WILDLIFE RESPONSE: PART OF THE PLAN

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ABSTRACT

When an oil spill impacts wildlife, the success of the wildlife response often depends on the quality of the preplanning and the responders ability to manage the factors that they can control. While factors such as season and weather, seasonal behavior and lifecycle stages of wildlife cannot be controlled, training of personal, equipment caches and pre-identifying facilities can have a huge influence on the success or failure or a wildlife response. Effective planning prior to the event is the only way to assure maximum preparedness and effective response.

Wildlife response planning has become a key component of oil spill preparedness and response. With the recent publication of the IPIECA Report: A Guide to Oiled Wildlife Response Planning, planning for wildlife response has become an accepted and expected component of any oil spill contingency plan. Depending on available resources, appropriate response strategies may include any of a variety of tools: assessing impacts, use of dispersants, protective booming, hazing, wildlife rehabilitation and euthanasia.

A good wildlife plan should address each of these issues and provide the information and guidance to necessary for responders to make appropriate and timely decisions that will maximize the success execution of the plan and the objectives of the specific response.

This paper will outline the components necessary in a good wildlife plan within a framework that should be familiar to oil spill response planners. It will include a strategy section, an action section and a data section.

As with every other phase of the response there are a variety of factors that affect the success of the wildlife plan. These include efficient management of all resources including the human resources, equipment and facilities. Quick initiation of the operations is critical to minimize the time between oiling of animals when they are collected and rehabilitation initiated. This paper will provide a framework for planners or responders with little or no wildlife experience to assist them in planning for the wildlife component within the overall response.

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In the years since the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill caught the world's attention through the eyes of CNN. The have been a number of oils spills impacting large numbers of wild animals. The Sea Empress, the Apollo Sea, Iron Baron, The Nahodka, The Erika and The Prestige are estimated to have oiled thousands or even hundreds of thousands of animals. In each case there was a wildlife response that was seen on TV's around the world. In most cases the wildlife response was unplanned or under planned, not well organized and with a few exceptions not widely considered successful. In each case there was slow initiation of an official wildlife response, many wildlife responders were untrained or inexperienced at the start, scrambling for information on current protocols and models and facilities were nonexistent or inadequate for the number of animals impacted. As a result in each case the chance of success of the wildlife response was diminished.

By now most people and organizations involved in oil spill recognize that wildlife will likely be an issue in any significant oil spill and that the best way to deal with the issue successfully is to have a plan that can be quickly and effectively initiated.

To assure wildlife issues are identified and addressed early and to maximize communication, efficiency and responsibility it logically follows that the Wildlife Response Plan should be a part of the greater Oil Spill Response Plan. The collection and rehabilitation of oiled wildlife because of the special training, skills and equipment involved is not simply another part of the cleanup. Planning and organizing oiled wildlife collection and rehabilitation, utilizing a common framework and language will increase efficiency and the likelihood of success.

Elements For Success

The first goal of any oil spill response plan is to minimize the amount of oil that escapes into the environment and the first goal of any wildlife response plan should be to minimize the impact that any spill has on wildlife. This will include keeping oil away from animals and particularly sensitive habitats as well as moving animals away from the spill before they come in contact with it when possible.

In developing a plan to mitigate the effects of an oil spill on wildlife it is important first to understand those effects. Currently collection and cleaning techniques are limited mainly to birds, marine mammals and reptiles and terrestrial mammals in aquatic habitats. Most available information on the effects of oiling focuses on these groups. Generally effects can be divided into internal and external effects. External effects include fouling or matting of fur and feathers for those animals that have them and this will often cause loss of waterproofing and insulation, leading to hypothermia and possibly death. Other external effects may include skin irritation and burns, irritation and damage to mucous membranes. Internal effects may occur as a result of ingestion when animals attempt to clean themselves by grooming or preening Effects will vary with the type of petroleum product and its specific components, weathering and age as well as species, age and condition of the animal affected. In addition to the direct effects of the oiling there may be indirect effects related to captivity. The wildlife response and the wildlife plan must minimize these effects if they are to maximize success.

Wildlife Plan Structure

The Wildlife Response Plan's structure should reflect the structure of the overall response plan including sections on strategy, operations, and data. This common framework and common language should facilitate communication and understanding between responders in all areas. This framework has been utilized to respond to oil spills successfully for a number of years and many spills and is widely accepted and utilized within the spill response community. Wildlife responders may learn a great deal by studying and utilizing it will promote consistency as well as understanding by those unfamiliar with oiled wildlife response issues. Below are some general guidelines more specific information can be found in the recent IPIECA publication IPIECA Report Series Volume Thirteen: A Guide to Oiled Wildlife Response Planning. The most important consideration in terms of structure is that the wildlife plan follows and fits into the structure of the overall response plan.

Strategy Section

The strategy section should include the purpose, goals and overall priority of the plan. It should define the geographical scope as well as identify the management structure for the wildlife response as well as place it within the overall management structure of the spill response.

- Introduction and Wildlife Plan Philosophy—This subsection should put the plan into perspective. It should describe where the plan fits into local, regional or national or international plans and bodies. It should include statutory requirements, authorities and responsibilities and how it will interface with the overall oil spill response structure. It should clearly communicate the philosophy of the wildlife response plan. Some plans identify exactly what organization/contractor will manage the wildlife response utilizing pre-staged equipment in pre-identified facilities or others lay out how that will be done at the time of an incident. This area should also describe the goals and scope. For example a plan may be meant to prepare for a spill of up 2500 live birds, 2000 carcasses collected, 100 fur seals, and 50 sea turtles. Or it may be written to prepare for the worst-case scenario within the geographical scope of the area.
- Risk Assessment—This sub-section should assess the risk of a spill and its impact. This should include species and habitats at risk, species of high conservation value or priority and information on seasonal temporal impacts. Sensitivity or oil vulnerability maps that denote species or animal groups and their seasonal presence can be especially helpful in planning and as well as assessment and execution of the plan.
- Wildlife Response Strategies—The section should identify specific response strategies to be considered. These should include initial assessment, protective booming, wildlife deterrence and hazing, preemptive capture and collection and treatment including triage and euthanasia.
- Safety issues—As in all areas of spill response human safety is the highest priority. The wildlife response plan should address potential risks and how they will be addressed in each area in the field, during transport, at collection stations (if they are utilized) and at the rehabilitation centers. It should include all local legal requirements as well as organizational requirements and provide an overview of the expected safety issues.
- Organizational structure—One of the most important aspects of a successful wildlife response is a clear, efficient and effective organizational structure that puts the right people in the right places, facilitates necessary communication and documentation, and provides the support necessary to allow the for safe and successful execution of the plan while still providing flexibility to deal with unexpected events. This subsection should describe exactly how this would be accomplished.
- Personnel/Volunteers—The wildlife response strategy for personnel provides an overview of the personnel needed for the wildlife response and how they will be provided. What mix of specialized contractors, local wildlife groups, animal welfare groups and convergent volunteers will be used and what training and support will be provided
- Equipment and supplies—This sub-section addresses the strategy for procurement of equipment needed for a wildlife response. What types of equipment will be stockpiled, what types will be pre-sourced and what type may be easily and quickly procured locally at the time of an event.
- Facilities—This sub-section should designate how the facilities used for rescue and rehabilitation of oiled wildlife will be secured. These may be either permanent, purpose built facilities, retrofitted facilities or pre-identified buildings that will be converted to a facility in the event of a spill. The plan should include an activation procedure for all facilities.
- Media relations -This subsection should outline the strategy for working with media. How media will be handled within the wildlife response and how that fits within the media plan for the overall response including the interface with the Joint Information Center if there is one. This should include how the needs of the media will be balanced with the needs of the oiled wildlife
- Training and Exercises—This sub-section describes what training is necessary prior to implementation of the plan as well as ongoing training and exercising. Exercising to a detailed level is critical to both test the plan as well as keep key personnel well versed in it
- Documentation and cost recovery—This subsection provides an overview of the system and forms that will be used to record and track activities and expenses as well as animal records.
- Permitting requirements—This sub-section should include descriptions of necessary permits for all of the activities within the wildlife plan including deterrence, preemptive capture, capture rehabilitation, release and post release monitoring and the authorizing agencies.
- Waste management—This sub-section strategies for proper waste storage and disposal of waste generated by the wildlife response, including solid waste, oil contaminated solids and liquids and animal feces
- Demobilization The strategy section should include how decisions will be made to demobilize the wildlife unit in a timely and organized manner.
- Evaluation—This subsection should describe the evaluation philosophy and strategy. What are the goals of evaluation and how will the products be utilized.

Operations Section

This section will provide the information required to successfully mesh the various parts of the wildlife response unit into a cohesive team that gets the job done. It will include notification and activation procedures, including names and numbers of individuals and organizations needed to initiate the wildlife response. Job descriptions or actions cards for key personnel will provide reminders that can be used during the initial stages of activation as well as evaluation.

- Initial Actions and Procedures—This sub-section should include the procedures for reporting the incident and notify-

ing key initial responders as well as gathering information to facilitate good decision making regarding in the initial stages of the wildlife response.

- Planning and Mobilization—This sub-section should describe the procedures for assembling the initial planning team, identifying priorities including, and mobilizing the immediate response including identifying facilities, personnel and equipement availability. It should also describe how planning for the near term response will take place as well as how and when decisions on escalating the response will be made.
- Management of Personnel/Volunteers—The personnel subsection should provide the management structure necessary to integrate the paid staff and volunteers of varying experience levels quickly and smoothly into an efficient response unit. It should include a clearly delineated management team that everyone can quickly understand as well as training procedures to assure safety as well as an effective wildlife response. It should include job descriptions for each position and checklists to promote consistency and efficiency in each position throughout the response.
- Equipment and supplies—This sub-section addresses the procedures for procurement of equipment and supplies needed after the initial activation. This includes equipment for collection, transportation, husbandry and veterinary care, administrative equipment as well as facility and maintenance equipment.
- Facilities—This sub-section should designate how the facilities used for rescue and rehabilitation of oiled wildlife will be managed. This should include an activation and deactivation procedure for all facilities as well as maintained and expansion as required
- Training and Exercises—This sub-section describes what training is necessary prior to implementation of the plan as well as ongoing training and exercising. Exercising to a detailed level is critical to both test the plan as well as keep key personnel well versed in it
- Documentation and cost recovery—This subsection provides the framework and forms for the system that will be used to record and track activities and expenses as well as animal records.
- Permitting requirements—This sub-section should include descriptions of necessary permits for all of the activities within the wildlife plan including deterrence, preemptive capture, capture rehabilitation, release and post release monitoring, the authorizing agencies and contact numbers and how to obtain the permits needed in each specific incident.
- Waste management—This subsection describes how waste will be properly stored and disposed of including solid waste, oil contaminated solids and liquids and animal feces
- Demobilization The sub-section should include how decisions will be made to demobilize the wildlife unit in a timely and organized manner.
- Evaluation—This subsection will describe how each response will be evaluated, provide the tools for the evaluation as well as how the lessons learned will be incorporated into the revised plan.

Data Section

The data section is where most of the details of the plan will be provided. These will include contact details for personnel, suppliers, and those responsible for facilities. It will include the lists of supplies already stockpiled as well as those needed for initiation of the response. It will list any pre-identified facilities. It will include copies of forms utilized to communicate document and collect data. Other data included here might be templates for safety plans, care protocols and maps denoting topography, access, culturally sensitive sites and species and habitat data.

CONCLUSION

In many areas of the world today planning for oiled wildlife response, if it exists at all, is far behind conventional spill response planning. While this is deficiency is recognized by many there is still much work to be done to develop wildlife plans, exercise them and implement them when necessary. A good wildlife response plan is one that is well thought-out and detailed addressing all foreseeable wildlife issues, describing the resources needed and providing the foundation and framework to assure the best possible result when wild animals are impacted by an oil spill. Experience has shown time and again that slow initiation of the wildlife response; ineffectual management structure; inconsistent, inappropriate or outdated protocols; a lack of adequate pre-identified personnel with appropriate training and experience; inadequate, inappropriate or outdated stockpiles of equipment; or a lack of appropriate pre-identified facilities matched to the risk will likely impact the success of a wildlife response. While it should be recognized that not all factors can be controlled or impacts avoided careful planning followed by prompt initiation of a wildlife response well integrated into the spill response system will have the best chance of mitigating the impacts and facilitating the restoration of the environment.

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BIOGRAPHY

Curt Clumpner is the Northwest Regional Representative for International Bird Rescue Research Center, He is founder and former director of HOWL Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Lynnwood, WA, and has been involved in wildlife rehabilitation since 1981. He has cared for a variety of wild animals from songbirds to large game mammals. Curt has responded to many oil spills beginning in 1984 including the ARCO Anchorage (1985), Nestucca (1988-89), Exxon Valdez (1989), and the American Trader (1990. He has responded to spills internationally in Argentina, Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Norway, Scotland, Spain and South Africa.

Curt is currently President of the Board of Directors of the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association, NWRA, a former board member of the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council, and is a member of numerous professional associations.

He is a member of the IFAW Emergency Relief 'Core' Team and has represented IFAW at site visits, meetings and conferences on numerous occasions. Curt has been involved in wildlife contingency planning efforts in a number of areas, most recently working with the Oil Spill Company and British Petroleum on