

Osborne Reef Waste Tire Removal Project July 8, 2009

During the 1970s, between one and two million tires were put in the ocean off Broward County in an effort to create additional fish habitat. Over the years, many of the tires were mobilized by tropical storms and hurricanes, the movement of which caused damage to nearby existing coral reefs. The threat is serious, but the complexity and magnitude of the challenge of removing these tires has prevented any individual government agency from doing so.

The NOAA Marine Debris Program funded a reconnaissance project that was conducted in August, 2006. The scope of work for this project included the development of a potential strategy for removing and properly disposing of the tires. It was decided that a pilot program was needed to test diver retrieval productivity, loading and transportation methods, and tire processing and disposal.

In 2007, a group of federal, state and county government agencies worked jointly to complete the pilot study with the objective of defining the technical and economic feasibility of coordinating agency capabilities to accomplish the objectives listed above. This joint-effort program involved Coastal America, US Navy, Army, Coast Guard, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Broward County Environmental Protection and Growth Management Department, and Broward County Port Everglades Department.

Funding for the military mission, which included a multi-branch team of divers and an Army landing craft utility (LCU) ship was provided by the Department of Defense's Innovative Readiness Training Program. Permit fees, equipment and supplies, and tire processing services were funded by DEP out of 2007 abatement funds. Project management and dockage for the 2007 pilot were provided by Broward County.

The pilot project allowed productivity projections to be made for the remainder of the project. Monthly tire removal was estimated at 20,000 passenger tire equivalents (PTEs). At this rate, complete cleanup of the estimated 650,000 tires remaining would take more than the three years originally intended. After the pilot, it was decided that previously established priority areas needed to be redrawn to emphasize the importance of removing tires from the eastern edge of the affected middle reef (designated Priority Area 1). In order to remove the estimated 370,000 tires from Priority Area 1, an increase in military salvage resources, divers, and watercraft would be needed during 120-day project periods in each of the three years beginning in 2009. Given these additional assets, Priority Area 1 could be cleared in three years. Actual productivity could increase in future years and these projections can be revised accordingly.

The extent of the funding required for full abatement was estimated to be about \$3.4 million in state and county funds. The cost to abate the pile exceeded amounts in DEP's waste tire abatement contracts. Because of the need to save this resource, Governor Crist recommended and the Florida Legislature passed a \$2 million special appropriation in 2007 for DEP to complete its share of the project.

Using knowledge gained and lessons learned from the pilot project, the first full retrieval operation was successfully conducted in 2008. Divers worked 27 days with 16 dive days cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. An estimated 44,000 tires were removed over the course of the operation by approximately 66 military personnel, including boat drivers and LCU crew. When conditions were ideal (i.e. calm seas, no equipment failures), the divers were able to recover approximately 2,500 tires during a single day. This appears to be the maximum daily productivity that can be expected during the operation. The required time for the LCU to weigh anchors, return to Port Everglades, offload/reload trailers, and return to the dive site will prohibit more than one load (two trailers) being recovered in any given day.

At the end of each mission, an after-action meeting with all partners has been held to identify any concerns and make recommendations to enhance productivity for the next phase of operations. This spirit of cooperation, flexibility and willingness to adjust has characterized the partnership from the start.