



David Rouse/USFWS

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wildlife Response

Silvertip Pipeline Oil Spill

Yellowstone River, Montana

Oil along the Yellowstone River

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, Mont. 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 office and at Headquarters.

The Service's primary role is to support the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - the



Pallid sturgeon / USFWS

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



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Collecting oil soiled pads along a boom in the Yellowstone River

Background

On Friday, July 1, 2011, the Silvertip Pipeline (owned by ExxonMobil), which crosses under the Yellowstone River near Laurel, Mont., (approximately 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. At the time, the river was 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 hampered early spill response efforts and initial investigation activities.

Status

The EPA has established an 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 being located and cleaned up 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 deployed absorbent, floating booms around sensitive areas (e.g., Billings Water Treatment



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Canada geese on impacted portion of the Yellowstone River

Plant Intake). Service personnel are participating in Shoreline Cleanup and Assessment Technique teams as federal representatives, and embedding with cleanup crews as resource advisors. Service on-site response personnel are surveying the river environment and associated habitats for oiled wildlife by aircraft, water vessels and foot. 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. For current information, please visit: <http://www.epa.gov/yellowstoneriverspill/>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 6

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
PO Box 25486
Denver Federal Center
Denver, Colorado 80225**

**For State relay service
TTY / Voice: 711**

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>**

July 2011



Jerry Leggett/USBR

Booms along the Yellowstone River to capture spilled oil