

# Restoration projects bring fish

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Posted on Thu, Jun. 01, 2006

OUTDOORS

**P**sst, beach divers and snorkelers . . . Lauderdale-By-The-Sea is *not* the only game in town anymore. You might want to direct your fins south to Hollywood's North Beach Park or Hallandale Beach's public swimming beach.

Nearly three years ago, in advance of Broward County's recently completed beach renourishment, county workers deployed more than 10 acres of limestone boulders on the sandy bottom about 700 feet offshore among six south Broward sites. The boulder fields, 15 to 20 feet deep, were put down as mitigation for nearshore hard bottom anticipated to be covered up by pumping sand onto eroding beaches.

I haven't checked out the Hallandale sites yet, but a couple of weeks ago, my neighbor, Patti Hanley, and I dived on one of the boulder piles off North Beach Park. What a pleasant surprise!

We donned scuba gear and got into the water at Meade Street, swimming northeast toward one of the 12 mooring buoys that workers installed to mark the sites and allow boats to tie up.



**ROCKY TERRAIN:** Three years ago, Broward County workers deployed more than 10 acres of boulders among six sites in the county. Now, fish regularly visit Hollywood's North Beach Park.

CHRISTIE BARRETT / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

## BETTER VIEW

The swim out was pretty boring, but improved dramatically when we reached the first boulder pile. Dropping to the bottom, we swam slowly north over and around the giant rocks, admiring numerous tropicals such as surgeonfish, parrotfish, angelfish, snappers and grunts that chased each other through the crevice highways snaking among the monoliths.

Most of the boulders we saw were bare, but here and there were sprinkled a few colorful soft and hard coral and sponge decorations.

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Before the beach renourishment began, county marine resources program manager Ken Banks and colleagues collected about 600 corals from the hard bottom they expected would be impacted and transplanted them to the North Beach boulders.

"They're doing very well," Banks reported. "Their survival is close to 100 percent."

Glancing up from the rocks, we passed a school of lively jack crevalles circling near the surface and watched a very large tarpon watching the jacks. The tarpon, which I estimated at 75 pounds, let Hanley and me get to within about six feet, and then peeled off for more solitary waters.

County contractor Coastal Planning and Engineering of Boca Raton and scientists from Nova Southeastern University Oceanographic Center have been conducting fish counts comparing abundance and number of species frequenting the boulders with those inhabiting the natural hard bottom.

Nova professor Richard Spieler says the two are pretty close.

"Is [the boulder field] replacing hard bottom?" Spieler said. "It's not exactly replacing it because you get a different group of fish."

One animal we didn't spot was the spiny lobster. Hanley and I theorized that perhaps the helter-skelter arrangement of rocks failed to provide the narrow, secret-passageway-type safe rooms that lobsters find in hard bottom solution holes. But Banks said previous divers on the site have told of finding (and catching) lobsters on the eastern edge of the boulder fields.

As with most reefs (and fine wines), the boulder fields will improve with age, attracting more and richer marine growth and fish species. In the meantime, paying them a visit is a lot more interesting than simply lounging on the beach.