HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To:	Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources Republican Members
From:	Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources Staff: Rob MacGregor (Robert.Macgregor@mail.house.gov), Jacob Greenberg (Jacob.Greenberg@mail.house.gov), and Sam Harvey (Sam.Harvey@mail.house.gov); x5-9297
Date:	Monday, January 12, 2026
Subject:	Legislative Hearing on H.R. 5745

The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will hold a legislative hearing on H.R. 5745 (Rep. Ezell), *"Marine Fisheries Habitat Protection Act,"* on **Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at 10:15 a.m.** in room 1324 Longworth House Office Building.

Member offices are requested to notify Kenna Cline (Kenna.Cline@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, January 12, 2026, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- Marine scientists and anglers have long championed the significant benefits that oil and gas infrastructure has conferred on fisheries' habitat.
- H.R. 5745 embraces the role that this infrastructure has played in attracting and creating abundant fisheries habitat, particularly in the Gulf of America.
- The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) currently oversees the Rigs to Reefs initiative, which allows states to accept liability for energy operators who would like to reef their infrastructure once it is no longer needed.
- H.R. 5745 codifies and builds upon the existing program, which is found in federal regulations, to clarify the process for operators to reef energy infrastructure in place.
- This bill creates key procedural timelines and recognizes essential state authority currently not found in statute. Through its enactment, H.R. 5745 will help protect the marine environment, provide greater certainty for the private sector and the regulated community, and enhance the angling experience.

II. WITNESSES

Panel I (Members of Congress)

- ***To Be Announced***

Panel II (Administration Witnesses)

- **Mr. Bryan Domangue**, Gulf of America Regional Director, Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, New Orleans, LA

Panel III (Outside Experts)

- **Mr. Chris Horton**, Senior Director, Fisheries Policy, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Washington, D.C.
- **Dr. Greg Stunz**, Senior Executive Director, Harte Research Institute, Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi, TX
- **Mr. Ryan Montegut**, Assistant Secretary of Fisheries, Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries, Baton Rouge, LA
- **Ms. Megan Biven**, Founder, True Transition, Carmel, IN *(Minority Witness)*

III. BACKGROUND

H.R. 5745 (Rep. Ezell), *"Marine Fisheries Habitat Protection Act"*

The Gulf States' Fishing and Energy Economies

For the five states along its coast, the Gulf of America plays a vital role in fishing, recreational activity, and energy production. Using 2022 data, the American Sportfishing Association (ASA) found that anglers in Mississippi contributed $1.0 billion in economic output to the state and supported nearly 8,000 jobs.[1] Overall, approximately 320,000 anglers spent roughly $917 million in Mississippi.[2] ASA also reported that in Louisiana, anglers contributed $3.7 billion in economic output in 2022, with an estimated 736,070 anglers having spent over $3 billion while fishing.[3] Louisiana is also a leader in oil and gas production, particularly offshore in the Gulf of America. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), as of August 21, 2025, Louisiana ranks third in marketed natural gas production in the United States (U.S.),[4] while Texas was the highest in crude oil and natural gas production.[5] ASA found that nearly 2 million anglers in Texas contributed $14 billion in economic output in 2022.[6] According to ASA, in 2022, 466,240 anglers in Alabama produced $2.1 billion in economic output,[7] and 5,065,070 anglers in Florida produced $11.1 billion in economic output.[8] Although the Gulf Coast region's fishing and oil and gas industries may at first seem to operate independently, smart policy can help make them mutually beneficial.

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[1] "Economic Contributions of Recreational Fishing: Mississippi," American Sportfishing Association, https://asafishing.org/state-reports/economic-impacts-of-recreational-fishing-mississippi/.
[2] *Id.*
[3] "Economic Contributions of Recreational Fishing: Louisiana," American Sportfishing Association, https://asafishing.org/state-reports/economic-impacts-of-recreational-fishing-louisiana/.
[4] Louisiana State Energy Profile, U.S. Energy Information Administration, https://www.eia.gov/beta/states/states/la/overview.
[5] Texas State Energy Profile, U.S. Energy Information Administration, https://www.eia.gov/beta/states/states/tx/overview.
[6] "Economic Contributions of Recreational Fishing: Texas," American Sportfishing Association, https://asafishing.org/state-reports/economic-impacts-of-recreational-fishing-texas/.
[7] "Economic Contributions of Recreational Fishing: Alabama," American Sportfishing Association, https://asafishing.org/state-reports/economic-impacts-of-recreational-fishing-alabama/.
[8] "Economic Contributions of Recreational Fishing: Florida," American Sportfishing Association, https://asafishing.org/state-reports/economic-impacts-of-recreational-fishing-florida/.

Rigs to Reefs Initiative

An artificial reef. **Source:** Joe Platko, New York Times.

In 1984, Congress signed the National Fishing Enhancement Act[9] in response to increased interest and participation in fishing at offshore oil and gas platforms and "widespread support for effective artificial reef development by coastal states."[10] The Act recognized the social and economic value in developing artificial reefs, established national standards for artificial reef development, provided for the creation of a National Artificial Reef Plan, and created a reef-permitting system.[11] The Rigs to Reefs initiative,[12] born out of this legislation, bridges the gap between artificial structures and the natural marine environment, transforming decommissioned offshore rigs into thriving ecosystems that support a vast array of marine life. In carrying out the initiative, BSEE "focuses on coordinating and facilitating the conversion of appropriately decommissioned oil and gas platforms from operators to a designated state artificial reef program."[13]

For decades, marine scientists and anglers have witnessed this infrastructure catalyze the development of fisheries habitat.[14] The diverse and abundant fish species found near platforms include popular fishing species like red snapper, Spanish mackerel, grouper, and red drum.[15] Recognizing the valuable new habitat these structures create, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has found that their removal could have "significant adverse impacts" on surrounding fisheries.[16]

Soon after an offshore rig is constructed, marine life begins to collect on the stationary rig jacket. Within a few short months, the underwater structure hosts a vibrant community including invertebrates, fish, sea turtles, and mammals.[17] As the average life cycle of an offshore rig in the Gulf of America spans several decades, these structures become integral to the offshore ecosystem. Both oil and gas operators and coastal fishing communities have long been aware of the bountiful marine ecosystem living on and around these rigs and have strongly supported the program.

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[9] Public Law 98-623, Title II.
[10] "Rigs to Reefs Program Fact Sheet," U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, March 2022, https://www.bsee.gov/sites/bsee.gov/files/rigs-to-reefs-program-fact-sheet.pdf.
[11] *Id.*
[12] Rigs to Reefs Directive Supplemental Data Sheet, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, November 21, 2019, www.bsee.gov/sites/bsee.gov/files/rigs-to-reefs-program-policy.pdf.
[13] "Rigs to Reefs Program Fact Sheet," U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, March 2022, https://www.bsee.gov/sites/bsee.gov/files/rigs-to-reefs-program-fact-sheet.pdf.
[14] "Rigs-To-Reefs: The Opportunity to Save Exceptional Marine Habitat," Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, https://congressionalsportsmen.org/page/rigs-to-reefs/.
[15] "Explosive Removal of Structures: Fisheries Impacts Assessment," U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, June 2020, https://espis.boem.gov/final%20reports/BOEM_2020-038.pdf.
[16] *Id.*
[17] Avery B. Paxton, et al., "Convergence of Fish Community Structure Between Newly Deployed and Established Artificial Reef Along a Five-Month Trajectory," NOAA Institutional Repository, 2018, https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/50796.

Permitting Process

The Rigs to Reefs initiative enhances collaboration between federal and state entities. BSEE, in consultation with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Environmental Protection Agency, currently oversees the program at the federal level, ensuring its compliance with environmental and safety standards.[18] BSEE is responsible for enforcing regulations for offshore oil and gas operations and the eventual removal of temporary facilities on the Federal Outer Continental Shelf (OCS).[19] When an OCS oil and gas lease expires or development and production operations cease, companies are obligated to decommission and remove their facilities[20] and clear the seabed of all obstructions.[21] Federal regulations allow BSEE to depart from the standard decommissioning and removal requirements if: (1) a state accepts liability for the structure under a state artificial reef program, and (2) the Army Corps permits the structure to be reefed.[22]

While each of the five Gulf of America coastal states has a distinct artificial reef plan, a common pattern prevails. When a rig in federal water is set to be decommissioned, its operator may contact the state with jurisdiction—typically the state closest to the platform—to begin the reefing approval process. In response, the state appoints a coordinator to assist in identifying whether the structure is suitable for reefing, which involves a site evaluation and cost negotiations. If the state elects to reef the structure, the coordinator collaborates with the rig operator to develop a reefing proposal. If the platform is not located in a federally approved reef planning area, the platform either must be towed to such an area or a new permit must be obtained from the Army Corps to reef the structure in place. The Army Corps permit process includes consultations and assessments with the USCG to ensure navigational safety.[23]

Once the Army Corps grants a permit, the operator negotiates the terms of its donation to the state.[24] Decommissioning a platform includes dismantling, towing back to shore, and scrapping the structure. This process is very expensive. By comparison, reefing in place is much more cost-effective, and a portion of those savings is earmarked for conservation. In exchange for accepting liability and managing the reefing program, operators typically donate 50 percent of the cost savings derived from reefing their structure to the state taking on the liability.[25] Most often—as is the case in Louisiana—these donations go towards funding the state's artificial reef programs and recreational fisheries management.[26]

In addition to their state-level negotiations, operators submit a reefing proposal to BSEE in collaboration with their assigned state coordinator. After the state receives the Army Corps

[18] Rigs to Reefs Directive Supplemental Data Sheet, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, November 21, 2019, www.bsee.gov/sites/bsee.gov/files/rigs-to-reefs-program-policy.pdf.
[19] 30 CFR § 250.1700.
[20] 30 CFR § 250.1725(a).
[21] 30 CFR § 250.1740.
[22] 30 CFR § 250.1730.
[23] 33 CFR § 322.
[24] "Rigs-to-Reefs," U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, https://www.bsee.gov/what-we-do/environmental-compliance/environmental-programs/rigs-to-reefs.
[25] *Id.*
[26] "Artificial Reefs," Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/artificial-reefs.

permit, state and operator negotiations reach an agreement, and the proposal meets BSEE requirements, BSEE can grant the operator approval to convert the structure into an artificial reef.[27] Once approval is granted, the operator may convert the structure to a permanent artificial reef, and the title, along with liability for the structure, is transferred from the operator to the state.

The Gulf states' streamlined and predictable reefing process has led to the reefing of over 600 platforms in the Gulf.[28] This stands in stark contrast to other regulatory frameworks, such as those in California, which have resulted in zero reefed platforms.[29] This difference is due largely to California's prohibition on assuming liability for the reefed structure and extensive and unnecessary environmental reviews that go beyond anything the federal government requires.[30] Of the 23 platforms in federal waters off California's coast, none are expected to be converted into an artificial reef.[31] States with burdensome regulatory landscapes, like California's, hamper efforts to invest in critical marine habitats.

The collaborative and reliable nature of the artificial reef programs across the Gulf of America is an example of how private industry, states, and the federal government can work together to symbiotically promote marine habitat in America's waters.

Legislation

Introduced by Representative Mike Ezell (R-MS-04), H.R. 5745 capitalizes on the habitat benefits offshore rigs provide to the marine ecosystem by encouraging more active participation in the Rigs to Reef initiative. Unlike its predecessor legislation in the 118th Congress, H.R. 5745 does not make NOAA the lead agency for carrying out the initiative. Since BSEE is responsible for decommissioning offshore energy infrastructure, the agency's continued authority over the reefing process will ensure all safety protocols are followed. Under the bill, NOAA will continue to focus on the fisheries aspect of the program and provide consultation when appropriate.

H.R. 5745 also provides a more streamlined process that allows owners and operators to reef in place inactive offshore energy infrastructure within three years, provided certain conditions are met. Those conditions are: documenting the presence of an established reef ecosystem; owner, lessee, or right-of-way holder removing all hydrocarbons; safely plugging and abandoning all wells associated with the structure; taking the necessary steps to aid navigation; and a state assuming title and liability once the reefing activity is complete. Although the legislation generally prohibits the Secretary of the Interior from requiring the removal of a structure during the reefing process, the structure may be removed if it becomes a threat to the environment or navigation.

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[27] 30 CFR § 250.1730.
[28] *See* "Rigs-to-Reefs," U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, https://www.bsee.gov/what-we-do/environmental-compliance/environmental-programs/rigs-to-reefs.
[29] "Rigs-To-Reefs: The Opportunity to Save Exceptional Marine Habitat," Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, https://congressionalsportsmen.org/page/rigs-to-reefs/.
[30] *Id.*
[31] "Oil & Gas," California State Lands Commission, https://www.slc.ca.gov/oil-gas/.

Since the passage of the National Fishing Enhancement Act, states' ability to assume liability for rigs in federal waters is only found in federal regulations. H.R. 5745 codifies that authority in statute, providing increased certainty for states, industry, and sportsmen. Additionally, the legislation caps payments associated with the transfer of liability from operator to state at 50 percent of the cost savings from reefing a platform, unless otherwise agreed to by the operator.[32]

Fundamentally, this legislation is guided by a science-based understanding of the significant potential of offshore energy infrastructure to create new habitat and support abundant marine life. Accordingly, the bill directs BSEE, in consultation with NOAA, to conduct "an assessment of each Inactive Structure,"[33] including its corals and fish species and the economic impact of reefing the structure in place. Within 60 days of completing such assessment, BSEE would have to make a determination that the Inactive Structure is an Eligible Structure if "there is an established reef ecosystem on, under, or in the immediate vicinity of the Inactive Structure."[34] After an Eligible Structure determination, BSEE would have 90 days to designate the footprint of the structure as a Reef Planning Area.[35] Applicants would have three years following the Eligible Structure determination to officially reef the structure so long as certain criteria are met.[36]The legislation allows for BSEE to enter into agreements with owners and operators of this infrastructure for these assessments to be conducted by third parties, including states. The legislation also requires BSEE to provide the Secretary of the Interior, the House Committee on Natural Resources, and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources with "a report summarizing all actions taken in relation to an Inactive Structure" under the bill in the preceding 12 months.[37]

H.R. 5745 is a bipartisan bill that bolsters the Gulf of America's fishing and oil and gas sectors. By allowing offshore energy infrastructure—and the valuable fish habitat it creates—to remain intact and in the water, the legislation supports conservation and industry alike. The bill's improvements to the Rigs to Reefs initiative provide access to abundant fish habitat for anglers and allow oil and gas operators to decommission their rigs without damaging critical fish habitats and ecosystems.

IV. MAJOR PROVISIONS & ANALYSIS

H.R. 5745 (Rep. Ezell), *"Marine Fisheries Habitat Protection Act"*

Section 2: Use of certain offshore oil and gas platforms and pipelines for artificial reefs.

- Creates a formal reef in place process that encourages inactive offshore oil and gas platforms and pipelines to be converted into artificial reefs instead of being fully removed or towed.

[32] H.R. 5745, 119th Congress, https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/5745/text?s=2&r=1.
[33] *Id.*
[34] *Id.*
[35] *Id.*
[36] *Id.*
[37] *Id.*

- Establishes clear timelines and procedures, ensuring streamlined and reliable permitting processes.
- Allows BSEE, in coordination with relevant state agencies, to designate Reef Planning Areas.
- Directs BSEE to provide Congress, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, and the Administrator of NOAA with a map of each idle structure supporting an established reef ecosystem, as well as an annual report detailing reefing application metrics and outcomes.

V. COST

The Congressional Budget Office has not provided a cost estimate for this bill.

VI. ADMINISTRATION POSITION

The Trump administration's position on this bill is unknown at this time.

VII. EFFECT ON CURRENT LAW (RAMSEYER)

H.R. 5745