



2023 Texas Oral Rabies Vaccine Distribution Update

1/9/2023:

On January 9, 2023, the Texas Department of State Health Services and the USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service/Wildlife Services arrived in Edinburg, Texas to prepare for the 29th Oral Rabies Vaccination Program vaccine bait airdrop. This year the South Texas International airport is hosting our team for the first leg of the program. The Texas Military Department also deployed 6 members to support this mission. For air distribution of baits, DSHS contracts with Dynamic Aviation out of Virginia. Their Beechcraft King Air aircraft are specialized for distributing vaccine baits across the landscape targeting foxes and coyotes. The vaccine baits are produced by Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health USA Inc. The USDA also distributes these baits in 13 eastern states to target raccoons and to prevent the western movement of the raccoon strain. Texas flights will begin on January 10th along the southern border from Cameron County up to Webb County.

1/10/2023:

On January 10, 2023, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), the Texas Military Department (TMD) and the USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service/Wildlife Services (WS) arrived at the South Texas International airport (STX airport) at 8:00 to complete orientation and training. By 12:30, when the official first flights were scheduled, the skies were blue, and the temperature was in the 70s. All 4 planes departed on schedule and completed the first leg after approximately 2 hours. The second round of flights started at ~ 2:45 and landed between 5:15-5:45. In addition, the WS helicopter baited zones along the border and in Cameron County. They started this portion on Jan 9. The WS helicopter crew took 59,100 baits to accomplish this goal. For the fixed wings, a total of 74,125 baits out of the total of 196,800 (allotted for the first leg) were distributed on the first day.

1/11/2023:

On January 11, 2023, DSHS, TMD, and WS met at the airport at 7:30 am. The weather, unfortunately, was not cooperative, and fog encompassed the area. At 11:15, the four planes were able to depart for the first round of flights. A second round started around 2:00 and arrived back at the airport around 4:15 – 5. The weather was a balmy 80 degrees. A total of 67,500 baits out of the total of 196,800 were distributed on the second day of the mission.

1/12/2023:

On January 12, 2023, DSHS, TMD, and WS met at the airport at 7:30 am. Flights departed shortly after 8:00am to complete the distribution of the baits for the Edinburg region. Weather was very warm and windy. Cloud coverage quickly dissipated. Four planes went up and landed approximately at 10:30am. Two planes departed immediately to Del Rio to prepare for the second portion of the mission. The remaining two planes went up again to distribute the final lot of baits. They landed around 1:00pm. In addition, WS relayed that the helicopter distributed all of the baits assigned to them which was 59,100. A total of 55,175 baits out 196,800 were distributed. The final two planes departed for Del Rio and all staff finished up the operation to prepare for a travel day tomorrow.

1/13/2023:

On Friday project staff from DSHS, TMD, and WS traveled to Del Rio, meeting at Del Rio International Airport at 2:00 pm to set up for the 2nd leg of the project. Flights resume Saturday morning at 8:00 am.

1/14/2023:

On Saturday project staff began arriving at the airport at 7:00 am for the first flights at 8:00. Conditions were clear and cold with a moderate wind. Three of the 4 planes departed within a few minutes of 8:00 while departure of the 4th plane was delayed 25 minutes for replacement of a fuse. A second round of 4 flights began departing about 11:15 am and a third round of flights began departing about 2:30 pm. The last plane landed at 5:50 pm. Twelve flights totaling 7,087 miles were completed today with 138,000 baits distributed.

1/15/2023:

The project is running far ahead of schedule. The logistical hurdles of potentially completing the Del Rio leg of the project and moving to Alpine so early are significant, involving the adjustment of previously scheduled bait delivery dates, airport schedules, hotel accommodations, flight crew hours, and other factors. As a result, project managers decided to pare the remaining Del Rio flight schedule in order to adhere more closely to the original project schedule, lessening these logistical complications. On Sunday the flight schedule was pared from 3 rounds to 2 rounds of flights. The initial flights were rescheduled from 8:00 am to 9:00 am and all planes departed on time into partly cloudy skies. Second round flights were rescheduled accordingly, and the third round of flights was cancelled. The last round of flights was completed by 3:00 pm. Eight flights totaling 4,269 miles were completed today with 82,800 baits distributed. Monday's flight schedule will be pared as well. Despite the decreased flight schedule for the remainder of the Del Rio leg, the overall project should be completed about 2 days earlier than originally scheduled, assuming no weather, aircraft maintenance, or other delays.

1/16/2023:

Flights began at 9:00 am with 2 planes departing. Two planes were delayed due to low cloud cover on the southern routes, but they were able to depart at 11:00 am when the cloud cover dissipated. The second round of flights was similarly staggered, with 2 planes departing as scheduled at 12:00 pm and the 2 planes that were delayed in the morning departing around 1:45 pm. The last flight of the day landed at 4:20 pm. Eight flights totaling 3,665 miles were completed today with 70,500 baits distributed. A single round of flights is scheduled for 9:00 am Tuesday to complete the Del Rio leg of the project.

1/17/2023:

The single round of flights today began at 8:45 am, with all 4 planes departing on time. The last plane landed at 12:00 pm. The four flights totaled 2,177 miles and distributed 42,900 baits, completing the Del Rio leg of the project. To date, 64.4% of the entire project is complete. Tomorrow, all project staff will travel to Alpine and set up the project command trailer and other equipment. Baits will be delivered early Thursday morning and flights will start mid-morning Thursday if all preparations go smoothly.

1/18/2023:

Project staff traveled to Alpine, meeting at Alpine Casparis Municipal Airport at 11:30 am to set up for the last leg of the project. A strong cold front had arrived earlier in the morning, leading to much colder temperatures and very high winds. Baits will be delivered between 8:00-9:00 am tomorrow morning, after which flights will resume.

1/19/2023:

The morning was clear and cold with light winds. The bait trailer arrived before 8:00 am, allowing the first round of flights to depart at 10:00 am. The second round of flights departed between 1:00 pm and 2:00 pm and all flights returned by 4:45 pm. Eight flights totaling 3,987 miles were completed today with 79,500 baits distributed. Three rounds of flights are scheduled for tomorrow beginning at 8:00 am.

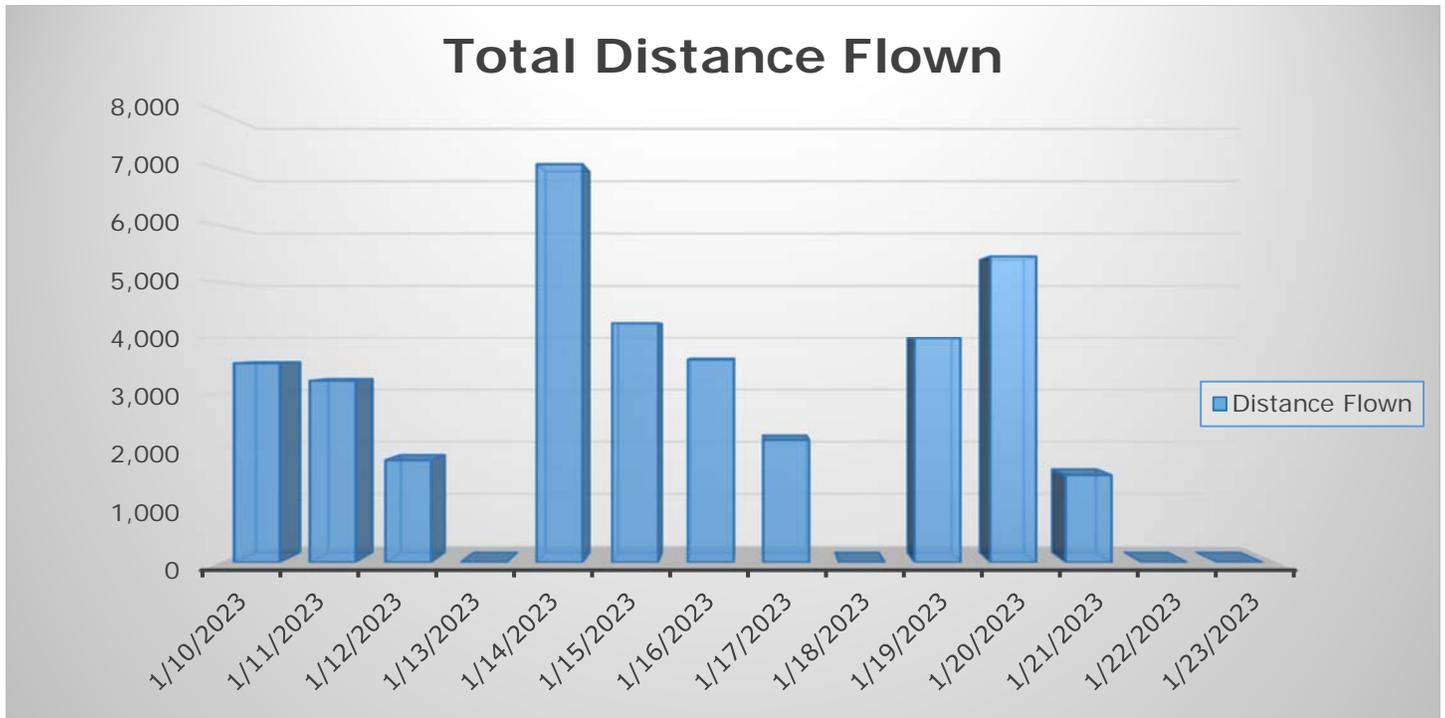
1/20/2023:

Another beautiful sunrise and a cloudless morning! Nick Saltamachia of DSHS Media Relations was onsite today to record video footage and interview project staff. Three rounds of flights were scheduled for the day and 3 planes departed between 7:45 am and 8:00 am. The 4th plane noted a slightly malfunctioning indicator during taxiing so returned to the tarmac before takeoff for evaluation and, ultimately, a minor repair. Due to the delay, this plane flew only 2 flights for the day. The last flight of the day landed at 6:10 pm. Eleven flights totaling 5,451 miles were completed today with 110,100 baits distributed. Dr. Ken Waldrup, DSHS Region 9/10 Zoonosis Control veterinarian, arrived in the afternoon and picked up 2,700 baits to hand distribute in the El Paso area. The final flights of the project are scheduled to start at 8:00 am tomorrow.

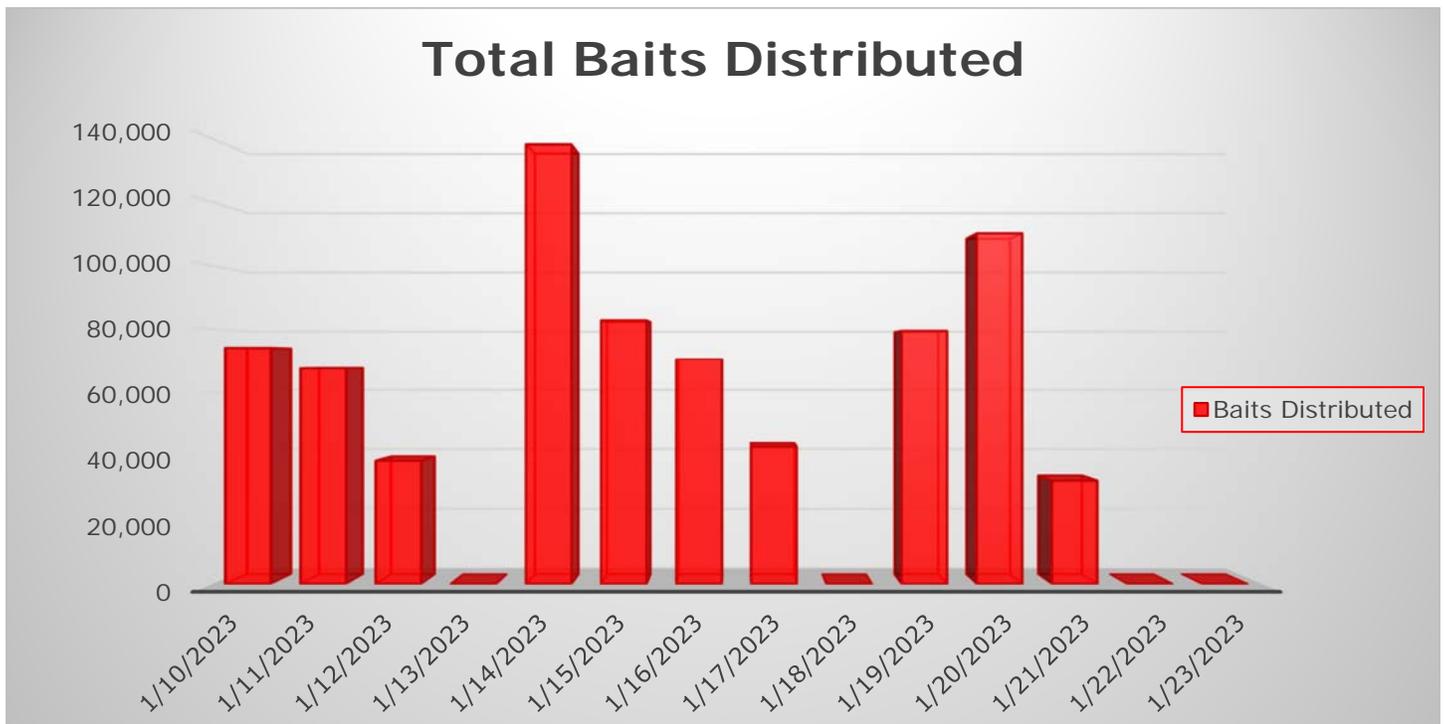
1/21/2023:

The staff was greeted by a cold, clear morning, and another stellar sunrise on the last day of the project. Two planes departed at 8:00 am for another project in the Texas Panhandle. The 2 remaining planes took off just after 8:00 am for the first of 4 flights for the day. The second round of flights departed beginning at 10:50 am, with the last flight landing at 1:30 pm. Flights totaling 1,552 miles were completed today with 32,250 baits distributed. The multi-agency team completed the 2023 bait drop in 13 days with a total of 36,772 miles flown by plane and helicopter, which distributed 810,300 baits over 12,529 square miles in 19 counties. An additional 26,700 baits were distributed by hand for a total of 837,000 baits distributed during the project. Congratulations to all of the project partners from DSHS, USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services NRMP, USDA-Texas Wildlife Services, Texas State Guard, and Dynamic Aviation for the completion of another successful bait drop!

Distance Flown by Day



Baits Distributed by Day



Daily Map

