

# Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program

## *International Center for Birds of Prey Combined Use Avian Medical Facility ~ Oil Spill Response Facility*

### Background

On January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1999, the coast of South Carolina was subjected to one of the more dramatic oil spills in recent history. A ship en route to the port of Savannah spilled over 24,000 gallons of fuel oil into the Atlantic Ocean approximately 30 to 50 miles offshore of Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, just north of Charleston. Two days later, dozens of oiled birds, primarily common loons, began washing ashore. Birds were collected from Folly Beach, South Carolina north to Topsail Beach, North Carolina.

Between January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1999 and February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999, a total of 194 birds were retrieved. Since the spill occurred well offshore, it is estimated that close to 2,000 birds actually may have perished. The birds were treated at a Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Myrtle Beach, a temporary facility assembled by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources – Federal and State Natural Resource Trustees for the state of South Carolina. Tri-State Bird Rescue and Research, a private, non-profit bird rescue and rehabilitation organization involved in oil spill response, was contracted to operate the facility. Hundreds of individuals from communities up and down the coast of South Carolina volunteered their time and talents to aide in the rescue, recovery, and rehabilitation of the injured birds.

### Developing a Permanent Response Facility

After a thorough investigation by the U.S. Coast Guard, a responsible party was identified. The M/S Star Evviva, a cargo ship of Norwegian registry, was determined as the source of the spill. Under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, the Natural Resource Trustees were able to reach an agreement with the owners of the shipping line in 2003. Two million dollars in restoration funds were paid to the Department of the Interior's Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration account, the Department of Justice, and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

As the Natural Resource Trustees prepared their Natural Resource Damage Assessment, it was abundantly clear there was great need for a permanent facility that would have the capability to treat both injured, diseased, or displaced birds on a daily basis and oiled birds on an as needed basis. Had there been a facility with such capabilities in place at the time of the Star Evviva spill, it is quite probable that many more birds may have been saved. Since the Star Evviva spill, two other sizable spills have occurred off the coast of South Carolina; one requiring the rescue and rehabilitation of oiled birds.

The final Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan for the Star Evviva spill identified and considered five restoration alternatives, one of which was the construction of a bird rehabilitation center in



Photo credits: Ed Duncan, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources

South Carolina. Natural Resource Trustees partnered with an established bird rehabilitator to design and construct the International Center for Birds of Prey Avian Medical Center ~ Oil Spill Response Facility. The Center was dedicated in October 2007 and has been hailed as one of the premier oil spill response facilities in the country.

### For more information, please contact:

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