



## CCA Florida habitat project redefines “nearshore reef”

*Unique project set for 60 feet off Grayton Beach*

*SANTA ROSA BEACH, FL – (9-13-13)* – One of the common traits of artificial marine reefs is the use of a boat of some kind will be required for anglers and divers to fully enjoy the opportunities they create. However, that won’t be the case with a unique reefing project being funded by the Coastal Conservation Association Florida and the CCA national marine habitat program that will be set close enough to South Walton’s beaches for snorkelers and anglers to access... right from the powder-white sand.

“This is going to be a beach-accessible reef and that is one of the main reasons we are so excited about it,” said Andy McAlexander. “There are no passes into the Gulf of Mexico in Walton County and the seafloor here is practically barren. Any structure attracts marine life. When we started talking about a habitat project in this area, we realized we have an opportunity to create a unique experience both for people and for sea life by making everything beach-accessible.”

Referred to as The Snorkel Reef by the CCA volunteers who founded SWARA (South Walton Artificial Reef Association), the 501(c)3 spearheading the project. The new reef will be built using fiberglass pylons with limestone plates bolted on to give barnacles, oysters and coral a place to attach and form the basis of a living reef. The reef will straddle the second sandbar and consist of 60 individual reef towers, all close enough for almost anyone to swim or paddle out and explore.

“Placing a reef this close to shore offers an attraction for the whole family, not just die-hard sportsmen,” said McAlexander. “There are all kinds of fish, as well as sea turtles and shellfish that cruise along the beach and will be attracted to these structures. It will be a chance for people, who may not otherwise have the opportunity, to see some of the amazing marine creatures that live and grow around reefs in the Gulf of Mexico.”

With the vision of SWARA almost parallel with CCA in the realm of habitat creation and awareness, The South Walton Chapter of CCA Florida has funded \$3,000 for the permitting of this project. The Building Conservation Trust, CCA’s national habitat program, which has garnered support from country music star Kenny Chesney and Costa Sunglasses among others, has provided an additional \$10,000 in funding.

“Our community loves to fish, but they also love to get people involved in conservation and raise awareness of our marine resources,” said McAlexander. “What better way to do that than by giving everyone a front row seat to a living reef?”