

Artificial reefs installed in Condado Lagoon

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The San Juan Bay Estuary Program has placed some 230 cement structures in the waters of the Condado Lagoon and Escambrón Beach to anchor the development of new coral reefs and to attract local and visiting snorkelers and divers.

"This is an innovative project for the restoration of marine wildlife in the channels, lagoons and the estu-

ary of the San Juan Bay," estuary program director Javier Laureano said.

The San Juan Bay Estuary is the system of rivers, channels, lagoons, wetlands and coast that sprawls throughout the metro area.

It was added to an Environmental Protection Agency national estuary protection and conservation program in the 1990s.

Laureano said after 30 artificial reef structures were placed in the Condado Lagoon the amount of endemic marine species there increased by 90 percent.

He said it became "an underwater city."

The structures set off Escambrón, each weighing some 800 pounds, were arranged so they form an underwater pathway that connects with the lagoon.

Live corals will be transplanted to the artificial reefs to speed up colonization.

"The purpose of this initiative is to interconnect the reefs with the sea-grass fields to restore the habitat for several species of fish, urchins, coral and other marine life," Laureano said.

Reefs create life

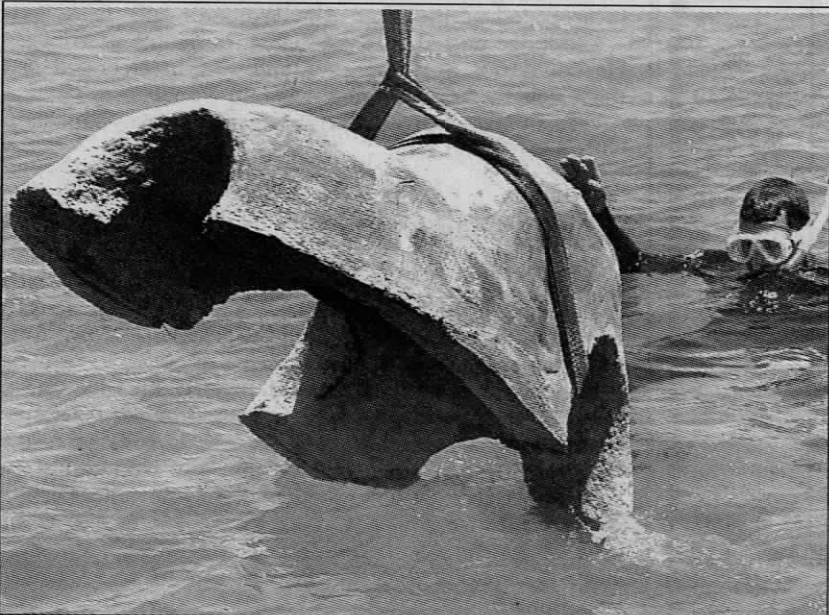
"For decades," Jorge Bauzá, an environmental scientist with the estuary program said.

"Our coral communities have been affected by pollution, climatic changes and over-exploitation," said Bauzá.

"By creating these reefs we are restoring and improving these fragile ecosystems," he said. "These structures will increase biodiversity, giving back to our waters part of its original richness, beauty and splendor."

Laureano said the effort will increase interest in Puerto Rico's marine ecosystem as a tourism attraction, particularly for those staying at Condado and Isla Verde hotels.

"Some of our Caribbean neighbors have already developed these kinds of underwater corridors and gardens with great success. Now we will be able to benefit from a low-impact environmental activity in a densely populated area," he said.



Daily Sun/Miguel Ríos

Members of the San Juan Bay Estuary Program on Thursday place some 230 cement structures in the Condado Lagoon and the Escambrón beach to foster the development of new coral reefs.