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DEP's new initiative will enhance artificial reef sites for anglers, divers

Seeking to improve New Jersey's artificial reefs and raise awareness of their economic and environmental value, the Department of Environmental Protection is deploying a decommissioned Navy tanker on the state's Garden State North Artificial Reef Site off the coast of Harvey Cedars.

New Jersey is a national leader in artificial reef management, and the DEP is committed to enhancing its reef sites to benefit the environment, fishermen, divers and the state's economy.

DEP is acquiring the tanker through a \$100,000 appropriation, which also will allow the state to acquire two other decommissioned ships. The state will deploy the other ships later this year. DEP is placing the three ships at different reefs along the entire Jersey coast so all residents can enjoy the benefits of these new acquisitions.

Built for the U.S. Navy in 1943, the 170-foot tanker, known as YO-153, had been stationed at Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. Before the tanker is deployed, DEP supervises a thorough cleaning of the vessel to remove all greases, floatables and other materials that might harm the marine environment. The U.S. Coast Guard then inspects the cleaned tanker before it is transported to the reef site.

The 1.1-square mile Garden State North Reef Site, approximately 6.5 miles offshore from Harvey Cedars in Ocean County, comprises more than 44,000 cubic yards of vessels, tanks, specially designed Reef Balls and other materials. In 2003, it was one of five artificial reefs where New Jersey deployed 250 decommissioned New York City subway cars.

The vessel is being sunk by cutting holes in the hull and opening the engine room sea cocks, which allows the ship to take on

water slowly. This vessel is the 134th ship to be sunk on New Jersey's artificial reef sites.

Artificial reefs play a key role in supporting New Jersey's marine fishing and diving industries, which contribute more than \$850 million to New Jersey's economy.

The DEP initiated its ocean reef building program in 1984, establishing over time a network of 14 reef sites from Sandy Hook to Cape May that encompass a total of 25 square miles of sea floor. The state has made more than 3,500 deployments of various reef materials - more than any other state in the country - including ships and barges, massive undersea ridges from six million tons of rock, and thousands of fabricated concrete reef units.

For more information on New Jersey's artificial reef program, visit the DEP's Web site at:

www.njfishandwildlife.com/artreef.htm.

