



Refugio Response Joint Information Center

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SPILL CLEANUP OPERATION REACHES 98 PERCENT, FOUR-COUNTY BEACH SURVEY RESULTS

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — The Unified Command directing cleanup operations for the Refugio oil spill reports the effort is 98 percent complete.

The cleanup progress measure is based on assessments of dozens of sites along 96 miles of shoreline. Remaining cleanup work is primarily being done along the shoreline in an area near where oil flowed into the ocean through a storm drain culvert after leaking from a pipeline.

Approximately 300 cleanup workers are currently involved in field operations, with about 25 public agency, commercial, and contractor personnel providing oversight, coordination, and support. Cleanup work is done in phases with assessments made along the way so a precise estimate on how long the remaining cleanup will take is not available.

The spill initially resulted in the closure of several beaches and fisheries. Fisheries were reopened June 29, and the last of the closed beaches, Refugio State Beach, is scheduled to open Friday.

One of the ongoing challenges in the response is determining if tarballs discovered on area beaches are related to oil spilled from the pipeline. The Refugio oil spill happened in an area where natural seeps of crude oil occur and cause tarballs on beaches in the region. A monitoring and sampling protocol has been established and will be carried out for months to come to ensure any recurring pollution from the pipeline oil is properly cleaned up.

Analyses -- conducted by the State of California Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response Petroleum Chemistry Laboratory -- of 44 tarballs collected in a recent two-day beach survey conducted across a four-county area from Santa Barbara County to Orange County identified one sample that was consistent with oil spilled from the pipeline. The matching sample was one of two collected at Las Varas Beach in Santa Barbara County. In accordance with sampling and response plans, a team has been assigned to Las Varas Beach to cleanup the area where the matching sample was found, and the area will continue to be monitored.

During the four-county sampling conducted July 9-10, representatives from the each of the counties, the City of Goleta and several non-governmental organizations including Heal the Bay, Surfrider Foundation, and Santa Barbara Channelkeeper accompanied the sampling teams as the tarballs were collected. All of the [results](#) from the Unified Command approved sampling plan can be found at www.refugioresponse.com.

Natural seeps in the area create tarballs throughout the year. Beach goers are encouraged to report unusual concentrations of tarballs to the National Response Center at **1-800-424-8802**.

"I'm proud the local, state, federal, and commercial responders, -- including volunteers and non-governmental organizations -- on this complex and difficult response," said Coast Guard Captain Jennifer Williams, the Federal On-Scene Coordinator for the response. "Although there are standard procedures and techniques, each major response always poses unique challenges and frustrating hurdles. Our team has faced these challenges with dedication, creativity, tenacity and focus. I especially appreciate the understanding, support, and assistance of local agencies and the public," she said.

The spill response Unified Command formed in the wake of the incident is responsible only for spill cleanup related operations. Other matters, such as natural resource damage assessments, investigations, law enforcement, and legal

matters related to the spill are handled by cognizant federal, state and local agencies in accordance with their respective authorities, laws, and regulations.

"For California Department of Fish and Wildlife, cleanup is only the first phase of our response," said Capt. Mark Crossland. "When the cleanup is finished, restoration begins which is critical for the environment and the community. We will be here until that restoration is complete."

While details on environmental impacts and wildlife damages won't be known until further studies and analysis are done, wildlife officials report some nearly 200 birds and more than 100 mammals were found dead in the spill area. Approximately 60 each of birds and mammals were recovered alive and treated by volunteer organizations and wildlife rehabilitation centers.

As the remaining cleanup operations continue, daytime single-lane closures of southbound U.S. Highway 101 west of Refugio State Beach in Goleta, California may still occur and cleanup sites will be off limits to ensure public safety.

Background

May 19, the Plains Pipeline, LLC Line 901 leaked and spilled oil that flowed along a culvert to Refugio State Beach where it reached the Pacific Ocean. Responders established a Unified Command comprised of the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Office of Spill Prevention and Response, Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management, and the responsible party, Plains All American Pipeline. At the height of the response more than 1,400 workers were deployed for field operations and several hundred more were working at the command post and in support roles.

For more information on the Refugio response visit www.refugioresponse.com.

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California Department of Fish and Wildlife News Release

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National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Honors Assistant Chief John Baker

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) today honored Assistant Chief John Baker of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) with the Guy Bradley Award for his 28 years of service to California's citizens, fish and wildlife. Established to honor the first United States wildlife law enforcement officer killed in the line of duty in Florida in 1905, the Guy Bradley Award seeks to recognize extraordinary individuals who have made an outstanding lifetime contribution to wildlife law enforcement, wildlife forensics or investigative techniques.

The award was presented to Baker at a ceremony held in Seaside in front of half the state's wildlife officers. Baker was chosen from a list of extraordinary nominees from across the country, and he is the first nominee from California to win the award.

To the 50 officers he directly supervises and the rest of the state's law enforcement division, Baker is one of the most highly respected wildlife officers serving the people of California today. Baker spent the majority of his career in the southern San Joaquin Valley, where he developed a passion for catching poachers and for working in cooperation with fish and wildlife conservation organizations in the region for the betterment of fish, wildlife and the habitats on which they depend.

Baker also spearheaded an effort that began in the mid-2000s to quantify environmental impacts associated with illegal marijuana cultivation. He was one of the first law enforcement leaders to move beyond rooting out illegal and often dangerous marijuana operations and to commit the resources necessary to remediate the contaminated sites the growers left behind. Remediation of these sites has become common practice today among CDFW and allied law enforcement agencies.

Baker began his career with the department in 1987 as a student assistant and later attended the warden academy. After 28 years of wildlife law enforcement, Baker remains enthusiastic about going to work every day.

"I've got a few years left in my career," he said. "I hope to continue to honor Guy Bradley's memory and this very special award."

About the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores our nation's wildlife and habitats. Chartered by Congress in 1984, NFWF directs public conservation dollars to the most pressing environmental needs and matches those investments with private contributions. NFWF works with government, nonprofit and corporate partners to find solutions for the most complex conservation challenges. Over the last three decades, NFWF has funded more than 4,000 organizations and committed more than \$2.9 billion to conservation projects. Learn more at www.nfwf.org.

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California Department of Fish and Wildlife News Release

June 5, 2015

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As White Sturgeon Decline, Anglers' Failure to Return Sturgeon Fishing Report Cards Could Lead to Restrictions

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is working to keep the state's white sturgeon population from declining precipitously. Much of that work is estimating the number of fish harvested (kept), the harvest rate and population size. Because many sturgeon anglers fail to submit their sturgeon fishing report cards and data from report cards is very important, new harvest restrictions or restrictions on the sale of the report cards may be required to address uncertainty attributable to uncooperative sturgeon anglers.

For the prehistoric-looking fish in California, it is as though 2015 is the ninth straight year of drought. White sturgeon only reproduce well here when the Sacramento River is nearing flood stage for many weeks during both winter and spring. That hasn't happened since 2006, triggering a period of decline that will last at least another nine years.

During this period of white sturgeon decline, conservation of the population and its fishery depends on CDFW's ability to adaptively manage harvest numbers. Good data is necessary for successful adaptive management. Data is gathered from research trawls, a tagging study, fishing guides, party boats, creel surveys and report cards.

California Code of Regulations, section 1.74(d)(1), requires sturgeon anglers, abalone and lobster divers, certain salmon anglers and steelhead anglers to send CDFW their report cards each year. Unfortunately, many sturgeon anglers – even those who are otherwise responsible – do not submit their catch data. Sturgeon anglers are second in enthusiasm only to abalone divers, but those avid sturgeon anglers are far less likely to submit their report cards than avid participants in other fisheries.

The white sturgeon population also declined because of the severe 1987-92 drought. The Fish and Game Commission helped jump-start recovery of the population by protecting more adult sturgeon in 2006 than it had previously. The length of legally harvestable white sturgeon – the so-called 'slot limit' – was temporarily narrowed for the spring of 2006.

"The stars aligned in 2006," said CDFW sturgeon biologist Marty Gingras. "Flows were the best since 1998 and there was relatively little harvest on the spawning grounds because the slot limit was so narrow."

Sturgeon anglers should see a brief period of improved catch rates in the next few years as white sturgeon spawned in 2006 reach legally harvestable size, then a decline for at least nine years. The rate and magnitude of decline can be managed through restrictions on harvest and can be better understood if sturgeon anglers submit catch data on sturgeon fishing report cards as required by regulation.

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California Department of Fish and Wildlife News Release

June 25, 2015

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Drought Prompts Fish Evacuation at American River and Nimbus Hatcheries

With a fourth year of extreme drought conditions reducing the cold water supply available, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is moving fish out of the American River and the Nimbus hatcheries for the second year in a row.

Bureau of Reclamation models suggest water temperatures at the hatcheries could be at lethal levels for cold water fish by August. CDFW has already begun to stock American River Hatchery rainbow and brown trout into state waters earlier than normal. These fish range from small fingerlings to the larger catchable size. The accelerated planting schedule will continue through mid-July when all the fish in the raceways are expected to be evacuated. This includes all the fingerling size rainbow trout that would normally be held in the hatchery to grow to catchable size for next year.

A new, state-of-the-art building at American River Hatchery, completed in early June using emergency drought funds, will enable CDFW to raise Lahontan cutthroat trout through the summer for planting into eastern sierra lakes and streams. The new building will also enable CDFW to hold a small group of rainbow trout fingerlings that are scheduled to be stocked in west side sierra put-and-grow fisheries by airplane in July. The new hatchery building utilizes water filters, ultraviolet sterilization techniques and large water chillers to keep water quality and temperatures at ideal levels for trout rearing. However, the new technology is limited to the hatchery building and not the raceways, which will limit capacity to include only the Lahontan cutthroat trout once the fish start to grow to larger sizes.

Nimbus Hatchery has already begun relocating some 330,000 steelhead to the Feather River Hatchery Annex to be held through the summer. When the water temperature at the Nimbus Hatchery returns to suitable levels in the fall, the steelhead will be brought back to Nimbus to finish growing and imprinting then will be released into the lower American River. The Feather River Hatchery Annex is supplied by a series of groundwater wells that maintain cool water temperatures throughout the year.

The fall run Chinook salmon from Nimbus Hatchery have all been released into state waterways. If necessary, the chilled American River Hatchery building will be used this fall to incubate and hatch Chinook salmon from Nimbus Hatchery.

“Unfortunately, the situation is similar to last year,” said Jay Rowan, Acting Senior Hatchery Supervisor for CDFW’s North Central Region. “We have begun to implement contingency plans to avoid major fish losses in the two hatcheries. We want to do the best job we can to provide California anglers with good fishing experiences and communicate when there will be deviations from normal practices. With that in mind, we want to let anglers in the area know that a lot more fish than normal will be going out into area waters served by American River Hatchery.”

Rowan said that the number of fish planted at various waterbodies will increase as the planting timeframe decreases, so the fishing should be very good through the summer at foothill and mountain elevation put-and-take waters. Early fish plants now mean there won't be as many fish available to plant in the lower elevation fall and winter fisheries, so the fishing may drop off later in the season if the fish don't hold over well.

American River Hatchery operations focus on rearing rainbow and Lahontan cutthroat trout and kokanee salmon for recreational angling, predominantly in waters within the North Central Region. Nimbus Hatchery takes salmon and steelhead eggs from the American River and rears them to fish for six months to a year, until they are ready to be put back in the system.

To the south, San Joaquin Hatchery near Fresno expects to experience high water temperatures this summer. Transferring and stocking fish in advance of high water temperatures is planned. CDFW hopes to maintain some trout at low densities at the hatchery for the winter stocking season.

Annually, CDFW works with the Bureau of Reclamation to ensure its operations provide suitable conditions for fish at hatcheries and in the river. This year, conditions are forecasted to be dire with little flexibility in operations. Similar to last year, low reservoir storage and minimal snow pack will result high water temperatures over summer and very low river flows by fall.

Fall and winter rains, if received in sufficient amounts, will cool water temperatures enough to allow both hatcheries to come back online and resume operations.

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