

TACTIC: WILDLIFE RECONNAISSANCE (RECON)¹

Objective and Strategy

- Identify and locate any wildlife that may be present and affected by a spill or response activities.
- Incidental wildlife (marine or terrestrial mammal, bird, fish, and invertebrate) observations can be made by any spill responder. Systematic wildlife observations are the primary responsibility of Wildlife Observers.

Tactic Description

- Look for, record information, and report wildlife that are:
 - In oiled areas;
 - In areas at risk of becoming oiled; and
 - Where affected wildlife is likely to travel (e.g., onshore).
- At a minimum, report this information:
 - **What kind, and how many?** (e.g., flock of 10 ducks, pod of 5-10 killer whales, 3 large whales, 5 seals)
 - **What were they doing?** (e.g., flying away from response boats, feeding in the area, hauled-out, floating/sitting in the water, transiting in a northerly direction)
 - **Where are they?** (preferably latitude/longitude, but could also be a description, e.g., “nearshore/shoreline approximately 1 kilometer west of oil, in [name of] Bay”)
 - **Any other details** (e.g., degree of oiling).
 - **Photos and video** are helpful.
- Wildlife Observers follow general or spill-specific protocols to systematically search for, identify, record, and report marine and terrestrial mammal, bird, fish, and invertebrate observations in the vicinity of the spill and response activities. They:
 - Survey numbers of wildlife using replicable methods;
 - Collect or verify baseline information;
 - Identify priority species and habitats;
 - Locate oiled individuals; and
 - Monitor oil spill impacts on wildlife through time, including impacts on animal behavior.

¹ This tactic can be found in the Wildlife Protection Guidelines for Oil Spill Response in Alaska (WPG) in Section 9740.3.2.

Safety Considerations

- Bear guards should be used when working on land or in nearshore environments when bears may be present, or as outlined in the incident-specific Safety Plan.
- Observers should exercise situational awareness depending on their observation platform. For example, slips, trips, and falls are a particular hazard on land and Personal Floatation Devices should be worn on vessels.
- Traveling on steep or unstable surfaces (cliffs, mud, exposed slopes, shoreline rocks with surf, etc.) should be avoided.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE; e.g., oil-resistant outerwear such as Tyvek coveralls) will be outlined in the incident-specific Safety Plan and is dependent on the potential exposure to oil in the observing environment.

Operational Considerations

Operating Environments, Geographic Considerations and Access

- Wildlife observation may be performed in all environments where a spill can occur (inland; on lakes, streams, and rivers; on marine shorelines; and in the marine nearshore and open-water environments).
- Observers may operate from one or more platforms, including on foot, in a vehicle or vessel, or by aircraft.
- Observers must avoid unnecessary disturbance to wildlife while conducting wildlife observations.
- Use of unmanned aircraft systems (UASs or drones) is not covered in this Tactic.

Species Type and Life Stage

- Incidental wildlife observations can be made by any responder, from any platform.
- Wildlife Observers may use species-specific or platform-specific protocols, such as marine mammal shipboard surveys or waterfowl aerial surveys.
- Be aware of species-specific requirements for non-approach zones (setback distances), sensitive time periods, and other factors to prevent or minimize disturbance

Communications

- Ensure all forms are accurate and complete at the end of each shift.
- Incident-specific observation or survey protocols may identify specific communication requirements such as reporting thresholds to Unified Command and wildlife agencies.
- **All responders** can report wildlife observations through their supervisor to the Unified Command. Reports should include (at minimum):
 - **What kind, and how many?** (e.g., flock of 10 ducks, pod of 5-10 killer whales, 3 large whales, 5 seals)
 - **What were they doing?** (e.g., flying away from response boats, feeding in the area, hauled-out, floating/sitting in the water, transiting in a northerly direction)
 - **Where are they?** (preferably latitude/longitude, but could also be a description, e.g., “nearshore/shoreline approximately 1 kilometer west of oil, in [*name of*] Bay”)
 - **Any other details** (e.g., degree of oiling).
 - **Photos and video** are helpful.
- **Wildlife Observers** will follow incident-specific protocols for providing forms to USFWS, NMFS, ADF&G, and the Documentation Unit.

Equipment, Vehicles or Vessels, and Personnel for Wildlife Recon Tactic

- See [Table 1](#) (begins on next page).

Table 1: Equipment, Vehicles or Vessels, and Personnel for Wildlife Recon Tactic.

EQUIPMENT		QUANTITY	FUNCTION/NOTES
Binoculars		1	Observe and identify wildlife.
GPS (with track-line function if available)		1	Set to Datum WGS84. Track-line can be uploaded to GIS.
Camera (with geo-referencing if available)		1	For documenting large groupings or significant observations. Geo-referenced photographs can be uploaded to GIS.
Wildlife Observation Forms		10	Print Wildlife Observation Forms on water-resistant (Rite-in-Rain [®]) paper, for filling out in field or for transferring device app information, if that is required. Observations may be collected using devices (tablet computer, cell phone). Device apps may be developed for an incident.
Incident-specific Wildlife Observation Protocol		1	Allows designated Wildlife Observers to collect comprehensive and scientifically defensible Wildlife Observations. If no incident-specific plan developed, follow Wildlife Recon Tactic.
Pens/pencils		5 each	
PPE		As needed for each responder	Protect personnel from platform-specific hazards. Platform-specific (e.g., personal flotation device for boat-based surveys)
VESSEL/VEHICLES		QUANTITY	FUNCTION/NOTES
Varies. May include trucks, ATVs, boats, or aircraft.		Varies with incident	Enable Wildlife Observers to access survey area and conduct survey.
PERSONNEL	TACTIC-SPECIFIC TRAINING	QUANTITY	FUNCTION/NOTES
Field Team Leader	Experience using binoculars to find and identify wildlife, and experience and training in identifying wildlife species in Alaska.	Varies with incident	Serves as primary Wildlife Observer; supervises field operations and is responsible for communication with Unified Command.
Wildlife Observer	Same as Field Team Leader	Varies with incident	Observe wildlife; record data.
Any Responder			Communicate any wildlife observations, especially in first 24-48 hours of spill, to supervisor or Unified Command.

IMPLEMENTATION

All Responders: Report wildlife observations through supervisor to Unified Command, including (as practicable):

1. **What kind, and how many?** (e.g., flock of 10 ducks, pod of 5-10 killer whales, 3 large whales, 5 seals)
2. **What were they doing?** (e.g., flying away from response boats, feeding in the area, hauled-out, floating/sitting in the water, transiting in a northerly direction)
3. **Where are they?** (preferably latitude/longitude, but could also be a description, e.g., “nearshore/shoreline approximately 1 kilometer from oil, in [name of] Bay”)
4. **Other relevant details** (e.g., degree of oiling, if observed).
5. **Photos and video** are helpful.

Wildlife Observers

1. Preparation:
 - a. Determine appropriate observation platform and ensure that Wildlife Observers have all required platform-specific training and PPE (e.g., Personal Floatation Device for boat-based recon).
 - b. Obtain and review standard survey methods for specific platform or any incident-specific survey protocols. Obtain Permits and Authorizations (if needed) for specific method/protocol. Obtain landowner permission if required.
 - c. Obtain equipment, Wildlife Observation Forms (print on Rite-in-the-Rain[®] or other water resistant paper).
 - d. Obtain map/charts/aerial photos of area to be surveyed.
 - e. Coordinate with Mapping Specialist as needed to determine incident-specific format of any electronic data such as track-lines, waypoints, data file transfers, geo-referenced photos, etc.
 - f. Coordinate timing of surveys through Operations to ensure platforms and resources are available and to prevent interference with other response activities.

2. Field Implementation:
 - a. Conduct surveys, record on map the area travelled and surveyed, take photographs.
 - b. Follow instructions on back of Wildlife Observation Form while filling them out and ensure documentation is complete and accurate at the end of each shift.
 - c. For long-term events, establish a routine and consistent survey schedule.
3. Deliverables (end-of-shift):
 - ☐ Completed Wildlife Observation Form(s) for each area surveyed.
 - ☐ Map of areas travelled and surveyed.
 - ☐ Any other documentation required by incident-specific protocols and formats.
 - ☐ SD cards, cameras, and GPS units turned in or data downloaded.

Notes:

Related Tactics

- Collection of Small Carcasses and Documentation of Large Carcasses (WPG Section 9740.3.3)

Resources

- *Alaska Spill Response Wildlife ID Aid*, available on the ARRT [Wildlife Protection Guidelines](#) webpage, is a field tool designed to aid spill responders in the identification and recording of wildlife observed during a spill..

Forms (on following pages)

- Wildlife Observation Form
 - A printable version of this form is available on the on the ADEC [Area Plan References and Tools](#) webpage.
 - Print landscape orientation on both sides of one sheet of water-resistant paper.

Wildlife Observation Form Return form(s) to Supervisor, Wildlife Branch, or wildlife agency representative		Incident Name:		Date (MM/DD/YYYY):		INV (OLE Use Only):	
ICS Position (Group, Task Force, Strike Team, or other name if no ICS Position):			Lead Observer Name & Employer (Phone & Email if no ICS Position):				
			Training/Experience:				
Other Observer(s) Names & Employers:							
General Location:		GPS Datum: WGS84 (preferred) <input type="checkbox"/> ; NAD83 <input type="checkbox"/> ; NAD27 <input type="checkbox"/> ; Other: _____		Camera & SD Card ID #:			
				GPS & SD Card ID #:			
For surveys, GPS Trackline File Name: _____ Total distance surveyed: _____ mi <input type="checkbox"/> or km <input type="checkbox"/>							
OBSERVATION INFORMATION							
Platform: On foot <input type="checkbox"/> Truck/4-wheeler <input type="checkbox"/> Vessel <input type="checkbox"/> Aircraft <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>			Platform Description:				
Cloud Cover (%) _____		Wind Speed _____ mph <input type="checkbox"/> knots <input type="checkbox"/> OR Beaufort Wind Scale (1-6): _____			Direction wind is blowing from: _____		
Precipitation: None <input type="checkbox"/> Fog/Mist <input type="checkbox"/> Light Rain <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy Rain <input type="checkbox"/> Snow <input type="checkbox"/>					Visibility: Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/>		
Time	Latitude (decimal degrees)	Longitude (decimal degrees)	Species/Species Group	ID Certainty	# of Animals	Details	
EXAMPLE 0805	57.70818 N	-52.32819 W	seabirds	certain	18	Mixed seabird flock incl 10 least auklets; feeding, not traveling, 2 km from oil, no visible oiling, WP 33	
						START SURVEY (write time, location)	

Lead Observer Name: _____

Date: _____

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Time	Latitude (decimal degrees)	Longitude (decimal degrees)	Species/ Species Group	ID Certainty	# of Animals	Details
						END SURVEY (write time, location)

INSTRUCTIONS: Wildlife Observation Form (or follow incident-specific protocols if available)

Incident Name and Date: Fill out.	ICS Position: ICS Position of Wildlife Observer(s), if applicable. Record other identifier if no ICS position.	Lead Observer: Record information for lead Wildlife Observer (person with the most training/experience). Training/Experience: May include but not be limited to applicable degree, employer training, USFWS/NMFS training, etc.	
Other Observer(s): Record information for other Wildlife Observers.		General Location: General location of observations, from navigational charts or maps (<i>Ex: Growler Bay</i>).	GPS Datum: Check one (found in GPS settings). WGS84 is preferred.
Camera/GPS & SD Card IDs: Write ID numbers of assigned camera and GPS unit and SD cards (memory cards).		GPS Trackline File Name: For incident-specific protocols, record trackline file saved in your GPS. Total Distance Surveyed: record with units.	
Platform: Check one.	Platform Description: Record type, name, and identifying numbers/letters of vessel/vehicle/aircraft. If Other, provide details in description.		Cloud Cover: Estimate percentage.
Wind Speed: Record with units OR Beaufort Wind Scale: 0: 0-1 mph, calm, flat seas 1: 1-3 mph, ripples 2: 4-7 mph, light breeze, wavelets 3: 8-12 mph, gentle breeze, large wavelets, some breaking crests 4: 13-18 mph, moderate breeze, small waves, many whitecaps 5: 19-24 mph, fresh breeze, 6-9 ft waves, some spray 6: 25-31 mph, strong breeze, large waves with spray >6: 32+ mph			Direction wind is blowing from: Record direction. Precipitation: Check one. Visibility: Check one. Excellent = unlimited; poor = <100 m
Time: 24-hour format.	Latitude and Longitude: Decimal Degrees preferred. Regardless of format used, include any decimals and symbols for degrees/minutes/seconds. If no GPS unit is available, describe observation location as detailed as possible.		Species: Record the species as precisely as you can. For example, you might ID a gull as "short-billed gull" (to species), or as "unidentified gull" or "bird."
ID Certainty: CERTAIN: You are quite sure of the species or species type. MAYBE: You have some question about the species or species type. UNCERTAIN: You do not know the species or species type.		# of Animals: Record the number of individuals of the same species or species group. Large numbers can be a range; for example, "40-50 short-billed gulls."	Details: Note any additional details, including: GPS waypoint (WP); size, age, or sex of animals; behavior (feeding, preening, loafing, or other); distance to oil; photo numbers; record degree of oiling; any other info you think important. Degree of oiling codes: NO =no obvious oil on body. LT =light spots of oil. MOD =moderate patches over body. HV =heavily oiled all over. UNK =unknown.

Wildlife Observation Form – WPG Version 2020.2 (back page)