



Unified Command Statement: Local wildlife activity near Hill Ditch and the Olympic Pipeline Gasoline Spill in Conway, WA

Burlington, WA (January 17, 2024)

Wildlife specialists in the field continue to monitor for impacts, including potential causes for decreases in wildlife activity.

To reduce impacts to wildlife from a spill, efforts are made early in a spill response to deter wildlife from entering impacted areas. As the response continues, increased noise and activity near a spill site and adjacent areas often causes animals to move away from the disturbance, reducing the potential for impacts to wildlife.

Wildlife professionals working with the Unified Command are in the field every day of operations, observing wildlife activity, using cameras to document activity, and frequently speaking with residents familiar with local wildlife movements. We understand area residents are concerned about wildlife activity patterns since the gasoline spill, particularly the absence of observations of river otters and beavers in Hill Ditch. Our wildlife experts have indicated it is likely that wildlife has moved from the area to avoid response activity and engage in normal seasonal behavioral patterns.

Because river otters are highly mobile and known to avoid areas with significant noise and activity, we would not expect to see river otters in the area around the spill site. We would expect them to seek out food and shelter in areas away from spill response activity in the Hill Ditch area. River otters are active year-round and constantly on the move. Males will travel up to 150 miles within a particular watershed in a year. An otter family may range 10 to 25 miles in a season, staying in a den only two or three nights before moving to a new location.

Beavers are nocturnal and are less active during the winter, spending much of their time in their lodge or den. This may be one reason for fewer observations, but it's also possible beavers are avoiding the spill area due to increased noise and activity near the spill site. Responders have observed beavers downstream of the spill site, in and around a den near the Skagit River, as recently as January 10, 2024. Wildlife professionals monitor the den frequently and use cameras to monitor nocturnal movements. Monitoring provides insight on wildlife movements in the area and informs strategies to prevent impacts to wildlife, including otters and beavers. One deceased beaver was recovered in Hill Ditch at the spill site on December 12, 2023.

Response activities involving wildlife are managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife with assistance from Focus Wildlife. Focus Wildlife is a state-approved wildlife response service provider. The Washington Department of Ecology approves [wildlife response service providers](#) which are companies with trained personnel qualified to staff and manage wildlife response activities during an oil spill. These providers coordinate with state, federal, tribal, and other response partners to conduct wildlife impact assessments, reconnaissance, deterrence, capture, stabilization, and rehabilitation operations should these services be needed.

Members of the public who come upon injured or deceased wildlife are asked not to touch or relocate affected wildlife and to call 1-800-22BIRDS.