

ACL Barge DM932-New Orleans, LA Oil Spill
FWS Report: R4-EC-RST-7/26/08 to 7/27/08 Operational Period

Incident

On July 23, 2008, a major release of #6 fuel oil occurred in the Mississippi River, in New Orleans, Louisiana. More than 9,000 barrels of oil were released. The release has necessitated the closure of more than 80 miles of river to commercial shipping and recreational boating. The closure extends from RM 98.0 to the Southwest Pass Sea Buoy. The river, shorelines, and adjacent wetlands were impacted in much of the area. This incident represents a significant threat to fish, wildlife, and habitat quality. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Environmental Contaminant (EC) Program and National Wildlife Refuge System personnel responded to the incident.

Response Status

Response operations continued on July 26 and 27, 2008. Over 13 miles of hard and absorbent booms have been placed within the river and adjacent habitats at various locations to contain/capture as much of the released product as possible. Oil skimmers have been deployed to recover the oil. Oil and significant sheening have not been observed downstream of Ft. Jackson (RM 15).



FWS Staff:

The Southeast Region Spill Response Regional Strike Team (Goatcher (LFO-LA); Starkel (RO); Tuttle (DFO-AL); Hemming (PCFO-FL); Alexander (TFO-TN); McKenzie (RO); Whitaker (PCFO); and McCall (PCFO-FL)) are on-site in the Incident Command Center (ICC) in Belle Chasse and participating in field-based operations on the Mississippi River in New Orleans and downstream areas of St. Bernard Parish and Plaquemines Parish. Velasco (KFO-KY) arrived in the ICC at 0600 on July 26. Lopez (PRFO- Puerto Rico) is expected to arrive in the ICC on Monday morning, July 28. MacKenzie demobilized from the Incident Command System (ICS) on Sunday afternoon, July 27.

FWS Activities on 7/26/08 and 7/27/08

FWS EC personnel Alexander, McKenzie, Goatcher, and Whittaker continued with spill response documentation in the Wildlife Group within the ICS. Goatcher met with Dwight LeBlanc, USDA Wildlife Services, to plan the activities of Wildlife Services personnel in wildlife hazing operations. Alexander prepared a response-specific Health and Safety Plan and Wildlife Operations Plan. These plans were submitted to the ICS and incorporated in the Incident Action Plan (IAP). Goatcher and Alexander participated in operations and planning meetings for the Unified Command (UC) and ICS. Velasco mobilized with USCG personnel on July 27 and collected oil samples for fingerprint analyses. Whittaker provided budget and finance administrative oversight.

Starkel, Tuttle, McCall and Hemming engaged in water-based surveys for oiled birds in the Mississippi River and adjacent habitats. Wildlife hazing operations were initiated with propane cannons being deployed at 8 select locations. FWS EC personnel are also providing technical assistance to FWS Office of Law Enforcement, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality. The presence of a media relations expert (McKenzie) and administrative officer (Whittaker) within the Wildlife Group proved to be invaluable.

Pollution Removal Funding Authorization (PRFA):

A PRFA Amendment was prepared by the Department of Interior (DOI), Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance (OEPC) (Spencer) on 7/26/08. Funds available for FWS activities (PRFA) were increased by \$100,000 to \$165,000.

Estimates of expended funds:

Overhead	\$10,700
Travel/per diem	\$10,000
Labor	\$36,000
Contractor (helicopter)	\$9,600
TOTAL (July 26 estimate)	\$66,300
Remaining unexpended funds	\$98,700

Aerial Wildlife Surveys:

Aerial surveillance activities continued in contracted aircraft on July 26 and USCG aircraft on July 27. Significant riverine and wetland habitats (e.g., willow swamps) have been impacted by the release. Impacted areas requiring additional response actions and/or bird hazing were geo-referenced and documented with still photography or video. These areas will be re-surveyed with boats or by land. After each mission, FWS-EC personnel are de-briefed and relevant documentation to the Wildlife Group files and ICS made.



Water-based Operations:

Significant but variable oiling was observed via water-based operations conducted on the Mississippi River, batture lands (i.e., alluvial wetland areas between the river and levees), trenasses (i.e., hydrologic connections to adjacent wetlands), and other areas. Numerous oiled birds were observed during these surveys, but the animals evaded capture. It is anticipated that these birds will begin to succumb to the effects of oiling and enable capture/rescue by field personnel. Tuttle, Starkel, Hemming, and McCall are geo-referencing oiled habitats and attempting to locate and capture oiled wildlife observed during aerial surveillance or reported on the Oiled Wildlife Hotline. Locations for the deployment of propane canons are also being identified. Eight propane cannons were deployed at select locations on July 27. Water-based operations were terminated at 1700 hours on July 27 due to weather.

To date, the following oiled avian and mammalian species have been observed: great egret (N=32); snowy egret (N=12); cattle egret (N=6); grebe (N=1); wood duck (N=3); duck sp. (N=17); crane sp. (N=1); heron sp. (N=4); gull sp. (N=2); black vulture (N=6); mourning dove (N=1); beaver (N=2); muskrat (N=2); and American alligator (N=2). All duck species observed have been 100% oiled. Unverified reports on the Oiled Wildlife Hotline also have been received.

Wildlife Recovery Efforts:

Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education (WRE) has set up wildlife rehabilitation facilities in Venice. We have received additional phone reports of oiled wildlife in New Orleans and downstream areas on the Mississippi River. These calls are being documented, locations mapped, and efforts to attempt capture and transfer these species to WRE continued.

Planning:

Hemming, McCall, and Whittaker will de-mobilize from the ICS on Tuesday (07/29/08). Additional assistance in the response effort and NRDAR pre-assessment activities is needed.

The USCG is attempting to open the shipping channel in the river to limited traffic. This may pose safety-related issues for water-based operations, as well as mobilizing released product. The Wildlife Group is taking measures to adapt to these and other changing conditions.

The Regional Strike Team has progressed in planning and documentation efforts for this response effort. An Incident-specific Health and Safety Plan and Wildlife Operations Plan were developed and submitted to the ICS. They will become official components of the Incident Action Plan (IAP). These plans will protect FWS response personnel and guide the recovery of oiled wildlife, the prevention of additional oiling, and wildlife hazing activities.

The Wildlife Group received notification from Southern Helicopters that there are no available Aviation Management Directive (AMD)-certified low-level and vertical reference (i.e. external sling load) pilots available for immediate aerial surveillance. All AMD-certified pilots have mobilized to the Southwest United States for firefighting operations or FEMA-related work associated with post Hurricane Dolly response efforts. Therefore, the aerial surveys conducted on July 26 will be the last on contracted aircraft for the immediate future. USCG aircraft are available for the Wildlife Group to use for reconnaissance and familiarization flights, but these aircraft are not available for low-level and other wildlife-related flights.

With the assistance of FWS EC personnel, Wildlife Services submitted a USDA-specific PRFA which was approved by the Federal On-Scene Coordinator (FOSC). Wildlife Services field personnel will mobilize and arrive at the ICC in the next couple of days.

Their personnel will be imbedded within the Wildlife Group and FWS EC personnel will supervise their field operations.



Media Relations

A televised press conference was conducted with various outlets with Goatcher. Primary interest is number of oiled birds, number of captured birds and the use of volunteers. There will be continued national media interest until the river opens and normal shipping activity resumes. The FOSC stated environmental interest in this incident is increasing. We also anticipate increased media interest on reports of oiled alligators in the impact area. This spill response may draw more media attention than any spill in recent times. A long lasting regional and local media interest is expected for the entire clean-up period (estimated 30 plus days). This interest likely will wane as time passes.

FWS EC personnel are coordinating with the Joint Information Center (JIC) on developing press-related products for release to the public. USCG media relations personnel accompanied Tuttle and Hemming in water-based operations on July 27 and video documented the deployment of propane cannons.

Other Considerations

Technical assistance was provided to the USCG in drafting a Notice to Mariners radio broadcast and Internet Bulletin regarding FWS wildlife hazing operations. Close coordination between the Wildlife Group and the USCG is essential in the delivery of public interest messages.

Alexander provided technical assistance to the USCG in the preparation of a section 7 consultation request for the pallid sturgeon. There have been inquiries from the press and outside interest group related to endangered species issues.

As a member of the Regional Response Team (RRT) Region VI, DOI concurred with the USCG request to utilize surface washing agents during this response effort. DOI has requested that water sampling be conducted to document potential impacts to the water column on behalf of the public, as well as to demonstrate the effectiveness of the methodology and the protection of the environment relative to the use of surface washing agents.

The USCG will monitor the application of surface washing agents ensuring that they are being applied as outlined in the RRT Region VI Emergency Response Pre-approved Guidelines to Decontaminate Vessels and Hard Structure in Coastal Port Areas and Area Contingency Plan. The USCG will evaluate the product(s) effectiveness. Any observed negative effects will be documented and the FWS EC response personnel notified. If subsurface plumes are observed, water sampling will be initiated immediately. All analytical data will be shared with the Wildlife Group. In the event of high pressure flushing, water sampling is required under the pre-approval guidance to assess hazards to the aquatic environment.

FWS EC personnel have coordinated the emergency section 7 consultation procedures with the Lafayette Ecological Services Field Office, OEPC, and National Park Service.

We are in constant communication with representatives of the Louisiana Oil Spill Coordinator's Office. Entrix personnel have engaged Service personnel regarding bird hazing operations and Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) methodologies/activities. We've tentatively agreed to participate in joint NRDAR pre-assessment activities subject to the approval of the FOOSC. The Responsible Party (RP), American Commercial Lines, has representatives serving as the Environmental Unit Leader, Finance Section Chief, and Logistics Section Chief.

Anticipated 7/28/08 Activities

Additional water and land surveys of the Mississippi River and adjacent habitats will be conducted. Wildlife hazing operations will continue. FWS EC personnel will continue to provide technical assistance to the USCG and other agencies, staff the ICS Wildlife Group, and receive in-coming calls from the public on the Oiled Wildlife Hotline (504/393-0353).

ICC presence will continue and the ICS Wildlife Group will be staffed by FWS EC personnel into the coming week (July 28-August 3). FWS EC personnel will be released by the FOOSC at an undetermined date.

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