

Environmental Contaminants



In situ burn at a crude oil spill in North Dakota/USFWS

Program Overview

The Environmental Contaminants (EC) program is the only nationwide Federal program evaluating the effects of contaminants exposure on fish and wildlife resources, both on and off the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service)-controlled Refuge lands. The EC Program supports and enhances all other Service activities, playing a critical role in the Service's mission to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. EC Specialists also regularly partner with other

agencies and organizations that have come to rely on our expertise.

Environmental Contaminants Specialists in the Mountain-Prairie Region of the Service have unique expertise and experience that add value to Service efforts in six core areas:

- Spill Response
- Restoration
- Water Quality
- Pesticides and Pests Management
- Contaminants Investigations
- Technical Support

Spill Response & Preparedness

EC Specialists throughout the eight states in the Mountain-Prairie Region respond to hundreds of spill notices each year. These emergencies require response to oil, industrial waste water, gasoline, acid, coal, mining tailings, and other hazardous material spills. Additionally, the EC Program assists planning groups and other partners with contingency planning for catastrophic spill prevention and response efforts. Beyond these regional activities, EC Specialists also respond to national crises, such as the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Spill in the Gulf of Mexico.



Oiled Canada geese from the Red Butte Creek oil spill, Utah/USFWS

Restoration

When pollutants degrade natural resources, EC plays a critical role in assessing the damage and restoring the ecosystem. For example, EC Specialists in Utah negotiated a funding and restoration settlement with responsible parties for damages to migratory birds and their habitats caused by mining activities along the Jordan River, which runs through Salt Lake City. EC Specialists are now implementing the restoration plan, resulting in over 150 acres of



Preventing diesel from spilling into Turtle Creek, a tributary of the Missouri River in North Dakota/USFWS

important urban migratory bird riparian habitat being preserved and managed in perpetuity.

Water Quality

Hundreds of aquatic species across the country, including commercially- and recreationally-important fish currently require special protection as a result of water quality degradation. In the Mountain-Prairie Region, all eight states have fish consumption advisories due to elevated contaminant levels in fish tissue. Working with the Service's Fisheries Program, the National Wildlife Refuge System, and State game and fish agencies, the EC program evaluates the effects of pollutants on fish and wildlife and their habitats. In Grand Valley, Colorado, for example, the work of EC Specialists is being used by the Colorado River Recovery Program to improve recovery efforts of the endangered razorback sucker.

Pesticides & Pest Management

Though pesticide use has benefits, it also poses risks to the environment. EC Specialists regularly work with the EPA and State agriculture agencies during pesticide registration and labeling, to help protect the environment from undue risk. In 2010, for example, EC engaged the North and South Dakota Departments of Agriculture

and the EPA on, among other issues, labeling for anticoagulant rodenticides proposed for use on prairie dogs.

Contaminant Investigations & Refuge Clean-Up Projects

EC Specialists perform contaminant investigations and clean-up projects that produce specific management actions, which prevent, reduce, or eliminate the impacts of contaminants on wildlife and their habitats. In the Mountain-Prairie Region, Montana EC Specialists are leading a collaborative clean-up effort to remove or remediate environmentally hazardous levels of salts and selenium on Hailstone National Wildlife Refuge.

Technical Support

Beyond providing contaminants expertise to all internal Service programs, including Fisheries and the National Wildlife Refuge System, EC also supports outside



American coot covered in oil/USFWS

Pollution is one of the American public's greatest environmental concerns. Like the proverbial "canary in the coal mine," fish and wildlife often signal pollution problems that ultimately affect people and their quality of life. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the main Federal agency dedicated to protecting wildlife and their habitat from pollution's harmful effects, helping to create a healthy world for all living things.

entities. In 2010, for example, EC Specialists in Wyoming worked with oil operators, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Petroleum Association of Wyoming to distribute information regarding risks to migratory birds at oil and gas facilities and to identify actions that can be performed to prevent or reduce this risk.

To learn more about the Mountain-Prairie Region Environmental Contaminants Program, please visit: <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/contaminants>

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April 2011

