



Oil Spill Response

The Fish and Wildlife Service's Role in Oil Spill Response

The Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for the protection of threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, and certain fish, marine mammals, and sea turtles. As a major federal landowner, we are also responsible for preparing for and responding to oil spills that may impact the 97 million acre National Wildlife Refuge system. We work proactively with the Coast Guard, the Environmental Protection Agency, State agencies, and the spiller to support their efforts to contain the spill by providing response-related scientific and technical advice.

We also work with our partners and co-trustees, such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, other Department of the Interior Bureaus, States, and Indian tribes to help response personnel avoid or minimize injury to natural resources.

Our Spill Responders

Each Region of the Service has a regional spill response coordinator, but most response actions are initially addressed by Environmental Contaminants



Environmental contaminants staff take biological samples at the fuel oil spill resulting from the Cosco Busan hitting the San Francisco Bay Bridge.



Environmental contaminants biologist deploys propane cannon to deter birds away from oil spill.

biologists at the field level. For larger spills or those involving significant risk or injury to natural resources, a much larger, coordinated spill response action involving multiple field offices may be necessary. For example, the 2007 Cosco Busan oil spill in San Francisco Bay, in which approximately 2,500 migratory birds were killed, involved 40 Service personnel representing many offices and programs such as Environmental Contaminants, Law Enforcement, National Wildlife Refuges, Endangered Species, and Public Affairs.

Guiding Response Actions to Protect Habitats and Sensitive Species

Our field biologist's intimate knowledge of local resources and sensitive ecological areas makes us invaluable to the managers directing response activities, prioritizing spill countermeasures, and conducting clean up work. Our advice is particularly valued when wetlands, refuge lands, federally listed species, migratory birds or the habitat supporting these species are potentially or physically impacted.

Leading the Survey, Capture and Rehabilitation of Oiled Wildlife

We often support the commanding response agencies by taking a leading role in wildlife protection. Field staff use a variety of methods to deter wildlife, especially birds, from oiled areas. This includes hazing techniques such as scare balloons, propane cannons or other noise makers, and air boats. We also conduct surveys to determine where oiled birds

and wildlife may be found and assist with their safe capture and transportation to a rehabilitation center. Service staff work with State agencies to oversee wildlife rehabilitation contractors as they clean oiled birds and wildlife and return healthy individuals back to the wild.

Assist the Incident Command in Planning Clean Up Actions

We work directly with the Incident Command to help prioritize clean up actions and to determine the best methods to clean up oil to reduce the impact to sensitive areas. This may include physical removal of oil, using



Environmental contaminants biologist collect an oil bird from the Selendang oil spill in Alaska.

absorbent pads, booms, and skimmers or recommending that no clean up take place, when the clean up activities may injure wildlife and habitat more than the oil.

Assessing Injury to Natural Resources

In partnership with our co-trustees and sometimes the spiller, Service staff assesses injuries to natural resources with a focus on returning injured resources to pre-spill conditions. This may require the collection of samples such as water and sediment and other evidence such as oiled fish, birds, and other wildlife. These data are used to determine the magnitude of the injury caused by the spill and developed into a natural resource damage assessment claim for restoration. The Service's Law Enforcement Division oversees the collection of evidence when a criminal claim may be filed.

Effective Training and Planning

To ensure the safety of our responders, Service staff are trained and provided the resources required to integrate their activities within the larger response effort. This training includes incident command system (ICS) training, participation in pre-spill drills with cooperating agencies such as Spills of National Significance (SONs) drills, internal response training programs, and OSHA-required Health and Safety training. We also participate in pre-spill planning and coordination efforts of Regional Response Teams. This participation helps us maintain a strong working relationship with our response partners.

A Continued Commitment to Conservation

The Service remains committed to its role as a partner in conserving America's natural resources, and effectively responding to oil spills is a key element of



Capture while sitting in skiff tied to ship. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Response to Grounding/Oil Spill off Unalaska

this commitment. Effective and safe response involves specialized training, building and maintaining solid relationships with our partners in the response community, and considerable pre-spill coordination and planning. This ensures that Service staff are prepared to immediately respond to a spill and capable of assessing injuries and determining damages to natural resources. Our ultimate goal is always prevention first, but we also ensure Staff are prepared to properly document natural resource injuries when they occur.

Mission Statement

Our mission is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

For More Information Please Contact

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