



DOUG OLANDER
EDITORIAL

STOP FEDERAL PLANS TO DESTROY CORAL REEFS!

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he U.S. Department of the Interior wants to blow up living coral reefs in the Gulf of Mexico.

That's not a joke — far from it.

A ruling issued by DOI requires oil companies to destroy and remove decommissioned oil platforms from the Gulf within five years.

Were those rigs today just as they had begun — huge towers of metal sunk deeply into the ocean floor — the DOI mandate would make some sense.

But they're not. Over the course of many years, these structures have become the complex inner skeletons of vibrant, living coral reefs. In addition, they now host entire diverse ecosystems, from plankton to apex predators.

And keep in mind these reefs thrive on an otherwise generally barren Gulf floor, adding particular importance to the Gulf's ecology.

It would be reasonable to assume that an agency concerned with the environment would celebrate such living reefs.

Yet, rather than crafting rules designed to preserve and protect our Gulf's coral reefs, DOI is busy enacting directives that will obliterate 650 of them.

Among those who have expressed concern are recreational-fishing and -diving groups, as well as a number of federal lawmakers. Of course, everyone *should* care, but it seems that many do not.

What truly astounds me is the deafening silence on the part of environmental organizations, who should be not indifferent but leading the charge to save these reefs. The most likely motivation for this apathy stems from the fact that oil companies own these structures, and it's a costly process to remove them (though it can also be expensive to cut them off well below the surface and then maintain them).

Removing each rig not only removes tons of living coral but also often leads to a sea covered with dead, floating fishes killed when rigs are severed by blasting.

Is it worth butchering the environment just to stick it to Big Oil? One would hate to think any true environmentalist could think that way. As of this writing, I'm still hopeful that green groups can be brought into this fight as our allies; that would up

the odds of success considerably.

One means to encourage enviros' involvement: Ensure that any legislation designed to save the rigs includes language specifying that whatever savings the oil companies might realize from not having to remove their rigs will be put toward Gulf restoration and preservation.

The Rigs to Reefs Habitat Protection Act introduced by Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) last



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session faces a long uphill battle. Meanwhile, other members of Congress are stepping up to address this vital issue. Rep. Steven Palazzo (R-Miss.) has introduced a House version nearly identical to Vitter's and, at press time, Jeff Landry (R-La.) was working on another version of a rigs-to-reefs bill.

Those offer hope, but passage of such legislation won't be easy. We can — and must — help. At this point, your best option for action to rescue the reefs from the DOI rule can be found at joincca.org; see "Rigs to Reefs."

Please take action now: With merely a mouse click, you can ask your legislators to stop the madness.

To lose these living reefs would be a shame; to order them destroyed borders on criminal; to let it happen is unthinkable.



Renowned artist Guy Harvey has teamed up with AFTCO to raise awareness with a limited-edition rigs-to-reefs T-shirt design; a portion of profits are earmarked for CCA's fight to save the Gulf reefs. To order, visit guyharveysportswear.com.