

# Oil Spill Response



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service veterinarian Dr. Sharon Taylor and Robert Love of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries prepare to release a Green Heron into the wild after being cleaned at a Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Ft. Jackson, La. photo: Thomas Gresham.

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

During spills, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service protects 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 150 million acre National Wildlife Refuge system. We provide scientific and technical advice to Coast Guard, the Environmental Protection Agency, state fish and wildlife agencies, and responsible parties support their efforts to contain spills. We also work with our partners and co-trustees, such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, other Department of the Interior bureaus,



Jason Duke, a geographic information systems coordinator with the Service, directs an airboat to search for oil off the coast of South Pass, La. photo: Petty Officer 3rd Class Stephen Lehmann.

states, and Indian tribes to help response personnel avoid or minimize injury to natural resources.

## Guiding Response Actions to Protect Habitats and Sensitive Species

Our field biologists' intimate knowledge of local resources and sensitive ecological areas makes us invaluable to those 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 work together with responding 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 may include 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 rehabilitation centers. Service staff work with the appropriate agencies to oversee wildlife rehabilitation contractors as they clean oiled birds and wildlife and return healthy individuals back to the wild.

## The Current Spill

We continue to support the joint agency response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The Service has many experienced technical specialists, scientists, land managers, and support personnel involved in the oil spill response. The Service is taking aggressive steps to protect ecologically sensitive areas on the Gulf Coast national wildlife refuges that potentially could be impacted.

## Oversight of Wildlife Rehabilitation

Under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, the responsible party – BP in the current case - is charged with hiring and funding firms to handle the many jobs required by a spill such as this, including wildlife rehabilitation. BP has hired Tri-State Rescue and Research and the International Bird Rescue Research Center, well-respected service providers that operate under existing permits issued by the Service. They work closely with the Service and state fish and wildlife agencies to compile data accurately, complete necessary testing and support field activities aimed at

saving as many birds and wildlife as possible. Federal agencies, including the Service, are providing oversight of BP's efforts in this and other areas.

## 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. 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. Effectively responding



Containment boom is staged at the Breton National Wildlife Refuge.

to oil spills is a key element of this commitment, and effective response involves building solid relationships with our partners and ensuring that our people are trained and ready to act when a spill occurs.

## Hotlines

To report oiled or injured wildlife:  
866/557 1401

For media: Joint Information Center:  
713/323 1670 and 713/323 1671

To report claims related to damages:  
800/440 0858

To volunteer: 866/448 5816

For more information about the Service's response and our resources at risk:

<http://www.fws.gov/home/dhoilspill>

May 2010

