

Wildlife Response

Silvertip Pipeline Oil Spill

Yellowstone River, Montana

Therovr Selch/MTFWP



Oil covered vegetation

Response

Environmental Contaminants Specialists from multiple states with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) [Division of Environmental Quality](#) have deployed to the pipeline break site near Billings, MT. Their expertise includes a mix of toxicology, ecology, risk assessment, and Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) with specialized experience responding to oil spills. All Service field personnel are fully supported by personnel in the [Region 6 \(Mountain-Prairie Region\)](#) regional and national offices.

At this time, the Service's primary role is to support the U.S. Environmental Protection



Pallid sturgeon / USFWS

Agency (EPA) - as the lead Federal response agency - in planning, managing, and implementing spill clean-up activities through the Incident Command System/Unified Command at Billings, pursuant to the Service's authorities under the Oil Pollution Act (OPA), Clean Water Act, CERCLA (Superfund),

Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the Endangered Species Act. Federally-listed threatened and endangered species of fish and wildlife and all migratory birds are two categories of natural resources held in trust by the Department of the Interior. The fish and wildlife species of highest concern in the spill zone include the endangered pallid sturgeon and various species of birds, including waterfowl and wading birds that frequent the Yellowstone River valley.

The Service's [Division of Migratory Birds](#) has ensured regulatory coverage for trained animal rehabilitation specialists with [International Bird Rescue \(IBR\)](#) to enable IBR to clean and decontaminate any oiled birds and wildlife found and brought into the on-site wildlife rehabilitation station IBR has established. IBR has led bird rescue and rehabilitation efforts on many oil spills in the United States, including the Deepwater Horizon incident, and throughout the world. The public can report oiled wildlife to the IC via a toll-free hotline: **800/259-0596**.

The Service's Division of Environmental Quality and the [Region 6 National Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program](#) are coordinating with State of Montana

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Collecting oil soiled pads along a boom in the Yellowstone River

and Tribal Natural Resource Trustees to implement NRDAR pursuant to the provisions of OPA.

Background

On Friday, July 1, 2011, the Silvertip Pipeline (owned by ExxonMobil), which crosses under the Yellowstone River near Laurel, MT (about 15 miles upstream from Billings) breached, causing approximately 1000 barrels (42,000 gal.) of light, sweet crude oil to be released into the river before the pipe was shut down. The river is at flood stage and the pipeline may have been undermined by the high, swift flows causing it to be subject to heavy shear forces. The exact cause of the release remains unknown and the chronically fluctuating high water conditions due to spring snow melt into the river are hampering spill response and investigation activities.



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Oiled vegetation in the Yellowstone River

Status

The EPA has implemented the Incident Command/Unified Command at Billings and is overseeing the deployment of several hundred state, federal and private personnel to help clean up the released oil. Most of the oil is located in quiet backwater areas, on islands, in debris piles and vegetation along the banks of the Yellowstone River. The vegetation growing along the banks acted like a filter and collected a significant amount of the released oil. Crews have deployed absorbent, floating booms around sensitive areas (e.g., Billings Water Treatment Plant Intake). Early reports indicate most of the

shoreline oiling, and observed river surface sheen is limited to an area of about 25 river miles in length.

Service on-site response personnel are engaged in planning and implementing how to best survey the river environment and associated habitats for oiled wildlife given the current restrictions on boat use. Service Office of Law Enforcement personnel are assisting Environmental Contaminants personnel and legal evidence chain-of-custody procedures are in place. A Department of the Interior Solicitor has been assigned to assist

in NRDAR legal matters, and a Service contact information list has been compiled and submitted to Incident Command as well as state and federal partner agencies.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 6

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July 2011



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Booms along the Yellowstone River to capture spilled oil