DESTIN-FORT WALTON BEACH MAKES HISTORY AS THE SS UNITED STATES BECOMES THE WORLD'S LARGEST ARTIFICIAL REEF

America's Flagship finds new life beneath the Gulf, inviting explorers from around the world to discover her legacy

VIEW PHOTO/VIDEO ASSETS FROM THE DEPLOYMENT

OKALOOSA COUNTY, Florida (Nov. 12, 2026) – A new chapter has begun in Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida, where the legendary SS *United States*, once the fastest ocean liner in the world, has completed her final voyage to become the World's Largest Artificial Reef. Now resting approximately 22 nautical miles off the coast, the underwater site invites divers from around the world to explore a piece of history while creating a thriving new habitat for marine life. Hundreds of spectators watched from nearby boats as intake valves were opened, allowing Gulf waters to fill the ship and gradually submerge the vessel at its new home beneath the surface.

For Destin-Fort Walton Beach, the milestone represents far more than the completion of an ambitious project. It introduces a one-of-a-kind attraction to the destination's already extensive artificial reef system. The historic deployment marked the culmination of years of planning and collaboration to safely give the iconic vessel a second life.

"This sets Okaloosa County apart as a leader in the tourism industry worldwide and we could not be happier to see this project come to fruition," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. "The story and history of this vessel is also remarkable. She will be visited by tens of thousands of people each year, who will learn about the memories she created over the years for her passengers. The SS *United States* now rests off the shores of Destin-Fort Walton Beach as the largest artificial reef in the world. And I can think of no more fitting day for her final voyage. On Veterans Day 2026, we honor those who defended the nation whose name she bears, and we lay the SS *United States* to rest."

Resting at a depth of approximately 180 feet, with the uppermost deck accessible to divers at approximately 60 feet, the SS *United States* offers a new underwater experience for recreational and technical divers alike. **Located at 30° 07.148' N, 86° 46.755' W**, the vessel joins more than 580 artificial reef sites throughout Destin-Fort Walton Beach, further establishing the destination as a premier dive destination in the nation.

Early sonar and Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) inspections have indicated that SS *United States* is sitting upright on the bottom of the Gulf. The safety zone has been lifted, and divers can now enjoy the site.

"The successful deployment of the SS *United States* is a significant achievement, and I couldn't be prouder of the team," said Jennifer Adams, Tourism Director. "To see a vessel of this size come to rest upright, within feet of its intended location, is a great testament to the expertise and collaboration of everyone who helped bring this ambitious vision to life. America's Flagship has found a new home, and we can't wait to share this next chapter of her remarkable story with the world."

Beyond its appeal as a dive destination, the SS *United States* will serve an important environmental purpose. Her massive structure will provide new habitat for marine life, supporting the growth of an underwater ecosystem that includes inhabitants such as sea turtles, grouper, snapper, marlin, mahi mahi, tuna and an abundance of other species.

The deployment also creates new opportunities for scientific discovery. Partnerships with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Dauphin Island Sea Lab and Louisiana State University will result in biological, physical and chemical monitoring of the vessel, providing insight into how large-scale artificial reefs develop and support marine ecosystems over time.

"To see a project of this magnitude become a reality is an incredible moment for our team and for the future of marine conservation," said Alex Fogg, Natural Resources Chief for Destin-Fort Walton Beach. "This is so much more than creating a new dive destination. It's an opportunity to advance marine science on a scale we've never experienced before. The sheer scale of the SS *United States* presents a rare opportunity to study how an artificial reef of this size transforms over time."

The historic ocean liner will also be celebrated in the future SS *United States* Museum and Visitor Experience, being developed in partnership with the SS United States Conservancy.

"As the SS *United States* embarks on a new mission at sea, the future museum will showcase the iconic ocean liner's extraordinary history. Her legacy will live on," said Susan Gibbs, Conservancy Board Chair.

The SS *United States* artificial reef project was fully funded through tourism revenue and contributions from project partners.

More Information:

- Discover the history of the SS United States: https://www.ssusc.org/
- Explore 3D models of Destin-Fort Walton Beach's artificial reefs: https://www.destinfwb.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs/3d-models/
- Learn about the ship's environmental remediation: https://www.destinfwb.com/explore/eco-tourism/ssus/ssus-remediation-updates/