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Demolition begins on eastern side of Skyway fishing pier

By DAVID GULLIVER
dgulliver@bradenton.com

MANATEE -- Demolition of the eastern sides of the Sunshine Skyway fishing piers is scheduled to begin this week, but the western side will remain open for anglers and sightseers.

"They shouldn't notice a difference at all," said Audrey Clarke, project spokeswoman for the Florida Department of Transportation.

The east sides of both the north and south piers have been closed since August 2008, when state inspectors deemed them unsafe. The piers have deteriorated, largely from saltwater corrosion, since they opened in 1954.

Misener Marine Construction, a state contractor, was to move barges into position Tuesday afternoon and begin work by removing light poles, a state Department of Transportation spokeswoman said.

Misener will remove 48 spans from the south pier and 27 from the north side, using specialized saws. No explosives will be used, Clarke said.

The Tampa-based contractor also will replace fencing with masonry block walls and renovate restrooms and bait shops. The project will cost about \$2.2 million and should be complete by March or April of 2012.

Misener is a subsidiary of Houston-based Orion Marine Group.

The state plans to eventually demolish the entire east side of both piers but has set no date for that project.

The demolition will not limit access to either pier, officials said. Most of the demolition will be performed from barges, and only on Mondays through Fridays. Bait shops on both north and south piers will remain open seven days a week.

"There may be barricades, but it should not affect the fishing they've been doing," Clarke said.

Misener expects to dispose of the debris in permitted artificial reefs, she said.

The 3-mile southern fishing pier and the 1.5 mile northern pier, in Pinellas County, are the remnants of the original Sunshine Skyway bridge. The east side was the original bridge, while the west side was a parallel bridge that opened in 1969. A freighter collided with the original Skyway in 1980, collapsing part of the bridge.

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