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California's Solution to Wildlife Impacted By Marine Oil Spills - The Oiled Wildlife Care Network: Can This Program Work For Inland Spills ?

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Legislatively mandated rehabilitation of wildlife damaged in marine oil spills has resulted in professionally supervised rehabilitation efforts in California. The Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN) is a joint program of the Wildlife Health Center, School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of California, Davis and The California Department of Fish and Game, Office of Spill Prevention and Response (CDFG-OSPR). The OWCN is on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year to respond to injured oiled wildlife. In addition, the OWCN has organized over 20 wildlife care facilities with trained personnel available along the entire CA coast. The OWCN also funds a competitive grants program which supports research on the effects of oil on wildlife and other aspects of health related to species which can potentially be impacted by oil spills.

While the OWCN was initially established to respond to marine oil spills, CDFG-OSPR is now responding to inland oil spill incidents, and the OWCN has started to respond to inland spills as well. Certain issues associated with inland spill responses make them more challenging than coastal spills. The infrastructure of the OWCN does not exist inland, trained response personnel are geographically removed from inland spill sites and the species which require care are often very different. This combination of issues has resulted in less successful rehabilitation efforts at inland spills compared to coastal spill responses.

Most recently, the OWCN responded to a 600 barrel crude oil spill outside of Bakersfield, CA, where oil flowed approximately 1 mile through a riparian habitat heavily used by a variety of wildlife including introduced species (European starling), common avian species (mourning doves and red-winged blackbirds) and special status species (tri-color blackbirds, kit fox and kangaroo rats). A synopsis of this oiled wildlife response will be presented and challenges associated with this spill incident will be highlighted.