



Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet Settlement Hurts California, Helps Texas

The recent court settlement which allocates federal money to move obsolete ships from Suisun Bay will help prevent further Bay pollution, but is not the most economically and environmentally sound solution for California, asserts California Ships to Reefs (CSTR).

CSTR, a non profit organization, protests the plan to tow the ships to Texas, where they will be dismantled and scrapped. The U.S. Maritime Administration will spend at least \$38 million over the next two and a half years to clean and dispose of 25 of the 52 badly decaying ships in the Bay under the terms of the settlement.

“Why not avoid an expensive, energy consuming, and environmentally damaging tow to Texas?” asked Joel Geldin, Chairman and CEO of CSTR. “After California takes on the burden of cleaning the ships here, we should keep them here and sink them in appropriate locations along our coastline. We can create new artificial reefs where ocean life will flourish. These vessels could make California jobs and provide state tax revenue while making these historic old ships a lasting resource for our state, not scrap metal for Texas.”

The Suisun Bay fleet was the target of litigation by three environmental groups who want to force the Bay cleanup. Tons of toxic metals from the ships have leaked into the Bay. The settlement, which must still be approved by a federal judge in Sacramento, will remove all the ships by 2017. Geldin applauded the effort to clean up the Bay, but he noted, “The Maritime Administration has a short sighted rule which releases only one ship at a time for artificial reefing, while allowing many ships at a time to be sent to Texas for scrapping.”

California Ships to Reefs is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit public benefit corporation that works with agencies to create artificial reefs by sinking decommissioned military or retired commercial vessels near harbors, where they quickly become breeding grounds for new ocean life. The rejuvenated ocean environments attract divers, fishermen and other recreational opportunities, pumping additional income into local businesses. Artificial reefs have been successfully created all over the world. CSTR’s California example is the 366 ship *Yukon*, sunk outside San Diego harbor 10 years ago, and now a popular and lucrative diving site which annually puts \$4.5 million into the San Diego economy.

The organization advocates keeping the best ships from Suisun Bay for reefing in California, where they will provide benefits for recreational fishing and diving. “We need state and federal agencies to come together for the necessary permits and leases for these new reefs,” said Geldin. “With enough governmental and public support, these ships can mean jobs, money and environmental enhancement for California.”