



## Partners working to protect ducks in Indiana Harbor canal



MARCH 20, 2015 6:10 PM • [LAURI HARVEY KEAGLE](#)  
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**EAST CHICAGO** | Dan Sparks said sick, dead ducks have been showing up in the Lake George branch of the Indiana Harbor canal for at least the last 25 years.

"It's a historical problem," Sparks said. "It's really nothing new, but it is bad."

What is new, he said, are the efforts underway to prevent more birds from suffering the same fate.

The birds are found primarily during the spring and fall migrations in the section being remediated as part of a \$56 million 2005 consent decree between Atlantic Richfield Company, BP Products North America, DuPont, ExxonMobil, GATX, Georgia-Pacific, Inland Steel and U.S. Steel. The work, which is being led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, seeks to remove legacy contaminants in sediments and water there, including those from a former Sinclair refinery.

Sinclair later became ARCO, BP and ECI.

"The old ECI site has petroleum product leaching from the property into the canal," Barry Sneed, spokesman for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, said. "For several years, an environmental contractor has changed out booms on Tuesdays and Fridays."

Sparks, Natural Resource Damage Assessment specialist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Bloomington office, said he found 17 dead diving ducks in the Lake George Branch of the canal over the last two weeks which had been compromised by the oily sheen there.

"They're filthy and they can't keep their buoyancy or keep their body temperature up," Sparks said. "One of the primary sources of mortality is hypothermia."

Sparks checked the site last week and found 14 dead ducks over two days. Three dead ducks were discovered this week.

One other bird was found alive and was stabilized by specialists at Moraine Ridge Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Valparaiso, but later died in the care of another rehab center, Sparks said.

Sparks said the numbers are not unusual for that site, given the quick warm-up last week and the spring migration pattern of waterfowl along the southern edge of Lake Michigan.

Efforts began in earnest last spring with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, ARCO, BP and the U.S. Coast Guard on how best to minimize the impact to waterfowl in the area.

"The EPA requested last week that (contractors) get in there and if they see birds come in there, try to haze them out quickly," Sparks said. "Everyone is working together to figure out how to rectify the situation. We're all recognizing now that birds are dying and that's a big improvement."

Scott Dean, spokesman for BP, said the partnerships are key in the process.

"Together we have already set in place a plan for the recovery of the stressed birds," Dean said. "We are also increasing the wildlife deterrent techniques at the former ECI Site, and are working collaboratively with EPA in its wildlife efforts along the Lake George Branch. EPA is in the process of soliciting areawide industrial partners to address wildlife concerns associated with the entire reach of the Lake George Branch of the canal."

Sparks said initial efforts to use small boats in the area to scare them away are working.

"Historically, there was no one there to harass them, no hunters, open waters," Sparks said. "Just a little bit of small boat traffic has been very helpful. As we see more and more restoration, they have other places these guys can go and they are going. The birds, right now, are at bay."