

Request for Assistance

U.S. Senator Bill Nelson
225 East Robinson Street, Suite 410
Orlando, FL 32801

Dear Senator Nelson,

Thank you for your support and assistance to Santa Rosa county in it's dealings with the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) permitting process for the Navarre Beach fishing pier. There is another ACOE issue that negatively impacts the 5 westernmost counties of the Florida panhandle (Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay) and I request your assistance with resolving it. There are two parts to this issue.

The first part affects mostly Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. It is the expediting of five current artificial reef zone permits that have been submitted by Escambia County. These five permits were submitted to establish areas for placement of artificial reefs inshore and near shore of Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. They have been in the ACOE permitting process from two months to almost one and a half years. Reefs deployed in these zones will provide essential marine habitat, are good for the marine ecology, and the permitted material is much more restrictive and eco friendly than the materials allowed for deployment in the same coastal waters along the Alabama coast. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has already approved all five of the permits, yet the ACOE seems to be requiring much more scrutiny and third party agency comment than is obviously required in the coastal waters of Alabama. This is not only **unfair** but is economically **damaging** to Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. The Santa Rosa and Escambia County Marine Advisory Committees and the County Commissioners are anxious to move ahead with deployment artificial reefs in the areas to be permitted. I ask the assistance of your office in expediting approval of these permits. The chart below provides a general timeline.

Permit	Location	FL DEP Submission	FL DEP Approval	ACOE Submission	ACOE Approval
Near Shore East - Gulf of Mexico	Slightly to the east of Pensacola Pass surrounding "3-barges reef"	3-Oct-07	30-Oct-07	Jul-07	
Near Shore West - Gulf of Mexico	1.5 miles SSW of the USS Mass. near Pensacola Pass	3-Oct-07	30-Oct-07	Jul-07	
Pensacola Beach Snorkeling Reef	East end of Santa Rosa Island near Portofino Development	4-Sep-08	26-Sep-08	8-Sep-08	
Fort Pickens Snorkeling Reef East	Off the sound side beach near Fort Pickens Entry Gate	28-Aug-08	23-Sep-08	8-Sep-08	
Fort Pickens Snorkeling Reef West	Off the soundside beach near Fort Pickens Entry Gate	28-Aug-08	23-Sep-08	8-Sep-08	

The second issue is one that the citizens and governments from all five of the westernmost counties are attempting to address. We appear to be hamstrung by the ACOE misguided approach to permitting of reefs and reef zones in Florida waters. It is ridiculous to treat all Florida waters with a one size fits all process/comment/review process. In south Florida and the keys where there is much coral and other ecological and high boating traffic considerations, a more thorough review and stricter limitations on reefing in general is sound policy. In the panhandle area, the floor of the Gulf of Mexico is a vast desert of sand – less stringent oversight is necessary. Permitting of more reefing areas in the near shore and in shore waters of the Florida panhandle is not only good ecologically, but is a grass-roots economic stimulus package bringing millions of dollars in economic activity to our area. It is a true win-win for the economy and the environment. In response to citizen dissatisfaction with the ACOE reef permitting process all five counties have either passed or are in the process of passing resolutions to request moving the jurisdiction over their waterways from the Jacksonville District back to the Mobile District of the ACOE where it has historically been. Will you please lend assistance in eliminating these inequities by helping us (via legislation or other means) to move this jurisdiction back to the Mobile District?

Best Regards,

Signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Printed Name: _____