

North Atlantic Region

While the national news was dominated by the Prince William Sound disaster, another spill of #6 Fuel Oil was quickly cleaned up at Cape Cod NS. Although many magnitudes smaller, this spill was still threatening in that it came ashore at the principal nesting area of piping plover and immediately north of an inlet opening into a highly productive back-barrier estuary, Nauset Bay.

The Coast Guard led containment operations, using NPS, contracted, and volunteer cleanup crews. Despite having to give the plovers a wide berth, and brisk weather through the night, cleanup was accomplished before the spill was carried through the inlet into the Bay.

The offender has not yet been found despite intensive searching. This incident provided a valuable test of the Seashore's oil containment plan and yielded important information on its strengths and weaknesses. Especially noted were the limitations of volunteer labor (however well-intentioned), the value of technical information in media relationships, and close communication between the various agencies involved.

The recent completion of a major inventory effort, which includes a numerical model of tidal driven circulation within Nauset Bay, had just been completed in preparation for possible oil spills in this heavily-used and navigationally-difficult area. For future refinements to the control plan, the model will be used to map the limiting velocity of containment boom effectiveness and thus allow for the design of choke points in the estuarine flow network. This will further minimize the penetration of surficial pollutants onto the habitats of the Nauset system.

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Michael Soukup (Regional Chief Scientist) and Paul Buckley (CRU Leader at Rutgers) will be moving to the University of Rhode Island (Graduate School of Oceanography) this summer to establish the new Center for Coastal Research to serve coastal and marine parks in the North and Mid-Atlantic Regions. Much more on this later.