

Extended Abstract

Oiled Wildlife Volunteer Coordination During the M/V Cosco Busan Oil Spill

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Abstract: This paper provides an introduction to components of the volunteer management system used during oiled wildlife responses within the State of California. A case study is presented of the volunteer management system utilized during the *M/V Cosco Busan* Oil Spill in San Francisco Bay, November 2007. Wildlife collection and care were administered through a partnership between the State of California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) and the Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN) based at the Wildlife Health Center, University of California, Davis. The OSPR and OWCN volunteer coordinators managed approximately 1850 volunteers who contributed to the oiled wildlife response. Volunteer notification and response, emergency volunteer center activation, specific challenges of managing both trained and convergent volunteers, and wildlife operations are discussed. Program changes for improved future volunteer management and communication during oiled wildlife responses are also presented.

Background

After the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989, the California Legislation passed the Lempert-Keene-Seastrand (LKS) Oil Spill Prevention and Response Act that created a specific program within the Department of Fish and Game, known as the Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR). The act mandated that OSPR ensure the best achievable protection of coastal and marine resources that included oil spill prevention and response to marine spills, natural resource damage assessment, restoration and care for oiled wildlife.

In 1994 an amendment to the LKS Oil Spill Prevention and Response Act created the Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN). The OWCN mission is to provide the best achievable capture and care of oil-affected wildlife. As such, OSPR partnered with the renowned Wildlife Health Center (WHC) at the University of California, Davis to administer the OWCN. The Wildlife Health Center coordinated the development of an oiled wildlife research program and regional primary care facilities, and facilitated the further development of the OWCN. Although managed by WHC, the OWCN is a cooperative network of over 25 participating organizations that consist of wildlife rehabilitation centers, conservation organizations, and academic and scientific institutions. These organizations work together during an oiled wildlife response to provide immediate deployment of trained personnel, volunteers, and access to care response facilities in California.

Volunteers in Oiled Wildlife Response

Volunteers are a critical component of oiled wildlife response in California. Volunteers provide their time and energy and are the critical work force in almost all aspects of an oiled wildlife response. Volunteers are used in animal care, kitchen duties, laundry, cleaning, facility maintenance, lab diagnostics, logistics and more. There are two types of volunteers, trained and convergent.

Trained volunteers are part of the OWCN through an affiliated organization and are provided with annual oiled wildlife training. Many of these volunteers work with wildlife in some capacity during non-spill times and have skills and knowledge that are vital for oiled wildlife rehabilitation. These trained volunteers are put on alert when a threat of oil spill impact to wildlife is present and are the first to be requested for assistance in the event of a response.

When the resources of trained volunteers are exhausted, the response system can be adapted to expand volunteer resources by incorporating volunteers from the general public. On the job training is provided to these convergent volunteers. Prior to entering the facility, convergent volunteers receive an introductory training that includes state and federal health and safety regulations, basic oiled wildlife care considerations, and biological hazards. They are then integrated into an appropriate area of the response where both staff and pre-trained volunteers provide them with hands-on training.

Volunteer Coordinators

During an oiled wildlife response, the OWCN and OSPR volunteer coordinators work together to manage volunteers. The OWCN manages the trained volunteers and OSPR manages the convergent volunteers in a joint effort. In addition, many OWCN organizations have their own volunteer coordinator who can assist in the initial management of their local volunteers to help with the immediate response. The benefits of this unique collaboration between OSPR and OWCN are vast. Turnkey facilities, trained volunteers, and a response system that can integrate convergent volunteers into a response based on required resources have created an efficient oiled wildlife response system in California.

Volunteer Notification

The OWCN volunteer coordinator notifies participant organizations of a potential response as soon as OWCN staff has been put on alert or has received information from participant organizations of an abnormal influx of oiled wildlife. Notification has historically occurred through email and/or phone calls.

Emergency Volunteer Center

At the beginning of a response the first thing the volunteer coordinators activate an Emergency Volunteer Center (EVC) at the primary care facility. The EVC provides an established meeting area for both trained and convergent volunteers. The EVC is a location for volunteers to fill out required paperwork, receive introductory training, and updates on

key response information. Shifts are then assigned and a sign in/out form is filled out before volunteers are integrated into the response action.

In conjunction with the development of the EVC, a statewide toll-free oiled wildlife volunteer hotline is created to provide volunteer information and current status of the event.

OWCN Training

OWCN provides all network organizations with annual oiled wildlife training opportunities. Trained volunteers allow us to provide improved oiled wildlife care. All trained volunteers are entered into the OSPR/OWCN volunteer database where they can easily be notified in the event of a spill. This database also maintains information on people who have assisted in previous oiled wildlife responses and trainings or who would like to become involved. Their information can be searched based on regional needs. The following outlines the OWCN training program.

- 1) Online Training Series (OTS): The OTS is a series of basic training lectures delivered over the Internet. The series of trainings addresses topics ranging from the history of the OWCN to basic seabird and marine mammal rehabilitation techniques. It allows OWCN volunteers from all over the state to participate in training regardless of their location. This format allows volunteers to interact with the instructor(s) by submitting questions during the lecture.
- 2) OWCN Annual Rehabilitation Conference: This annual conference is a two-day event that provides both lecture and hands-on instruction in oiled wildlife response. Recent research findings, protocol updates, animal care, and hands-on wet labs are examples of the topics available to attendees. In addition to bringing all of the OWCN organizations together for training, it creates a sense of community and an avenue for sharing ideas.
- 3) Volunteer Coordination Training: In addition to the online trainings and annual conference, OWCN and OSPR provide annual volunteer coordinator training to the participating organizations. These trainings provide resources and tools to activate an EVC, and define volunteer roles and responsibilities in an oiled wildlife response. The assistance of the participant volunteer coordinators with initiating the management of their volunteers within the first few hours of an oiled wildlife response effort is paramount to OSPR and OWCN efforts.
- 4) Participant Outreach Seminars: Participant organizations may request an Outreach Seminar be conducted at their facility. These seminars are in-person lectures delivered by OWCN staff. Examples of presentation topics include: protocol updates, roles and responsibilities of the participant organization during oil spill and non-oil spill periods (e.g., animal stabilization or volunteer support), and technological development. The Outreach Seminars provide an opportunity for OWCN staff to address questions specific to the participating facility or role within the OWCN.

In 2007, OSPR and OWCN's volunteer coordination management framework was once again put to the test with the *M/V Cosco Busan* oiled wildlife response. The following is a case study of the volunteer coordination response that occurred.

Case Study: *M/V Cosco Busan*

Introduction

In the early morning of November 7, 2007, the *M/V Cosco Busan*, a 900-foot long container ship, collided with the fendering system of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and discharged approximately 53,000 gallons of intermediate fuel oil into San Francisco Bay. The *M/V Cosco Busan* response suffered, in part, from poor communication of protocols and processes already in place. One might say this was the making of a perfect storm. For one, the spill affected multiple counties, which made this event extremely political. Also, it occurred in a highly urbanized area that is very environmentally conscious. To further complicate matters, the public utilized social networking tools (i.e., Facebook, Twitter and blogs) to organize their own response efforts.

This case study will focus on the Volunteer Coordinators' (VC) role in managing pre-trained and convergent volunteers in the programs of OWCN and OSPR. This case study will include details surrounding the wildlife volunteers that assisted in the care and processing of oiled wildlife.

The overview provided below concentrates on notification and setting up the Emergency Volunteer Center (EVC), which includes registration and training of both pre-trained and convergent volunteers and corresponding lessons learned. Many of the events mentioned above went as planned, some exceeded expectations and a few have been revised based on lessons learned and are described in the final section of this document.

Notification

On November 7, 2007, at approximately 1030, the OSPR VC received a phone call from the OWCN VC that there had been a spill in San Francisco Bay and to standby. At approximately 1200, the OWCN VC informed the OSPR VC that OWCN had been activated by the Unified Command. In the early afternoon, OWCN and OSPR staff conducted initial reconnaissance and recovery in the San Francisco Bay. At approximately 1630, the OWCN VC reported, while in the field, to the OSPR VC that due to the significant amount of oil in the environment and the presence of wildlife in the Bay, a large impact on wildlife would be imminent. At 1700, OWCN VC contacted the International Bird Rescue and Research Center (IBRRC) VC to begin setting up the EVC. The IBRRC is one of the primary participants of the OWCN. The OWCN VC proceeded to review volunteer protocols, registration, and training with the IBRRC VC. In addition, the OWCN VC contacted the Bay Area OWCN participants, telling them that an oil spill had occurred and requested that each participant inform their pre-trained volunteers to standby.

By mid-afternoon, the OWCN VC contacted the OSPR VC requesting follow-up notifications be made to several of the OWCN participants. The follow-up notifications were made by the OSPR VC, and several of the OWCN VCs participants had already begun notifying their core group of pre-trained volunteers. This coordination and collaboration provided a rapid response from the pre-trained OWCN participants.

By late morning on November 8, 2007, the OWCN VC, while assisting with field stabilization reported to the OSPR VC that a small number of birds were being collected and transported by OWCN participants to the San Francisco Bay Oiled Wildlife Care and Education Center (Center) in Cordelia for care and processing. The Center houses the IBRRC, which is the lead oiled wildlife rehabilitation organization for the OWCN. At the wildlife facility, OWCN staff and pre-trained volunteers were already preparing the Center to care for the oiled birds.

At approximately noon on November 8, 2007, the OWCN Director contacted the OSPR VC and indicated that based on OWCN's field observations, large wildlife impacts were highly likely and, therefore, requested that the OSPR VC start preparing for utilizing convergent volunteers at the Center.

On the evening of the 8th, the OSPR VC was activated by the UC via the Wildlife Branch Director. The OSPR VC was instructed to report to the Center at 0800 on the morning of November 9. In addition, the OSPR VC activated the Volunteer Hotline (VH) and rolled the line to the Center per the approval of the State On-Scene Coordinator from OSPR.

The VH message included name of the spill, location of the incident, and information regarding volunteer requirements and needs. The VH allowed prospective volunteers to receive the most up-to-date information on whether their time and skills were needed to support the wildlife response. On the evening of the 8th, the VH message was only informational due to the rapid deployment of pre-trained volunteers.

Notification Lessons Learned

On November 7 at 1200 notifications went out to the Bay Area OWCN participants by the OWCN VC. This early notification resulted in a rapid response by the Bay Area pre-trained OWCN volunteers that helped prepare the Center to care for oiled birds that were slowly beginning to show up at the wildlife facility.

Early communications between the OWCN, OSPR and IBRRC VCs helped expedite the volunteer operations at the Center. For example, mobilization decisions were being made based on these early discussions on the magnitude of the wildlife response for this oil spill

OSPR VC should have activated the VH immediately in order to accommodate the large number of calls that could be expected for a spill of this magnitude in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition, several media outlets should have been used to provide the general public with volunteer information, including the activation of the volunteer center and the fact that trained volunteers were handling initial wildlife operations.

Subsequently, the VH has been updated to include multiple lines, and other communication sources have been identified such as local governments' emergency phone systems, and the use of social networking tools.

Currently, OSPR is working on a spill specific website that will provide up-to-date volunteer information.

Emergency Volunteer Center (EVC)

For oiled wildlife response EVCs are set up at the primary care wildlife facility that has been activated. In addition, all wildlife volunteer needs such as volunteer information, screening, registering, training, scheduling, supervision, personnel protective equipment, spill information, and volunteer tracking are handled at the primary care facility. The use of facility-based EVCs helps to eliminate confusion at the incident command post or spill site.

On the morning of November 9, the OSPR VC arrived at the Center at 1300. Upon arrival, OSPR VC quickly learned that the VH had been overrun by phone calls. The VH had to be suspended due to the overwhelming response from the public.

The IBRRC and OSPR VCs continued to set up the EVC while the OWCN VC was in the field managing field stabilization. IBRRC and OSPR VCs continued to register, train and schedule OWCN pre-trained volunteers, but many convergent volunteers had begun arriving at the wildlife facility. Having the pre-trained volunteers in the wildlife facility not only provided for a rapid response, but they were also able to provide hands-on training and assisted with oversight of the convergent volunteers while they performed their volunteer duties. The response from the public, though helpful, caused the EVC to become overwhelmed with convergent volunteers early in the response.

On November 10, the OSPR VC requested that additional phone lines be added in order to reactivate the VH. Unfortunately, such addition would require the partial closure of wildlife operations. This was not an option. The VH message was changed to direct potential volunteers to the OWCN Web site for volunteer opportunities.

Over the next several days, the IBRRC and OSPR VCs processed hundreds of pre-trained and convergent volunteers. At times, volunteer numbers exceeded our needs. This discrepancy between volunteers needed and volunteers present caused the Center to be overrun with volunteers and created frustration among the staff and those who wanted to assist.

As the oiled bird numbers increased, so did our need for volunteers. The Center is a 1,000 bird facility but is able to expand, if necessary. During the first few weeks of the *M/V Cosco Busan*, the Center utilized between 150-190 trained and convergent volunteers per day for a total of 1850. Over time, a core group of experienced volunteers emerged. This group of volunteers assisted staff greatly in the care and processing of oiled wildlife.

EVC Lessons Learned

One of the successes of this wildlife response was having a fixed facility ready to care for oiled wildlife. The disadvantage is that most of the wildlife centers are located away from populated areas. The remote locations do not allow the general public, local, state and federal governments and volunteer-use groups this opportunity to observe the EVC and how it functions during an oiled wildlife response. For future spills, OSPR will have a Public Information Officer at the wildlife facility so the volunteer information will be distributed quickly to all media outlets.

The OWCN, IBRRC and OSPR VCs coordinated and collaborated according to our procedures and policies. However, the OSPR VC arrival on the 9th, two days into the response, resulted in a delay in setting up the EVC. In the future, the OSPR VC will be activated simultaneously with OWCN VC.

The OWCN VC was tasked with many duties such as reconnaissance, recovery and transport and field stabilization away from the Center, as well as operations at the Center. OWCN has hired a dedicated VC who in the future will focus on volunteer management during an oiled wildlife incident at the EVC.

Early in the response, convergent volunteers exceeded our EVC processing and utilization capability and capacity. The OWCN has expanded their volunteer opportunities. In addition, OSPR's Convergent Volunteer Program has expanded to include volunteers that would like to assist in non-wildlife activities. With the addition of other volunteer opportunities, OWCN and OSPR hope to prevent being overrun by volunteers.

In response to volunteer coordination and other issues, OSPR has been conducting outreach with local governments and volunteer-use groups to provide information on how a marine oil spill unfolds and how convergent volunteers are utilized during the oil spill response. Typically, volunteers are not used to clean oil off of beaches due to health and safety concerns. However, during this spill, there was political pressure to use volunteers in this manner. The goal is to educate government officials and non-government organizations about volunteer policies and procedures during an oil spill event. Fortunately, the political pressure of utilizing volunteers for oiled beach cleanup did not hinder the overall volunteer wildlife response but did cause a great deal of unwarranted negative attention.

Current Status and Future of the OWCN's Volunteer Coordination Program

With respect to oiled wildlife response events, the OWCN's volunteer coordination program has a tremendous amount of growth potential. To better improve the OWCN's volunteer coordination program, a number of changes have been implemented since the *M/V Cosco Busan* spill. One of the most significant changes includes the addition of a staff member to focus full-time on the OWCN's volunteer coordination elements. With the addition of a new

staff member the OWCN has taken steps to address the communication issues that arose during the oil spill.

Prior to the *M/V Cosco Busan* oil spill, the OWCN conveyed information to its member organizations primarily by email and phone calls to established contacts, and with a general posting on its Web site. The information was then disseminated to each member organization's volunteers and staff members by the established contacts referenced above. Information to the general public on the OWCN's role in the response effort was provided by the Joint Information Center of the overall spill response. However, during the *M/V Cosco Busan* spill the need for the OWCN to review and revise its communication tactics with its member organizations and general public became clear.

During the spill it became obvious that wildlife response information needed to be distributed in a timelier manner to member organizations. Volunteers and staff members at member organizations were unable to obtain up-to-date information on the OWCN's response efforts and volunteer needs because many of the OWCN's designated contacts were working the spill. Also, the need for a website redesign was also made clear when potential volunteers from the general public had difficulty understanding the OWCN's role during the response effort. To address these issues, the OWCN has completed a full redesign of its website to better convey to the public the role the organization has during a response, as well as how and when pre-trained and convergent volunteers are brought into the response. In addition to restructuring the website so information can be more easily found, the OWCN has included a password protected section that houses important oil spill documents ranging from animal care information documents and wildlife dietary recipes to required oiled animal forms. Additionally, the OWCN has also developed a blog that is open to the OWCN's member organizations and the general public during both non-spill and spill periods. The blog works to provide pertinent information on the OWCN's response efforts and volunteer needs during an oiled wildlife response, while also providing information on the organization's work during non-spill times. This information includes current research occurring at the OWCN, training opportunities and information highlighting the work of OWCN member organizations.

However, while the OWCN has made progress in the area of volunteer coordination and information accessibility, there are a number of projects in development to further enhance this aspect of the oiled wildlife response. These proposed projects include the implementation of a volunteer coordinator drill program, which would focus on preparing local volunteer coordinators at the OWCN member organizations for the issues they may encounter with pre-trained and convergent volunteers. Currently the OWCN has an annual spill drill that focuses on testing the overall preparedness of a member organization, including testing staff preparedness and the member organization's ability to change from a non-spill to a spill ready facility. While the volunteer coordinator position is also included in the drill, the OWCN would like to more thoroughly drill this aspect of the response effort.

The OWCN is also planning to move its volunteer database from the Microsoft Access program to one that is compatible with both PC and Apple computer platforms. Additionally, the OWCN is investigating ways to tether its electronic volunteer database,

which houses information on both pre-trained and convergent volunteers, to its website so information can be uploaded remotely by volunteers. Lastly, the OWCN is looking into methods to provide for the emotional needs of pre-trained and convergent volunteers during a response so these valuable individuals leave with both a meaningful and positive experience. The OWCN is currently exploring working with organizations like Green Cross Academy of Traumatology, which is oriented to helping people in crisis following traumatic events.

As the organizations involved reflect on the wildlife response efforts to the *M/V Cosco Busan* oil spill, the incident has brought to light the relationship between volunteer coordination and communication and outreach with the general public, which are similar in nature but not in scope. Additionally, the spill underscored the importance of this component to the overall emergency response effort, and the need to improve current standards and utilize technological advances to both manage volunteers and better communicate with them and the general public.