U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Our Role in Coastal Oil Spill Response

Northeast Region

Part of the Department of the Interior, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the federal agency responsible for many of the nation's fish and wildlife resources. Having this responsibility has established the agency as one of the primary trustees for fish, wildlife and habitat at oil spills.

USFWS

Oiled sea stars, lobsters and quahogs.

Swinging Into Action

The U.S. Coast Guard coordinates response activities at coastal oil spills. When the Coast Guard is notified of a spill, it contacts the appropriate local, state, health and emergency officials, and the Department of the Interior about the location and extent of the spill. The Department of the Interior then notifies the appropriate U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff who look at spill size and its effects on resources and decide if and how the Service will respond.

When Service biologists arrive at a spill, they report to the Coast Guard's Incident Command Post. They join staff from the state resource agencies and the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration and begin assessing the damage to fish, wildlife and habitat, and assisting with preventing additional harm.

Behind the Scenes

Actually, the Service biologists work year round to prepare for oil spills. For example, biologists meet with staff from other agencies and organizations involved in spills to fine tune response procedures to ensure that activities at the next spill will be well coordinated.

Also, biologists from the Service and the state resource agencies locate and survey fish and wildlife habitat and other natural resources vulnerable to a coastal oil spill. This natural resource inventory becomes part of the Coast Guard's Area Contingency Plans so that if a spill occurs, the response agencies know the area's natural resources that should be protected.

USFWS

Contaminant sampling in coastal ponds.

Did you know?

- **There were 6,449 oil spills reported in the northeast U.S. in 2000.**
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biologists work year round to prepare for oil spills.**
- **Rehabilitated oiled birds can thrive and reproduce in the wild.**

USFWS

Assessing oil damage to bottom-dwelling creatures.

Activities At the Spill

Many Service biologists may be involved in a significant oil spill. Some will help state biologists set up a wildlife rehabilitation center and assist with recovering oiled migratory birds.

Other biologists will begin surveying the spill's effects on wildlife habitat and advise the Coast Guard on measures to protect other natural resources from oil contamination.

Service law enforcement staff team up with other response agency law enforcement staff to investigate potential criminal acts and assist with crowd control.

Still other personnel help keep the media and public informed about the spill's effect on fish and wildlife.

The Work Continues

Another important aspect of the Service's work begins after the spill is under control. Service biologists then begin assessing the full extent of the spill, determining what natural resources were exposed and what harm the oil caused to those natural resources. This process involves sampling and surveying and can take many months. Biologists will use the information to work with those responsible for the spill and other natural resource trustees to seek restoration of natural resources injured by the spill.

For more information, contact:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Regional Spill Response Coordinator
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035-9589
413/253 8646
http://contaminants.fws.gov

USFWS

Oiled loon

Federal Relay Service
for the deaf and hard-of-hearing
1 800/877 8339

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
http://www.fws.gov

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