

side of the company's 46-foot yacht *Megabyte*. "We guess they're good for fishing," Prewitt told *PC Magazine*. "We already know they're not good for computer data."

Things didn't go exactly according to the plan that grew out of Lady Bird's highway beautification program. Cars disintegrated into chassis and steering wheels. Washing machines and refrigerators rotted and rolled. Buffeted by storms, vessels moved around the bottom, bulldozing *natural* habitat. Along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts tires by the hundreds of thousands broke free of their wire restraints and unbeautified beaches. One short-lived tire reef in Florida was 3,000 feet long, 20 feet wide and eight feet high.

American reef builders learned a lesson from all this: use heavier junk. Alabama, for instance, has gotten tougher with anglers who construct secret, do-it-yourself reefs. Now do-it-yourself reef builders have to get their junk approved by state inspectors. (Automobiles, refrigerators and washing machines no longer make the cut, and tires are forbidden unless you soak them in concrete.)

"We should not allow people just to go out and build reefs because they want to catch fish," remarks Ron Lukens, director of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. "We've got a number of fisheries in the Gulf that are under stress, and a number of those are reef fish that could be affected by people establishing artificial reefs. It's akin to fishing in a barrel. More artificial reefs could contribute to overfishing. I'm enthusiastic about their use, but at the same time cautious. We shouldn't go into it with the idea that we can't mess up."

Anglers still get lumps in their throats when they help make artificial reefs. Not only are they cleaning up America, they're helping the fish—or so it has been assumed by almost everyone, including this magazine, which in a Nov/Dec 1995 Short Cast entitled "General Patton's Aquarium" reported about the alleged benefits of sinking Army tanks off New Jersey, Alabama and Florida.

There is no question that artificial reefs attract fish, and very quickly. But are they a conservation measure? "A casino attracts people but that doesn't mean it's good for them," declares Dr. James Bohnsack, the National Marine Fisheries Service's reef resources team leader in Florida. "Instead of throwing out bait to catch fish you throw out habitat, then you throw out your bait. You just add a step."

Nor that there's anything wrong with this when the resource can tolerate the