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***Commission Hosts Ribbon Cutting for
Navarre Beach Marine Sanctuary Reefing Projects***

The public is invited to attend a ribbon cutting to celebrate the opening of two of three Navarre Beach Marine Sanctuary snorkeling reef projects on Tuesday, May 22 at 11:30 a.m. at the Sandpiper Pavilion located sound side in Navarre Beach Park. The installation of the two Navarre Beach Park sound side tiered reef modules, also known as Walter Eco-System Reef Modules, began May 15 and is expected to take four days to complete.

The project includes three near shore reefs all located in Navarre Beach Park, two sound side and one gulf side. The western sound side reef will be located approximately 413 feet northeast of the area known as Mom's Beach in Navarre Beach Park, just east of the Navarre Beach Bridge. The eastern sound side reef will be located an estimated 197 feet from shore, near the Black Skimmer Pavilion. Deployment of the gulf side reef, located approximately 350 feet from shore will begin as soon as seas permit and is expected to take two days. A map of deployment sites can be found online at <http://www.navarrebeachmarinesanctuary.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/locationalgraphic-aerial1.pdf>. See www.santarosa.fl.gov/parks/maps/navarrebeachpark.pdf for a map of Navarre Beach Pavilions.

The reefs are the result of the Navarre community working together since 1999. The Navarre Beach Marine Sanctuary Committee, a committee of the Navarre Beach Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Inc., was formed to administer the project. Hundreds of people and businesses have been involved over the years by volunteering for events, attending meetings, writing grants, designing brochures and advertising, sponsoring events, and fundraising. The community raised over \$25,000 to fund the project with the Santa Rosa Board of County Commissioners approving the contribution of \$149,160 in district four recreation funds and \$100,000 in Santa Rosa County Tourist Development Council funds.

All three reef modules will be attached to pilings driven into the gulf or sound floor. The gulf side reef system will consist of 30 individual reef structures totaling 22,550 square feet. This Eco-System reef will measure 275 feet (north/south) by 82 feet (east/west) and will be located at approximately 30 degrees 23 minutes north latitude, 86 degrees 51 minutes west longitude. The sound side Eco-System reef structure will consist of 105 individual reefs, with the west reef located approximately at 30 degrees 23 minutes north latitude, 86 degrees 52 minutes west longitude and the east reef located at approximately 30 degrees 23 minutes north latitude, 86 degrees 51 minutes west longitude. Both the gulf and sound side reef systems will be covered by about 6 feet of water. For diver safety, both sound side areas will be clearly marked with the internationally recognized dive markers while the gulf side reefs will be marked from shore. These areas will be off limits to watercraft.

The reefs are expected to impact the community on several levels. Economically, as a recreation and eco-tourism site the reefs are expected to bring a minimum 25 percent increase in tourism dollars. John Dodrill of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has said the near-shore reefs in the Florida Panhandle would have an overall economic impact of \$138 for every dollar spent. Educational benefits include providing a convenient study area for the Marine Science Station at the park, increased opportunities for reef studies by area educational institutions, and educational information for park visitors. Environmentally, the reefs will help provide cleaner water, increased biodiversity, and the creation of 124,480 square feet of new marine habitat.

The Navarre Beach marine Sanctuary is offering the opportunity to adopt a tree or a single branch of the reefing sites to fund on-going maintenance of the three reefing systems. Your donation includes a certificate suitable for framing or as a gift and beach signage with your name or message noting the exact branch or tree adopted. For more information on how to adopt a branch or tree, visit www.navarrebeachmarinesanctuary.com and click on “adopt a reef.”

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