N.J. builds up man-made reef off Atlantic City

AVALON ZOPPO Staff Writer

New Jersey has found a new use for an old U.S. Navy lock gate: leaving it to the fish.

The state Division of Fish and Wildlife last week added a more than 100-foot-long and 40-foot-high caisson gate to an artificial reef about 8.8 miles off the coast of Absecon Island. Caisson gates are made of heavy gauge steel and are used to dam off the open end of dry docks.

The reef is one of 17 similar projects encompassing 25 miles of the sea floor in waters across the state under the Bureau of Marine Fisheries’s Artificial Reef Program. They are created to provide additional habitat for marine life, grounds for anglers and underwater structures for scuba divers.

Once submerged, the massive gate will provide a hard surface for algae, barnacles and mussels to attach and as a result, form a feeding spot for small fish and lobsters. It also offers cover for bottom dwelling species such as black sea bass and tautog.

Atlantic City’s artificial reef was built decades ago, and the state has added a number of objects over the years, including nearly 120 stainless steel subway cars, six army tanks and a vessel. In 2009, divers discovered the subway cars had collapsed.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife said the newest addition, the caisson gate, was added to a small patch of the Atlantic City reef called the William Kane Reef, named after the first New Jersey artificial reef coordinator, William “Bill” Kane Figley.

The gate sits in 92 feet of water and 65 feet from the surface. It will become home to 150 types of marine species at least 75 years, the division said.