M. Garvin. “Our reef system is without compare in the Mid-Atlantic region, and the diversity of materials – from a former destroyer and other retired warships to almost 1,400 retired New York City subway cars reefed since 2002 – makes it a fish magnet for angling action and diving excitement, and more importantly making more fish habitat for helping sustain some of our leading fisheries including sea bass and tautog (blackfish).”

The ship’s vertical profile – much like the reefed ex-Twin Capes ferry – gives it a great attraction both as fish habitat and for underwater exploration by divers. For dive trips, the former cruise ship offers four passenger decks for exploration and meeting up with new aquatic residents drawn to the ship’s structure such as tautog and sea bass. Divers may also reflect on the ship once having more than 40 staterooms, most of them offering an ocean view when it cruised Atlantic coastal waters.

Delaware has 14 permitted artificial reef sites in Delaware Bay and along the Atlantic Coast, with development of the state’s reef system having begun in 1995. Funding for acquisition, environmental preparation, and sinking of the retired cruise ship as the latest addition to the system was provided by DNREC’s Division of Fish & Wildlife using federal Sport Fish Restoration grant funds administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

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