

**OIL SPILL CONTINGENCY PLAN  
FOR  
LAGUNA ATASCOSA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE,  
TEXAS**

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Texas General Land Office**

**Revised by**

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Linda Laack**

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## **Oil Spill Contingency Plan Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge**

### **Overview**

**Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 450, Rio Hondo, Texas, (956) 748-3607. Laguna Atascosa NWR is the largest protected area of natural habitat left in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, an oasis for wildlife with few alternatives. The 88,379-acre refuge (in three main units: (1) Laguna Atascosa NWR, 45,187 acres; (2) Bahia Grande Unit, 19,910 acres; and (3) South Padre Island Unit, 23,282 acres) is located in Cameron County and Willacy County, Texas (see attached map). Refuge visitors can drive on the tour roads or walk one of the many trails for a close-up view of native shrubs and trees. Wildflowers are plentiful during March and April. Alligators, ocelots, Texas tortoise, and a variety of birds can be seen along with other wildlife (including many butterfly species) and an abundance of waterfowl. The main refuge is located about 18 miles east of Rio Hondo on FM 106 and is open sunrise to sunset daily.**

### **Intent**

This plan is intended to serve as a step-by-step guide to emergency oil spill response, for refuge personnel, in the event that such a spill threatens refuge lands and wildlife resources.

Because it may take several hours before professional oil spill responders and clean up crews arrive, the emergency efforts of refuge personnel may play a key role in minimizing impacts to refuge lands and wildlife resources. The primary goal in this emergency response is to minimize the impacts on the trust resources of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Appendix A lists the priorities for Service response, as outlined in the Service's Response Plan for Discharges of Oil and Releases of Hazardous Substances (Service Contingency Plan - SCP). For specifics regarding legal authorities and responsibilities, refer to the Service Contingency Plan.

This plan pertains to spill of petroleum products only. Because of the threat to human health involved in responding to hazardous substances spill, evacuation may be the appropriate response. There are few Service personnel who are trained for hazardous spill response. The Service policy states that Service personnel will not enter hazardous waste sites without specific Regional clearance. Additionally, the likelihood of a petroleum spill in the vicinity of Laguna Atascosa NWR is greater than that of a hazardous substance spill, since most barges carrying hazardous waste are double-hulled versus the single-hulled barges used for petroleum products.

Following is a numbered, step-by-step response sequence that should be followed in the event an oil spill is discovered or reported to the refuge office. The three most likely spill scenarios are covered in the response sequence. These three scenarios are:

- (A) A pipeline rupture at the Upper Cayo Atascosa crossing at State FM 106,
- (B) A barge collision or spill in the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), or
- (C) A barge collision or spill in the Harlingen Ship Channel.

After completing Steps 1 through 7, proceed to 8A (pipeline rupture at Upper Cayo Atascosa), 8B (spill in the GIWW), or 8C (spill in the Harlingen Ship Channel) according to the spill scenario. Actions which should be taken in order to prepare for a spill are presented in Appendix C. Equipment needs are presented Appendix D. Colonial bird nesting islands are listed in Appendix E, and secondary responses are listed in Appendix F. Appendix G provides telephone numbers of those who may need to be contacted. Wildlife rehabilitation and oiled bird cleaning are addressed in Appendix H, even though related activities are not strictly emergency priority issues. Prevention and habitat protection must be the focus during the first few hours.

This is a dynamic document and is intended to be updated as appropriate. Although it is recognized that it is impossible to foresee, prepare for, and control all potential oil spill scenarios, it is hoped that this document will help guide personnel reacting in the critical initial stages.

Priority Response Sequence

1. Cease all non-essential work. If more than one staff member is available, assign one to make the telephone contacts (i.e., Steps 2-6) while other personnel proceed immediately to Step 6. If only one staff member is available, begin with the phone calls in the order listed.

2. If he has not already been notified, call the Refuge Manager (or his designees):

<b>John Wallace</b>	<b>Office</b>	<b>(956) 748-3607 ext. 101</b>	<b>245-0625 (cell)</b>
<b>Sonny Perez</b>	<b>Office</b>	<b>(956) 748-3607 ext. 202</b>	<b>873-0031 (cell)</b>
<b>Linda Laack</b>	<b>Office</b>	<b>(956) 748-3607 ext. 113</b>	<b>245-9445 (cell)</b>

**(See Appendix G for additional numbers)**

3. If they have not already been notified, call:

<b>Texas General Land Office</b>	<b>1-800-832-8224</b>	
<b>TGLO Brownsville</b>	<b>(956) 504-1417</b>	<b>(956) 459-3135 (cell)</b>

<b>National Response Center</b>	<b>(800) 424-8808</b>	<b>or (202) 267-2675</b>
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<b>Corpus Christi Marine Safety Office</b>	<b>(361) 888-3162</b>	
<b>MSO Brownsville</b>	<b>(956) 546-2786</b>	<b>592-0991 (cell)</b>

<b>USFWS Spill Response</b>		<b>(361) 994-9005</b>
<b>Clare Lee</b>	<b>Pager</b>	<b>(361) 224-3432</b>
<b>Ken Rice</b>	<b>Pager</b>	<b>(361) 889-8878</b>

<b>Texas Parks &amp; Wildlife Department</b>		
<b>Michael Weeks (Kills and Spills Team)</b>	<b>Pager</b>	<b>(800) 299-4099 PIN#7858</b>
<b>Randy Blankenship (Coastal Fisheries)</b>		<b>(956) 350-4490</b>

<b>USFWS Fire Management Officer –</b>	<b>Mark Ruggiero</b>	<b>(956) 784-7602</b>
	<b>Cell Phone</b>	<b>(956) 607-9472</b>
	<b>Pager</b>	<b>888-732-8332</b>

4. Tell each person called:
  - a) Your name and callback number.
  - b) Exact location and nature of the incident.
  - c) Extent of personal injuries, fire, property and resource damage.
  - d) Wind speed and direction (if possible).
  - e) If identifiable, the type of material involved and the extent of the spill, and the barge or ship name and number. **ONLY trained personnel should ever approach a fire or spill.**
5. Call the designated OAS pilot and arrange for an overflight survey for the Refuge Manager, or his/her designee, immediately, or at first light if at night.

**McCreery Aviation Co. S. 10<sup>th</sup>, McAllen  
USCG SPI Station**

**(956) 686-1774  
(956) 761-2668**

6. Check wind speed and direction. Call Weather information at

**Brownsville National Weather Service**

**(956) 546-5378**

Or check the website at: <http://www.srh.weather.gov/bro/>

7. If possible, designate one person as the media contact. This should be someone who can provide specific information about the resource at risk. If the spill is large enough to catch the media's attention, the refuge will be besieged by the press! Advise the media they must remain out of refuge airspace since this may haze birds from clean to oiled areas. Establish security using USFWS Refuge Law Enforcement Officers. Allow only essential personnel on scene.

#### **A. Rupture in pipeline at the Upper Cayo Atascosa crossing at State FM 106**

- 8A. Ensure the safety of all responders. Conduct safety meeting taking into account the particulars of the area and the material spilled. (Review Attachment 1 for Site Safety Plan)
- 9A. Take out Texas GLO Refuge trailer and immediately go to the Upper Cayo Atascosa to deploy containment boom across the Upper Cayo at the two fixed stations, securing the boom to the fixed anchor points. Maximize protection of environmentally sensitive areas. (Review Scenario A)
- 10A. Remain in the area and haze birds away from the oiled sections.
- 11A. Coordinate with the USFWS spill coordinator to determine if oiled birds will be cleaned. Follow oiled wildlife rehabilitation protocol (See Appendix H).
- 12A. Set up Command Post at Refuge Headquarters Office and establish ICS.
- 13A. Remove oil from contaminated areas.
  - Manual removal
  - Alternative technologies (in-situ burn, surface washing agents, etc.).

B. **One or more barges run aground or collide in the GIWW**, breaking their hulls and releasing their petroleum product cargo. Depending on the winds, much of this may soon end up on refuge property. During winter months, (October-March) redhead ducks will be at high risk. During spring and summer, (February-July) nesting colonies of birds on the rookery islands will be at high risk. Concentrations of shorebirds will be at risk from August through April.

8B. Ensure the safety of citizens and response personnel (See Attachment 1). Equipment needed: airboats, shallow water boats, response trailer equipped with 10” to 18” containment boom, and ATV’s. Stage response trailers along Bayside Wildlife Drive (Refuge tour road) that runs along the Laguna Madre. Use ATV’s to pull boom out of trailers to shoreline. Use airboats to deploy boom off of shoreline. Maximize protection of environmentally sensitive areas. (Review Scenario B)

\*The Laguna Madre is extremely shallow, use airboats for boom deployment.

\*\*Make sure contractors bring food and water out to spill site. There are no stores or restaurants in the area.

\*\*\*Launch boats from Cullen House (get permission first) and Laguna Vista Police Department.

9B. Communications: Nextel does not work at the Refuge. Request a satellite phone system. Cell phone coverage is also limited. Use the main refuge office phone (748-3607) to relay messages.

10B. Set up Command Post at Refuge Headquarters Office or TGLO mobile Command Post and establish ICS.

11B. Remove oil from contaminated areas.

- Alternative technologies (In-situ burn, surface washing agents, etc.).

### C. **Barge Spill in the Harlingen Ship Channel**

8C. Ensure safety of citizens and response personnel (See Attachment 1).

9C. Immediately go to Crossing #2 and close the water control gates. This should prevent oil from entering Laguna Atascosa by a North wind.

10C. Remain in the area and haze waterfowl and other birds away from the oiled sections.

11C. Stage the Texas GLO Refuge Trailer at Adolph Thomae, Jr. County Park.

12C. Boom off the entrance to the Cayo Atascosa where it enters the Refuge. Maximize protection of environmentally sensitive areas. (See Scenario C).

\* Use shallow water skimming systems only.

\*\*Due to shallow water, use airboats and shallow water boats only.

13C. Coordinate with the USFWS spill coordinator to determine if oiled birds will be cleaned. Follow oiled wildlife rehabilitation protocol (See Appendix H).

14C. Set up Texas GLO Mobile Command Post at Adolph Thoma, Jr. County Park and establish ICS.

15C. Remove oil from impacted areas.

- Alternative technologies (In-situ burn, surface washing agents, etc.).

## **SCENARIOS**

### **Scenario B Map #92 – La Coma**

- Stover's Point is high priority with numerous bird rookeries and black mangroves.
- This area is high priority as Laguna Atascosa Refuge makes up part of quad.
- Airboats recommended.

### **Scenario C Map #89 – Three Islands**

- At Cayo #1 and #2, recommend 18" containment boom across entrances to refuge.
- Back country is accessible only by airboat.
- Cullen Ranch house could be used for access to back country and Three Islands in the event of a spill.

## Appendix A

### Priorities for Service Response

Each of the actions listed below should be provided for during advance planning and carried out where applicable in the event of a spill. The actions are listed in order of priority should lack of manpower or other limiting factors constrain the level of response to a spill.

1. Protect threatened and endangered species and their habitats including, where advisable, rescue and rehabilitation of individual animals.
2. Minimize the direct and immediate impacts to fish and wildlife populations (such as dispersal of birds and other wildlife) and advise the On Scene Coordinator (OSC) of actions needed to minimize impacts to or prevent destruction of fish and wildlife habitats.
3. Assist State agencies or the OSC with collection of oiled birds and other wildlife and advise/assist groups wishing to rehabilitate oiled wildlife. The Texas Wildlife Rehabilitation Coalition and/or the Tri State Rehabilitation Center in Delaware will likely be involved. Refer to Appendix H "Oiled Wildlife Rehabilitation Protocol".
4. Provide the media and public with information on Service response activities only through the On Scene Coordinator. Avoid talking directly to the press "off the cuff".
5. Perform other activities to minimize indirect impacts to fish and wildlife resources, as warranted. Identify priorities and mark nesting islands that could easily be boomed with absorbent materials to help keep oil off the beach.

# APPENDIX B

## Appendix C

### Preparations Necessary Prior to Spill

1. Locate aircraft pilot with proper OAS certifications for over flight survey. Clarify needs, billing, availability, etc. so that no time is lost when a situation arises.
2. Arrange for training of personnel.
  - i. Oil Spill Control School. Corpus Christi. Personnel involved in oil spill work should have 40 hours OSHA safety training.
  - ii. Oiled Bird Cleaning. Annual workshops.
3. Ensure that all staff that may be capturing oiled birds is listed on state and federal collecting permits.
4. Measure distance to be covered by fixed-position booms, taking into account sags and angular deflection arrangements. Acquire sufficient boom material. Install in site storage sheds or obtain trailer for storing/transporting booms and other spill control material.
5. Locate positions for boom anchors and set, i.e., four to five foot lengths of 6” to 8” diameter PVC pipe driven into the ground with about 3 feet exposed. Refuge personnel must develop a boom strategy, locating and marking exact locations where booms should be placed for maximum efficiency for all three of the likely scenarios.
6. Check to see if booms can be extended without wading/swimming, i.e., using throw lines.
7. Obtain information from the Port of Harlingen and the GIWW to find out what types of materials are transported in their respective waterways.
8. Carry out drills as required familiarizing staff with equipment, procedures, etc.

## Appendix D

### Equipment on Site

<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Item Description</u>
2	Air boats
1	17.5 foot tunnel drive boat
800 feet	Oil containment boom with 18-24" skirt
0	Ropes, throw lines for setting up booms
11	Bird hazing equipment (air cannons, etc)
18	Communication Equipment
	4 – Portable Radios
	4 – Base Radios
	10 – Mobiles
18	Transportation Equipment (13 Vehicles and 5 Tractors)
4-30 gallon containers	liquid soap
	Bird cleaning supplies & designated work area
	Scale, water pik
1	On site storage for boom material and other supplies
	1 – Bunker, <u>OR</u>
25' Semi-pontoon trailer	Trailer loaded with boom material for mobilization to site
0	Sorbent pads and materials, hay bales
0	Portable anchors for variable-position booms

## Appendix E

### Nesting Islands Located Off of Laguna Atascosa NWR

<u>Bird Count #</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Species of particular concern</u>
618-160	Green Island Cut Spoil	Terns
618-161	Green Island	Egrets, Herons, Ibises, Spoonbills
618-180	Arroyo Colorado Int. Spoil	Gulls, Herons, Terns, Skimmers
618-181	East Arroyo Spoil	Terns
618-182	Three Island Spoil	Gulls, Terns, Herons, Egrets
618-183	South Three Islands	Herons, Gulls, Terns, Skimmers

Note: All of the above islands are owned by the Texas General Land Office with Green Island being leased by Audubon.

This list should be modified and updated yearly by Refuge personnel to reflect actual status.

## **Appendix F**

### Secondary Responses

1. Search for, clean up, and tabulate number of oiled birds. Prepare data sheets on bird numbers and species. See Appendix H. As part of oiled bird wildlife rehabilitation efforts, considerable volumes of oily, soapy water will be produced. A tank for storage of this effluent will be necessary, along with a regular removal, by vacuum truck, to the potentially responsible party's (PRP) designated waste handler.
2. Maintain documentation of staff time and expenditures for equipment during the response since these may be reimbursed either from the responsible party or the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund administered by the United States Coast Guard. Accurate documentation will also be needed for Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) compensation claims.

## Appendix G

### Other Important Contacts and Phone Numbers

Pilot	(956) 686-1774
Rudy Escamilla, Maintenance Worker (airboat operator)	748-2075
Arturo Villarreal, Maintenance Worker (equipment operator)	350-3796
Ondina Diaz, Administrative Technician (purchasing)	748-4343
Linda Laack, Wildlife Biologist (wildlife resource specialist)	748-2664
Alfredo Salinas, Maintenance Worker (airboat operator)	542-4873
John Wallace, Refuge Manager	748-4284
Manuel Perez III, Assistant Refuge Manager	748-9595

<b>FIRE DEPARTMENTS</b>	Rio Hondo	748-2323 (Emergency) 748-4193 (Office)
	Los Fresnos	233-5858

<b>ADJACENT LANDOWNERS</b>	Buena Vista Ranch (Lou Powell, Ranch Manager)	748-3795
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<b>TEXAS PARKS &amp; WILDLIFE</b>	Randy Blankenship	546-1952
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<b>BROWNSVILLE COASTAL FISHERIES</b>		350-4490
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<b>EMS</b>	Harlingen & San Benito	428-3087 or 911 for emergency
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### **WILDLIFE REHAB & EDUCATION RESPONSE TEAM**

Sharon Schmalz	(281) 332-8319
Michelle Johnson	(281) 992-8080

<b>USFWS LAW ENFORCEMENT</b>	Tom Mason, Special Agent, Corpus Christi Office (361) 888-3167
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Rich Johnston , Zone Refuge Officer, Zone 5 - South Texas	(956) 784-7621 (office) 380-7814 (pager)
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Melvin Maxwell, Refuge Officer, Laguna Atascosa NWR	(956) 748-2803 (home) 268-5577 (pager)
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Tony McGallicher, Refuge Officer, Laguna Atascosa NWR  
(956) 541-2785 ext. 227 (office)  
318-4802 (pager)

Howard Huey, Refuge Officer, Laguna Atascosa NWR  
(956) 541-2785 ext. 227 (office)  
421-3830 (pager)

## **APPENDIX H**

During an oil spill event, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) will jointly assume the responsibility for the clean up and rehabilitation of oiled wildlife. The decision as to IF, WHERE, and WHEN will be made on a case-by-case basis. The procedures to be used will be those employed in the Oiled Bird Rehabilitation Coalition (TWRC). Only rehabilitators with current state and federal permits will operate clean up centers, with non permitted volunteers working under their guidance in the case of a spill having a major impact on wildlife.

**NOTE:** Oiled wildlife can be quite dangerous, especially herons and their kin. Do not attempt their “rescue” unless you are properly prepared with protective eye ware, nets, gloves, etc. Be aware of possible infectious disease risks from handling weakened and sick wildlife.

