

## Oiled Wildlife Response

The purpose of this section is to guide the organization and coordination of government agencies, responsible party, and oil spill response organizations response to reports of oiled wildlife on the Upper Mississippi River. Upon discovery of oiled wildlife or significant threat of oiling, emergency response personnel should notify the Regional Environmental Officer for the U.S. Department of the Interior, state wildlife resource agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services. See Spill Notification roster, pages 19 to 22. The Incident Commander should request the services of these agencies to assist the response in addressing oiled wildlife needs identified below which may be applicable for the incident. The responsible party for the spill is obligated to provide for the wildlife response. Wildlife resource agencies are obligated to track and document their expenses during a spill incident and may apply for funding from the U.S. Coast Guard's [Oil Spill Trust Liability Fund](#). Information resulting from Wildlife Branch operations should be coordinated with natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) efforts, if NRDA has been initiated by the natural resource trustees. The NRDA process is separate from response actions, including wildlife recovery; however, coordination of response planning and field observations with NRDA allows for an overall more effective and efficient resolution of natural resource issues at spill sites.

### **ICS - Wildlife Branch with the Operations Section**

A scalable Wildlife Branch within the Operations Section should be established as part of an incident-specific ICS structure. As soon as feasible and necessary, state and federal wildlife resource agencies should designate a Branch Director and Group Supervisors to direct the operational activities for the Wildlife Branch. These operational activities are outlined below. The Wildlife Branch will follow standard ICS rules and forms and the Incident Command is responsible for addressing all resource needs identified by the Branch Director necessary to implement approved wildlife response operations. All wildlife branch operations must be covered by a spill specific health and safety plan to protect the responders. Animal welfare and animal ethics apply to emergency spill response. It is important to establish direct communication and coordination protocols between the Wildlife Branch and the Environmental and Situation Units of the Planning Section to ensure proper documentation and reporting of field observations (e.g., numbers, species, and locations of impacted wildlife) to continually inform planning decisions for subsequent operational periods. Similar protocols should be established to get the same information on a timely basis to the natural resource trustees if NRDA has been initiated. Request for interviews from the media should be coordinated through an incident-specific public information officer.

### **Reconnaissance**

Tasks for reconnaissance operations are to identify and determine the locations of oiled wildlife, along with the movement patterns of other wildlife that may become oiled. This may include the use of aircraft, watercraft, and vehicles. Predetermined search areas and routes plus the use of GIS will aid in the efficiency of the reconnaissance crews. Information and data gathered by this activity and associated forms may be used by the Environmental and Situation Units in the Planning Section and/or integrated into the Wildlife Branch to help plan wildlife avoidance and/or recovery operations. A Reconnaissance and Recovery Group may be established by the Wildlife Branch Director to fulfill these responsibilities.

### **Hazing and Deterrents**

Hazing or deterrent operations are designed to mitigate the threat posed by wildlife use patterns that may cause oiling. Commercial vendors retained by the responsible party or the U.S. Department of

Agriculture Wildlife Services may carry out hazing or deterrent operations, as determined by the Wildlife Branch Director. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services maintains readiness to use advanced methods to haze and deter wildlife. It may be advisable to establish a separate Wildlife Hazing Group to carry out these specialized operations in close coordination with oil collection and recovery operations.

## **Recovery**

The tasks for the recovery operations are to capture oiled wildlife for transport back to the rehabilitation facility. Recovery operations may include capture with hand nets or other techniques such as pharmaceuticals, rocket nets, traps, and other advanced methods. Recovery operational tasks may be assigned and accomplished by contractors working for the responsible party or by state and/or federal wildlife resource agencies. In particular, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services maintains readiness to use advanced methods to capture wildlife. All captures should be documented on approved forms using an agreed upon coordinate system along with tagging the cages or carriers.

Decontamination procedures should be used on the capture tools, cages, and carriers for re-use. All recovery operations must be closely coordinated with Law Enforcement agents from state and federal wildlife resource agencies to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations. A Reconnaissance and Recovery Group may be established by the Wildlife Branch Director to fulfill these responsibilities.

## **Transport**

The tasks for the transport operations are to safely and humanely move the captured wildlife from the recovery crews in approved carriers and vehicles to the rehabilitation facility. They may require stabilization of captured wildlife and triage to move the highest priority animals into care. This may also include euthanasia procedures as supervised by a qualifying professional. The transport operations may include tasks suitable for the use of volunteers. Wildlife transport operations may be implemented by the Reconnaissance and Recovery Group established by the Wildlife Branch Director.

## **Rehabilitation**

Oiled wildlife rehabilitation expertise may be available from local, regional, or national vendors. If oiled wildlife rehabilitation is required, the Wildlife Branch Director may establish a Rehabilitation Group to assist the responsible party in obtaining wildlife rehabilitation services. The Group Supervisor will be responsible for ensuring all rehabilitation operations follow applicable State and Federal regulations. Permits and special rules are required from state and federal officials for wildlife care, and may vary by state. It may be necessary for the rehabilitation facility to construct or provide extended holding cages for after the initial emergency treatment until the animal is healthy for release back into the wild.

The rehabilitation facility operations may include tasks suitable for the use of volunteers. USFWS' [\*Best Practices for Migratory Bird Care During Oil Spill Response\*](#) should be consulted for additional information regarding rehabilitation operations, including techniques for the prevention of oiling of birds, as well as good practices for cleaning, caring for, and releasing recovered birds.

## **Release Back into the Wild**

The release operation requires planning to avoid wildlife from returning to the oiled environment and to meet all applicable state and federal permits and rules. The release operations should be designed as not to promote disease transmission into wild populations. Released animals may be tagged for tracking. Release operations are typically implemented through the Rehabilitation Group.

## **Salvage and Morgue**

It is unlawful to pick up and transport dead migratory birds according to state and federal laws. Other state rules may apply to picking up dead wildlife. Accordingly, all salvaging operations must be closely coordinated with Law Enforcement agents from state and federal wildlife resource agencies, as well as any natural resource damage assessment representatives coordinating with the response. All dead wildlife should be documented on forms with chain of custody forms, photographs and coordinates for the location. Dead wildlife specimens need to be properly wrapped and tagged to preserve the evidence and for potential chemical testing. Dead wildlife specimens are to be transported to a facility that can properly store them in a freezer or refrigerator for later custody by wildlife resource agency Law Enforcement personnel. Wildlife salvage operations may be completed by the Reconnaissance and Recovery Group, or through a specifically-assigned Wildlife Salvage Group, as established by the Wildlife Branch Director.