From 1986 to 1989, artificial reefs were constructed in Lake Erie near Lorain and Lakewood, Ohio, by the Ohio Sea Grant College Program. These reefs were designed to attract and concentrate fish for anglers within safe distance to ports of shelter and access.

Both artificial reefs are located in water that is 28 feet deep and rise to within 15 feet of the surface. To take full advantage of angling the artificial reef structures, use an electronic fish or bottom locator.

The reefs are normally marked, in the middle of the reef only, with an 1147-R regulatory marker buoy. Marker buoys are generally placed in May and removed in October. These buoys are orange and white with “ART REEF” printed at the top. Once located, use your electronic fish or bottom locator to search for additional reef structures to the east and west of the marker buoys. Both reefs run parallel to shore in an east-west direction, but curve or “snake” along the bottom. Piles of concrete, rock, and brick rubble will rise from 6 to 15 feet above the bottom, and will be easy to find on the depth finder. (NOTE: Ohio Sea Grant is not responsible for marking the reefs. Private organizations are being sought to continue this annual effort. Marker buoys may not always be placed.)
Angling opportunity

Sea Grant research revealed that the smallmouth bass was the most abundant sportfish observed on both the Lorain and Lakewood artificial reefs. While the reefs concentrate high numbers of smallmouth bass throughout the year, research indicates significantly larger numbers of bass present in the spring and fall. This suggests seasonal patterns of preference for artificial structure. When fishing for smallmouth, concentrate your efforts directly on the reef structures.

Walleye and yellow perch can also be caught at both reef sites. Some fish, such as walleye and yellow perch, will move on and off the reef in search of forage. Be sure to fish on the reef and in the immediate area when angling for these species.

During an economic evaluation study of the Lorain artificial reef conducted in 1992, anglers were asked about what fish they pursued. The most sought after, caught, and kept species on the artificial reef was the walleye, followed by yellow perch, then by smallmouth bass. (Most anglers catch and release smallmouth bass.)

Early spring (during the spawn) and late fall (October) seem to be the best times to pursue yellow perch on both reefs. However, some anglers have reported good yellow perch catches during the summer months at Lakewood.

Walleye also seem to frequent the reefs during early spring (pre-spawn) and late fall, with good catches likely during the mid-summer months. Research has indicated that the Lakewood reef appears to concentrate significantly more walleye, on an annual basis, than the Lorain reef.

Remember, you are fishing around a submerged structure that creates snags for fishing lures, perch spreaders, and boat anchors. If you plan to anchor over the artificial reef, try using a large, 12-inch concrete block on an older piece of anchor line. The block will catch and hold in the structure, and if it cannot be retrieved, the loss will be minimal.

Anglers need to be aware of any vessel anchored on the artificial reefs displaying the “diver down” flag (red flag with a white diagonal stripe). This indicates scuba divers are below. State law requires boats not involved with the diving operation to remain 300 feet away.

Scuba diving opportunity

Both artificial reef locations provide an abundance of fish life for observation and photography. Reef structures also serve as “home” to zebra mussels and freshwater sponge colonies, and to other forms of aquatic life. The reefs are located in 28 feet of water, which is a comfortable depth for recreational diving, and are close to ports of shelter. Due to the abundance of zebra mussels, water clarity is generally good. Divers may also hunt for lost rods and reels, fishing lures, and fouled anchors among the reef structures.

Due to the popularity of the artificial reefs, scuba divers should display both the “diver down” flag, and the international “alpha” flag. It is also recommended that one person remain on board the vessel to advise boaters who venture too close, or in case of an emergency. Old fishing line can be found around artificial reef structures, which can tangle in scuba gear. Always carry a dive knife to cut yourself free from fishing line, and always dive with a partner.

Navigation coordinates

The artificial reefs may not always be marked. In this case, it will be necessary to use an electronic navigation device, such as Loran-C or GPS, to locate the reef structure. Not all navigation units are created equal. Go to the coordinates you have entered into your navigation unit, drop a marker buoy, and circle the area while watching your fish locator. Eventually, you will pass over an artificial reef structure. If you are in water deeper or shallower than 28 feet, you are searching in the wrong area.

Polish Fisherman’s Club (PFC) Reef (Lorain Artificial Reef)

This reef is located 1 mile west of Lorain Harbor and approximately 3/4 mile offshore. It is approximately 1,500 feet long, and is parallel to shore in 28 feet of water. The reef may or may not be marked with an orange and white marker buoy. The following coordinates are for the middle of the PFC Reef.

NORTH 41° 28.125’ WEST 082° 12.694’

The Mountain Reef (Second Lorain Artificial Reef)

This reef is never marked with a marker buoy. It is located approximately 100 yards north of the middle of the PFC Reef. It is parallel to the PFC reef, and also curves along the bottom in 28 feet of water. It begins at the west end with a large pile of reef structure and extends to the east approximately 800 feet. The following coordinates are for the middle of the Mountain Reef.

NORTH 41° 28.171’ WEST 081° 12.779’

Cuyahoga County Commissioners (CCC) Reef (Lakewood Artificial Reef)

This reef is located 2.3 miles west of Cleveland Harbor and 1/2 mile offshore of the Lakewood Park Point in 28 feet of water. It is approximately 900 feet in length and curves along the bottom, parallel to shore.

Look for the waterpipe coming out from the shoreline cliff, and proceed straight out to 28 feet of water to find the reef. Or, take a 56° compass heading from close to the Lakewood Park Point “pier”, and go 1/2 mile. This compass heading from the point will take you over the middle of the reef. Watch your depth finder/fish locator for reef structure to appear once you reach 28 feet of depth. The reef may or may not be marked with an orange/white marker buoy. The following coordinates are for the mid-