

## **Service Works to Save Lives, Provide Aid in Katrina's Wake**

Approximately 150 Fish and Wildlife Service employees are assisting other government agencies and relief organizations in the massive Hurricane Katrina recovery effort in southeast Louisiana and along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. In the days since Katrina's landfall, FWS employees have cleared miles of roads and emergency corridors to speed relief aid to citizens, operated boat rescue missions in New Orleans, supported search and rescue efforts throughout the impacted area, and provided food and lodging for emergency personnel and relief volunteers.

"We're continuing to focus on community assistance activities and support the Federal Emergency Management Agency's overall recovery effort," said Matt Hogan, Acting Director of the Service. "Service personnel were in the area within hours of the storm coming ashore and we'll help as long as we're needed. Our people live here too."

All Service personnel have been accounted for, although more than 20 employees have lost their homes or been displaced. Preliminary estimates suggest the damage to FWS refuges and facilities in the area affected by Hurricane Katrina now exceeds \$90 million, although not all stations have been assessed. Sixteen National Wildlife Refuges and other assorted Service hatcheries, field stations and offices across the region remain closed due to the damage they sustained from the hurricane.

The FWS response to the disaster has been rapid, aggressive, and varied. Earlier this week, FWS crews opened roads to Louisiana Heart Hospital and now are providing 200 meals a day to that facility, as well as to 100 Marines assigned to the area. FWS search and rescue crews have responded to a helicopter crash and an overturned airboat. As immediate needs are met, Service personnel are beginning to clean up debris around hospitals, schools and government buildings and extinguish brush fires.

FWS boat search and rescue teams from Mandalay NWR in Houma, Louisiana, and law enforcement agents from the Southeast Region have been working with FEMA and local officials throughout the disaster area. Over three days, an eight-member team made up of FWS personnel from the Lafayette field office and employees from U.S. Geological Survey, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, rescued between 250 people and 300 people from the New Orleans mid-town area. Later in the week, the team, which grew to include 38 volunteers and 18 boats, joined with a search and rescue team from Phoenix, Arizona, to rescue more than 100 sick and disabled individuals.

"Our people are making a difference every day in the lives of citizens across Katrina's path," said Acting Director Hogan. "Much more work lies ahead to be sure, but we are proud of the role our agency is playing in this relief effort and the dedication of our employees to one another."

For more information on the impact of Katrina and the Service response, visit our Southeast Region home page at <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/>