



New York Field Office

<http://nyfo.fws.gov>

Environmental Contaminants



Congressional District #18

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“The most alarming of all man’s assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials.”

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

Environmental contamination is one of America’s greatest concerns. Annually, approximately 136 million pounds of toxic chemicals are discharged into the Nation’s waterways, while 4 billion pounds of pesticides are applied to the land. Fish and wildlife often signal environmental contamination unnoticed by any other means – fish kills, deformities in birds and fish, and failed reproduction. The New York Field Office’s (NYFO) environmental contaminants program responds to the threats contamination poses to fish and wildlife. NYFO Biologists are responsible for natural resource damage assessment and restoration, hazardous spill response, and technical assistance to State and Federal agencies, National Wildlife Refuges, and citizens with concerns regarding contamination of our fish and wildlife.

Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program (NRDAR)



The Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) Program is designed to restore natural resources that have been impacted by releases of hazardous substances or oil spills. Several laws provide the foundation for NRDAR, giving natural resource Trustees the legal authority to have those responsible for harm to natural resources pay to restore those resources. Natural resource Trustees include Federal and State agencies and Indian Tribes that have the responsibility and authority to protect natural resources.

To fulfill the mission of restoring natural resources that have been injured by oil spills or hazardous substance releases, the natural resource Trustees conduct a damage assessment to determine the extent of injury to natural resources caused by the hazardous substance release or oil spill. This information is used to determine the amount of restoration that is needed. The Trustees then either reach an agreement with the responsible parties through a negotiated settlement or file suit against the responsible parties for the damage claim. Damage claims are for the cost of restoration, loss of use of the land or natural resources by the general public, and money spent to assess damages. Once the claim is resolved, the Trustees take action to restore the injured resources. Finally, the Trustees monitor the completed restoration projects to ensure success. Natural Resource Damage Assessments have been successfully concluded for the following sites:

Applied Environmental Services (Nassau County)
Brewster Wellfield (Putnam County)
Cortese Landfill (Sullivan County)
Forest Glen Mobile Home Subdivision (Niagara County)
Hi View Terrace (Erie County)
Love Canal (Niagara County)
Mattaice Petrochemical (Nassau County)
Wide Beach Development (Erie County)
102nd Street Landfill (Niagara County)

In addition, we are actively conducting natural resource damage assessments related to other hazardous waste sites, including the St. Lawrence Environment Cooperative Assessment and the Hudson River PCB Site Assessment.

Hudson River Natural Resource Damage Assessment

Past and continuing discharges of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) have contaminated the natural resources of the Hudson River. The Natural Resource Trustees – New York State, the U.S. Department of Commerce, and the U.S. Department of the Interior (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) – are conducting a natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) to assess and restore those natural resources injured by PCBs.

The Trustees are implementing the approach to the NRDA outlined in the September 2002 NRDA Plan for the Hudson River. Field work in progress this spring-summer includes the following:

Preliminary Investigation of Frogs and Sediments on the Hudson River

- The Hudson River and its surrounding habitat support many species of amphibians, such as wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*) and northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*). These species spend a large part of their lives in contact with potentially contaminated substances – water, sediment, and soil – and consume potentially contaminated prey.
- We are investigating the feasibility of using amphibians for an injury determination study through a preliminary investigation focused on wood frogs and northern leopard frogs, and the habitats in which they breed.



Wood frog (USFWS)



Tree swallow (James C. Leupold)

Study of Belted Kingfishers, Spotted Sandpipers and Tree Swallows on the Hudson River

- On behalf of the Trustees, scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey are studying belted kingfishers (*Ceryle alcyon*), spotted sandpipers (*Actitus macularia*), and tree swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) on the Hudson River to determine if reproductive success of these birds is negatively affected by PCB exposure.
- The Trustees released for public review and comment a Draft Study Plan for Year 2004 Avian Investigations, which included the work to be done by USGS. The public comment period closed April 29, 2004. The Study Plan underwent peer review. The Draft Study Plan is posted on the Trustees' web sites. We are in the process of preparing to release the Trustees' Final Study Plan and also preparing a Responsiveness Summary in response to comments received from the public on the Draft Study Plan.

Technical Assistance

Because NYFO contaminants specialists have unique expertise pertaining to the effects of environmental contaminants on fish and wildlife, they provide technical assistance that is invaluable in resolving complex environmental issues. Technical assistance relating to fish and wildlife affected by contamination at Superfund sites is provided by NYFO representation on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Biological Technical Assistance Group (BTAG). There are about 100 Superfund Sites in New York State, and hundreds of contaminated sites classified as New York State Inactive Hazardous Waste Sites, including 24 sites in Westchester County and 17 sites in Rockland County.

The NYFO also provides environmental contaminants technical assistance to National Wildlife Refuges, State and local governments, and private individuals.

Hazardous Spill Response

Although spills of oil and other hazardous materials occur infrequently in the 22nd Congressional District, personnel at NYFO are trained to assess and minimize harm to fish and wildlife resources. Spill responses are coordinated with other Federal and State agencies to assist with clean-up, wildlife recovery and rehabilitation, and collection and interpretation of information used in natural resource damage assessments and restorations.

Some Useful Websites:

<http://nyfo.fws.gov/ec/ecdesc.htm>

<http://contaminants.fws.gov/>

<http://restoration.doi.gov/>

<http://epa.gov/superfund/>

<http://epa.gov/superfund/programs/nrd>