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Board of County Commissioners

August 4, 2025



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FORT
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Okaloosa County Makes Progress Toward Deployment of World's Largest Artificial Reef

Mobile, Alabama - Progress continues to be made on the World's Largest Artificial Reef, the SS United States. Crews in Mobile, Alabama, removed the massive 65-foot forward smoke stack from the vessel on Monday. The stack will be preserved in a secure location for future use in the SS United States Conservancy's land-based museum. The aft funnel is expected to be removed soon after the forward funnel.

The 990-foot SS United States was purchased by Okaloosa County in 2024 with the goal of creating expanded marine habitat in the northern Gulf while enhancing the fishing and diving industry. The SS United States will join more than a dozen large vessels that have already been deployed in the Gulf by the Natural Resources Team at Destin-Fort Walton Beach. It will magnify the already thriving tourism industry in Destin-Fort Walton Beach that contributes more than \$2 billion to the local and regional economy.

"This is a massive next step toward an environmental effort that will benefit our local marine habitat and build upon our robust tourism industry in Destin-Fort Walton Beach," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. "I applaud the efforts of our contractor, Coleen Marine and the Natural Resources Team at Destin-Fort Walton Beach for their work in preserving this ship's history as the World's Largest Artificial reef."

The SS United States will be deployed in late 2025, about 20 nautical miles south of Destin-Fort Walton Beach at a depth of 180 feet to the bottom and about 55 feet to the upper deck. It will satisfy the diving aspirations of both beginners and technical divers. An exact location for the deployment has not been finalized.

- Learn more about the World's Largest Artificial Reef at <https://myokaloosa.com/SSUSFAQs>
- View an interactive map of the existing artificial reefs in Destin-Fort Walton Beach at <https://www.destinfwb.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs/>
- Learn more about the SS United States Conservancy and the ship's history at <https://www.ssusc.org/>

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER NICK TOMECEK AT 850.651.7321

NTOMECEK@MYOKALOOSA.COM