

### **Carcass Collection Protocols**

The purpose of this protocol is to describe the methods and materials required to collect wildlife carcasses from the field as part of response and NRDA activities during an oil spill incident. The majority of carcasses are expected to be birds, but some other wildlife may also be collected using these protocols. Marine mammals, manatees, and sea turtles will be handled by existing stranding networks following their own collection protocols. Unless otherwise covered in this Wildlife Contingency Plan, observations of carcasses of these species should be reported to Florida's Wildlife Alert Hotline (888) 404-FWCC (3922). Reports should include location, species, and numbers.

Procedures for U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and non-USFWS personnel are provided to address different procedural requirements for tagging.

#### **PROCEDURES FOR NON-USFWS PERSONNEL:**

##### **Operations Teams:**

- All field operations teams, including oiled-wildlife capture and rescue teams, shoreline protection teams, and clean-up crews who are unaccompanied by USFWS personnel, should be directed to collect animal carcasses when they find them.
- All field operations team leaders should be provided with carcass collection kits and incident-specific instructions for collecting carcasses. Instructions should include information on maintaining chain-of-custody.
- Team leaders should be directed to designate a single individual as the carcass collector.
- Incident-specific arrangements should be made to ensure appropriate transfer of collected carcasses from the field to the pre-designated carcass collection facility or designated USFWS official.
- [Carcass Collection Forms](#) should be provided to all field teams and collectors should be directed to complete this information, as appropriate.
- All collection teams will be responsible for reading and adhering to the *Best Management Practices for Protection of Florida's Coastal Wildlife* Appendix of this contingency plan.

##### **Carcass Collection Procedures:**

- When handling oiled carcasses, always wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (nitrile gloves, eye protection, oil preventative clothing, and oil resistant boots).
- When a carcass is found, **place the carcass in a paper bag or in foil wrap before placing in a plastic bag. It is important that oiled carcasses do not touch plastic bags as this may interfere with later hydrocarbon chemical contaminant testing.** Also, do not place used gloves in the bag with the carcass.
- Wash well with soap and water after handling carcasses.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling carcasses and be careful to avoid touching your own eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Place the paper-bagged or foil-wrapped carcass in a plastic bag and tie securely.

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- Tag the plastic bag with a blue Evidence Identification Tag (Form 3-2052) (available from USFWS) noting the following information: date, time, location, collector's name, species if known. If latitude and longitude can be provided, please use the Degrees and decimal minutes format (DDD MM.mmmmm).
- [Carcass Collection Forms](#) should be completed by the collector.
- All carcasses collected should remain with the collector until time of transfer to the appropriate authorities.

**Carcass Transfer and Chain-of-Custody**

- Anytime carcasses are transferred from one person to another, a chain-of-custody must be maintained. The chain-of-custody may be maintained by using the Chain-of-Custody Form provided in the kit prepared by the Wildlife Operations Branch.
- At the end of the day, collectors should be directed to transfer all collected carcasses to the pre-designated carcass collection facility or to a designated USFWS official. The carcass custodian at the facility, or the designated USFWS official, is responsible for ensuring that a chain-of-custody is established and maintained when carcasses are transferred.

**Carcass Custodian**

Upon receipt of carcasses collected by non-USFWS personnel, the carcass custodian or USFWS official will tag each carcass with a blue Evidence Identification Tag (Form 3-2052) and enter each individual's collection onto an Evidence Seizure Tag as described above. It should be noted on the Evidence Seizure Tag that the carcasses were received from a non-USFWS collector. The carcass custodian or USFWS official should also prepare a [Carcass Collection Form](#) (if this has not been completed by the collector) to include all information provided by the non-USFWS collector with a time and date of receipt. State trust species should be reported and turned over to FWC officials. Contact the FWC Wildlife Alert Hotline (**1-888-404-3922**) or other incident specific established oiled wildlife hotline.

**Carcass collection kit (non-USFWS):**

- Incident-specific carcass collection instructions
- Paper bags
- Aluminum foil
- Small plastic bags
- Large plastic bags
- Rubber bands or twist ties
- Pencil and / or permanent pen (sharpie)
- Carcass Collection Forms
- Chain-of-Custody Forms
- Tape
- Nitrile gloves
- Tyvek suit (if appropriate and/or needed for collection activities)
- Marking supplies (spray paint and/or flagging) marine mammal carcasses

**PROCEDURES FOR USFWS PERSONNEL:**

**Search & Collection Teams:**

- Search and collection teams will consist of at least two personnel. At least one member of the team must have previous carcass search and collection experience.
- Each collection team will be issued a carcass collection kit (listed at the end of this protocol) and be given search location assignments.
- All collection teams will be responsible for reading and adhering to the Best Management Practices for Protection of Florida's Coastal Wildlife Appendix of this plan.

**Search Locations & Search Procedure:**

- Search locations should be well-defined and documented so that they are easily repeatable.
- Search locations may be identified as shoreline segments as defined and provided by the Incident Command. If shoreline segments are not provided, then search locations should be described using lat/long from a GPS, or using descriptions of unique geographic features that can be easily relocated.
- Search zones or grids should be spaced to allow for thorough examination of an overall area while minimizing overall footprint of search activities that can adversely impact otherwise healthy habitats (e.g., trampling marsh vegetation and submerged aquatic vegetation). Nesting bird colonies **shall not** be entered for any reason, except in the case of a human emergency. If birds appear agitated by the presence of a search team, the search team is too close and should back up. If carcasses are spotted within a colony and the animals are showing signs of oiling, report the location and circumstances to live capture responders for further action.
- Searches should be conducted carefully and as thoroughly as time allows. Search effort should also be documented by noting the time at the beginning and end of each search on the Evidence Seizure Tag and Carcass Collection Form.

**Collection Procedure:**

- Begin each new search location by filling out the top portion of a Carcass Collection Form (attached to this protocol). Information on individual carcasses will be added as they are found. Also, at this time, assign a white Evidence Seizure Tag (Form 3-487) to this new search location. The Evidence Seizure Tag is imprinted with a unique Seizure Tag Number. Enter the INV (incident-specific) number; date and start time; and search location/shoreline segment.
- When a carcass is located, complete a blue Evidence Identification Tag (Form 3-2052). One blue tag is used to identify a single carcass and should be filled in to include: the INV (incident-specific) number; the Evidence Seizure Tag Number for that search location (shoreline segment); an item number (assigned sequential number; i.e., 01, 02, 03, etc); name of the collector; date and time; and the species (if known).
- Photograph the carcass with the completed blue Evidence Identification Tag visible next to the carcass.

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- When handling carcasses, wear nitrile gloves. (A new pair of gloves should be donned at the start of each new search location).
- Fill in the carcass information on the Carcass Collection Form including: species identification (if known), blue Evidence Identification Tag item number (assigned sequential number), photograph number, and amount/description of oiling. Determinations on carcass condition, scavenging, and emaciation should be made by experienced personnel as time allows.
- Place the carcass in a paper bag. It is important that oiled carcasses do not touch plastic bags. Also, do not place used gloves in the bag with the carcass. Place the paper-bagged-carcass in a plastic bag and securely tie the completed blue Evidence Identification Tag to the outside of the plastic bag.
- At the end of each search location (shoreline segment), record the stop time and stop GPS location information and estimate the width of the search area on the Carcass Collection Form.
- Complete the white Evidence Seizure Tag with information from all of the blue Evidence Identification Tags associated with each carcass found at this location. One white Evidence Seizure Tag should be used to represent (tag) all carcasses collected within a defined search location (shoreline segment). After the search of a specific location has been completed and carcasses have been appropriately bagged and tagged, the accompanying Evidence Seizure Tag should be filled in to include: the stop time, number of carcasses collected, blue Evidence Identification Tag item numbers associated with each carcass, and the name of the person collecting the carcasses.
- One member of the collection team should become responsible for that collection and their name should appear on the Evidence Seizure Tag.

**Turn in the Carcasses**

- At the end of the search day, the carcass collection person whose name appears on the Evidence Seizure Tag should take the carcasses to a pre-established carcass collection facility (with lockable freezers for incident carcasses only in a secure location) and sign them over to the carcass custodian.
- If circumstances are such that no designated carcass collection facility has been established, then the collector should receive guidance and assistance from the Regional Spill Response Coordinator regarding appropriate transfer procedures to a designated USFWS official.

**Carcass Custodian**

- The carcass custodian (if different from the person who collected the carcasses), or designated USFWS official, will complete the chain-of-custody on the back of the white Evidence Seizure Tag before logging the carcasses into the Evidence Storage Log (Form 3-2064). The carcass custodian will log the carcasses into storage on the Evidence Storage Log including the following information: sequential log number; INV (incident-specific) number; date and time; description of the evidence; Evidence Seizure Tag number; and custodian's signature.

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- At the end of each day, the carcass custodian should compile the number and species of oiled carcasses collected and logged, and transmit that information back to the Service's Regional Response Coordinator at the Florida Peninsula Command Post.

**Carcass Photographs**

- Photographs from each day's collection should be downloaded onto a disk and presented with the original copy of the carcass collection forms to the carcass custodian or to a designated Law Enforcement Officer.

**Chain-of-Custody**

- Anytime carcasses are transferred from one person to another, a Chain-of-Custody must be maintained. The chain-of-custody may be maintained by using the back of the white Evidence Seizure Tag or by using a Chain-of-Custody Form (Form 3-2063). A chain-of-custody form should be filled out for each white Evidence Seizure Tag (i.e., batch of carcasses with blue tags associated with that Evidence Seizure Tag). When there are only small numbers of carcasses, more than one Evidence Seizure Tag may be included on a single chain-of-custody form, provided all of the listed items are transferred at the same time. The information from the Evidence Seizure Tag(s) should be listed in the appropriate section on the chain-of-custody form, including all associated Evidence Identification Tag item numbers. Information and signatures of both the transferee and the receiver must be included on the form. The chain-of-custody form must remain with the carcasses and transferred to a designated Law Enforcement Officer, as appropriate.
- If evidence is not transferred in person (i.e. via helicopter, plane or mail), the custodian should describe how it will be delivered on the chain-of-custody form. All shipments must be sealed (preferably, using evidence tape) and signed to ensure that the shipment has not been tampered with during transfer.

**Carcass collection kit (USFWS):**

- Incident-specific maps or shoreline segment maps, if available
- Evidence Seizure Tags, Form 3-487 (white)
- Evidence Identification Tags, Form 3-2052 (blue)
- Carcass Collection Forms
- Chain-of-Custody Forms
- Carcass collection protocol
- Large paper bags (for otter carcasses)
- Paper bags
- Aluminum foil
- Small plastic bags
- Large plastic bags
- Rubber bands or twist ties
- Pencil and / or permanent pen (sharpie)
- Evidence tape
- Nitrile gloves

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- Tyvek suit (if appropriate/needed for collection activities)
- Marking supplies (spray paint and/or flagging) marine mammal carcasses