

**FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE**

Board of County Commissioners

November 18, 2025



**DESTIN
FORT
WALTON
BEACH
FLORIDA**

Pensacola
FLORIDA



**Okaloosa County Moves Toward Historic Regional Partnership in SS United States
Artificial Reef Project.**

Once deployed, the SS United States will become the World's Largest Artificial Reef.

Okaloosa County, Florida – [Destin-Fort Walton Beach](#) and Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners are proud to announce a regional collaboration between [Visit Pensacola](#) and Coastal Conservation Association Florida ([CCA](#)), to promote the deployment and long-term tourism and environmental benefits associated with the SS United States as the World's Largest Artificial Reef.

Okaloosa County Commissioners unanimously voted to approve agreements with Visit Pensacola and CCA as partners in the SS United States artificial reef project that will bring a \$1.5 million contribution from Visit Pensacola and a \$500,000 contribution from CCA. Visit Pensacola is scheduled to review and approve the agreement at their December 2025 meeting.

"I applaud the energy that went into creating these partnerships," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. "This collaboration will foster amazing adventures for generations of visitors and create a tourism economy that will benefit the state and the entire Northwest Florida region."

The contributions will be used for the deployment of the SS United States as an artificial reef with a portion being used for a multi-year marketing campaign to promote the SS United States as a worldwide premier diving destination.

"Visit Pensacola is thrilled to partner with Okaloosa County on this historic initiative. With the addition of the SS United States and Pensacola already home to the USS Oriskany, Northwest Florida is becoming one of the world's most extraordinary destinations for divers and marine exploration," said Visit Pensacola President and CEO, Darien Schaefer.

"The transformation of the SS United States into the world's largest artificial reef creates a rare opportunity to elevate our entire region on the global stage. Together, we're bringing unmatched environmental value to the Gulf while creating new tourism and economic opportunities that will benefit our destinations for generations. This collaboration showcases what's possible when our region works together with vision, purpose and a shared commitment for sustainable growth."

"CCA Florida is proud to once again partner with Okaloosa County, building on our long-standing collaboration on artificial reef projects and redfish stock enhancement," said CCA Florida Executive Director Brian Gorski. "This partnership demonstrates how coordinated efforts between public agencies and nonprofit organizations can effectively serve our communities while advancing the health and resilience of our marine ecosystems. This project is particularly meaningful, as it represents the largest single donation in CCA Florida's 40-year history. It is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to contribute to the creation of the world's largest artificial reef."

The creation of this reef will provide essential habitat, benefit marine life, and foster a sense of stewardship while generating substantial tourism and economic benefits for Northwest Florida.

The SS United States is currently docked in Mobile, Alabama and is in the inspection phase following months of necessary remediation for an environmentally safe deployment. She is scheduled to be deployed in early 2026 in the Gulf about 22 nautical miles southwest of the Destin East Pass and 32 nautical miles southeast of the Pensacola Pass.

About Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida

www.destinfwb.com

Captivating sugar-white sand beaches and emerald-green waters await in Destin-Fort Walton Beach. Located in Northwest Florida, the destination is not only an ideal place to unwind and experience total relaxation along a 20-mile stretch of beach, but to uncover the adventurous side within. The family-friendly locale offers an environment of discovery to play and explore, inviting kids to get on the water and give their adventurous side room to grow. Visitors enjoy pristine beaches, Gulf-to-Table seafood, abundant watersport activities, championship golf, lively nightlife, and numerous attractions, festivals and events designed to thrill all ages.

About Visit Pensacola-[Visit Pensacola](#) is the official destination marketing organization for Escambia County which includes Pensacola, Pensacola Beach and Perdido Key. With over 460 years of rich history and nearly 40 miles of sugar-white sand beaches bordered by the emerald-green waters of the Gulf, visitors from all over the world are lured to our pristine shores every year. Visit Pensacola supports the community vision of tourism by serving as the central body responsible for building tourism as an economic engine for our community through leadership, connection, collaboration and communication.

About CCA Florida -The Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) was founded in 1977 after drastic commercial overfishing along the Texas coast decimated redfish and speckled trout populations. One of 19 state chapters, CCA Florida became the fifth state chapter in 1985. A 501(c)3 non-profit, the purpose of CCA is to advise and educate the public on the conservation of marine resources. Through habitat restoration projects, water quality initiatives and fisheries advocacy, CCA Florida works with its over 18,000 members including recreational anglers and outdoor enthusiasts to conserve and enhance marine resources and coastal environments. Join the conversation on Facebook or learn more at ccaflorida.org.

About the SS United States- The SS UNITED STATES is a 990-foot-long iconic American ocean liner with a distinguished maritime history, including holding the Blue Riband for the fastest transatlantic crossing by an ocean liner-a record it still maintains today. Since 2022, County staff have been monitoring the status of this vessel, and in October 2024, the County entered into a purchase and sale agreement with the SS United States Conservancy and a remediation and deployment contract with Coleen Marine, Inc. View more history information about the SS United States at <https://www.ssusc.org/>

###

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

NTOMECEK@MYOKALOOSA.COM