



U.S. Border Patrol Specialty Units

January 25, 2022

Fiscal Year 2021 Report to Congress



**Homeland
Security**

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Message from the Deputy Commissioner of CBP

January 25, 2022

I am pleased to submit the following report, “U.S. Border Patrol Specialty Units,” which was prepared by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

This report was compiled pursuant to direction set forth in the Joint Explanatory Statement that accompanies the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260). The report provides a description of the types of specialty units found within the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) and the status of their capabilities and needs for FY 2021.

Pursuant to congressional requirements, this report is being provided to the following Members of Congress:



The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
Chairwoman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Chris Murphy
Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact my office at (202) 344-2001.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Troy A. Miller". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Troy A. Miller
Deputy Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide Congress with a description of USBP's specialty units and their functions as they relate to border security. Additionally, this report outlines the needs of these units and their ability to provide additional resources at or near the borders to combat transnational security threats.

This report is meant to capture activities conducted annually and consists of the reporting cycle between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2020.

USBP specialty units serve as force multipliers to border security operations. USBP utilizes a multilayered approach to border enforcement. These specialty units are directed to areas of specific concern that require a particular expertise and specialized training. Specialty units provide additional resources to combat transnational security threats to the United States, as well as to prevent individuals attempting to enter without authorization at or near the international borders of Mexico and Canada, and the coastal waters surrounding Florida and Puerto Rico. Specialty units' missions are in direct alignment with the DHS Secretary's priorities of national security and border security.



U.S. Border Patrol Specialty Units

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I. Legislative Language

This document was compiled pursuant to direction set forth in the Joint Explanatory Statement that accompanies the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260) and states:

Specialty Units.—Within 180 days of the date of enactment of this Act, CBP shall report to the Committees on the status and needs of all specialty units within each sector and department-wide. The report shall provide, at a minimum, a description of: (1) the specialty unit composition and quantity of membership, baseline capabilities, and training; (2) any needs of specialty units, including horses and off-road vehicles, training, or other capabilities; and (3) any other resource needs as applicable. For purposes of this section, “specialty unit” shall mean, any horse patrol unit, tactical or rescue unit, or bike or boat patrol unit.

II. Capabilities and Resources

The U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) uses a multilayered and risk-based approach for deployment of its limited resources. USBP strategic goals of achieving operational control at the international borders between the ports of entry (POE), organizational excellence by investing in its workforce, and stakeholder engagement by increasing communication with employees, stakeholders, citizens, and partners are in direct alignment with the goals and objectives of the DHS Strategic Plan and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Strategy.

The specialty units found within USBP encompass various skill sets that are developed over time through extensive training and certifications. This allows USBP to adapt constantly to emerging threats to national security, to humanitarian emergencies, and to natural disasters across the United States. These specialty units are national programs that report to their respective managers at the headquarters (HQ) level.

The units described in the following subsections each have different functions, capabilities, and requirements that are necessary and vital to the USBP mission.

A. Special Operations Group

In 2007, USBP consolidated the commands of the Border Patrol Search, Trauma, and Rescue (BORSTAR) and the Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC) under one centralized command designated as the USBP Special Operations Group (SOG). This placed all tactical and emergency response assets under one command to facilitate the rapid response required for national security issues. SOG's mission is to train, organize, equip, resource, and deploy specially trained tactical, emergency response, and intelligence personnel worldwide to protect America.

Eleven of the 20 Border Patrol sectors also are equipped with Special Operations detachments made up of both BORTAC and BORSTAR agents. These detachments are under the tactical command of the respective Chief Patrol Agent but may be called to support SOG for national deployments.

B. Border Patrol Search, Trauma, and Rescue

Composition and Baseline Capabilities

BORSTAR provides a specialized law enforcement, search and rescue (SAR) response from conventional to high-risk Border Patrol operations, Federal Emergency Management Agency mission assignments, national SAR operations, national special security events, and specialized training support directed by DHS for both domestic and foreign government agencies. BORSTAR is the only national law enforcement, SAR entity with the capability to conduct tactical medical or SAR operations, and training for federal, state, local, and international

government agencies. Since the inception of BORSTAR in 1998, the unit has evolved and has enhanced its capabilities to fulfill the foreign and domestic missions of DHS, CBP, and USBP.

On a national level, BORSTAR is located strategically to deploy rapidly throughout the United States and to conduct intelligence-driven operations to target transnational criminal organizations (TCO), high-risk areas, and crossborder criminal activity. The number of total active BORSTAR agents USBP-wide is approximately 250 Border Patrol agents (BPA) and is composed of experienced BPAs selected from all USBP sectors. BORSTAR agents must complete the BORSTAR Selection and Training Course, which is a physically and mentally demanding course where candidates are evaluated in various SAR techniques such as tactical medicine, technical rescue, land navigation, communication, swift-water rescue, air operations, and the ability to work in a cohesive unit.

Upon completion of the 5-week (400-hour) BORSTAR Selection and Training Course, all BORSTAR agents attend an additional 6 weeks of training to become certified as basic emergency medical technicians, followed by a 10-day basic tactical medicine course. BORSTAR agents complete Mission-Essential Task List training annually, consisting of a minimum of 80 hours, up to the necessary amount required to demonstrate an acceptable level of proficiency. This does not account for additional training required to operate specialized equipment such as all-terrain vehicles (ATV), motorcycles, rescue watercraft, marine vessels, snowmobiles, and small unmanned aircraft.

Many BORSTAR agents acquire additional specialty certifications beyond the basic level BORSTAR. Initial certification for some of these specialties can require months of training and additional recurrency training requirements to maintain proficiency. Examples of advance specialties include:

- SAR canine handler certification,
- Human remains detection canine certification,
- Paramedic,
- Austere paramedic,
- Dive medical technician,
- Scuba diver,
- Helicopter rope suspension training master, and
- Vessel commander.

Aside from the advanced specialties listed above, most agents receive additional training in other areas as needed. Topics include:

- Advanced tactical medicine,
- Cold-weather operations,
- Wilderness survival,
- Rescue watercraft operator,
- Personnel recovery,
- Small-unit tactics,
- Operations planning and management,

- Dignitary protection operations, and
- Various instructor-level certifications required to teach basic and advanced skills.

Operational and Resource Requirements

BORSTAR units require the following resources to operate (in addition to standard Border Patrol training/equipping):

- Advanced training, as described above;
- Tactical specialty tactical uniforms that meet the requirements of both domestic and foreign deployments and extreme weather conditions (both hot and cold);
- Individually issued laptop computers, mobile phones, and enhanced communications devices such as satellite communication and navigation devices for use where there is no existing communication infrastructure;
- Individually assigned vehicles for storage and transport of specialized equipment such as medical, water rescue, and rope rescue equipment to facilitate rapid deployment;
- Rescue vehicles such as motorcycles, ATVs, utility vehicles (UTV), snowmobiles, boats, and rescue watercraft;
- Trailers and/or specialized vehicles for transport of equipment and supplies including water, food, fuel, and climate-controlled shelters to allow for 72-hour self-sustainment in austere environments;
- Canines certified in SAR, tracking/trailing, and human remains detection disciplines;
- Dive equipment for public safety divers (e.g., air compressors, air tanks, lift bags, and individual equipment like buoyancy compensator, mask, fins, air regulator, and wetsuit);
- Swiftwater rescue equipment (e.g., personal flotation devices, rope launchers, rope throw-bags, inflatable boats/kayaks, dry suits, wetsuits, helmets, and gloves);
- Basic and advanced medical equipment (e.g., 12-lead heart monitors, automatic defibrillators, oxygen tanks and regulators, backboards, extrication tools, and medical supply backpacks);
- High-angle rescue equipment (e.g., ropes, webbing, pulleys, carabiners, harnesses, collapsible litter baskets, and Arizona Vortex);
- Individually issued tactical equipment (e.g., weapon systems, night vision devices, specialized personal protective equipment (PPE) such as ballistic plates, helmet, gas mask, and communications headset);
- Support from DHS physicians for required medical protocols and oversight; and
- Light and medium-lift rotary-wing aircraft support for which BORSTAR must rely upon Office of Air and Marine Operations (AMO) to provide.

C. Border Patrol Tactical Unit

Composition and Baseline Capabilities

BORTAC's mission is to provide an immediate response capability to emergent and high-risk incidents requiring specialized skills and tactics; its mission constantly evolves to the always-changing threat along the Nation's borders.

BORTAC's unique capabilities and personnel align with CBP's and USBP's strategic goals. BORTAC operations enhance USBP and CBP operations with additional resources and an unconventional approach to combatting TCOs and drug trafficking organizations. BORTAC supports the tactical response needs of USBP, CBP, and DHS. The current missions of DHS, CBP, and USBP place a greater demand on BORTAC and its tactical response capabilities than those of any previous time. BORTAC has evolved into a unit that can operate professionally, efficiently, safely, and effectively in an increasingly dangerous environment to ensure the Nation's safety and security.

BORTAC provides DHS with a highly trained and specially equipped tactical unit for rapid response or deliberate deployments to law enforcement situations in defense of national security. BORTAC capabilities include rural and mobile interdictions, mounted and dismounted patrols, vehicle interdictions, counternarcotics operations, high-risk warrants service, active shooter and barricaded subject response, and special reconnaissance operations.

BORTAC deploys nationwide in support of border security operations. BORTAC also plays a significant role in improving international partners' border security capabilities by providing capacity-building training in Central and South America, Africa, and Europe. Total BORTAC membership USBP-wide is approximately 250 personnel.

Operational and Resource Requirements

BORTAC units require the following resources to operate (in addition to standard Border Patrol training/equipping):

- Tactical uniforms;
- High-risk armored response vehicles, mobile command center, and off-road vehicles (ORV) and ATVs/UTVs, with required upgrades (lockboxes, off-road tires, and suspension);
- Specialized equipment for BORTAC high-risk operations (precision weapon platforms, breaching equipment and supplies, night vision, thermals);
- Annual Selection and Certification course, required annual Mission-Essential Task List training and specialty programs training (precision marksman observers, breachers, and canines);
Specialty communications (satellite communications equipment, data plans, and wireless mesh networks).

D. Mobile Response Team

Composition and Baseline Capabilities

The Mobile Response Team's (MRT) mission is to provide a national group of organized, trained, and equipped BPAs who are capable of rapid movement to regional and national incidents in support of priority CBP operations. MRT provides a flexible and enhanced tiered response capability to counter the emerging, changing, and evolving threats in the most challenging operational areas along our Nation's borders. MRT provides the mobilization assets

to vulnerable border areas by augmenting the number of agents to mitigate gaps in operational control of the border and nonborder areas as ordered.

MRT was created to provide USBP with a rapidly deployable asset that can address high-threat areas along the Nation's borders and other regions of the United States as ordered. MRT is available to respond to regional and national incidents in support of USBP and CBP operations. Currently, there are 11 participating sectors: San Diego, Tucson, El Paso, Laredo, Rio Grande Valley, Detroit, Spokane, Houlton, Swanton, Blaine, and Buffalo.

Some MRT accomplishments during 2021 include a deployment to the 2021 Presidential Inauguration in January to support U.S. Secret Service protective operations and, in March, its first out-of-the-country training in Panama City, Panama. The latter deployment trained local law enforcement officers in crowd control techniques.

There are currently 484 active MRT agents nationwide, divided among 12 sectors to include SOG.

Operational and Resource Requirements

MRTs require the following resources to operate (in addition to standard Border Patrol training/equipping):

- Mobile Field Force (MFF) kits: MFF suits, helmets, batons, shields, gas masks, gas mask filters, gas mask pouches, voice amplifiers, and gloves;
- Rollout kits: rollout bags, pelican cases, camelbacks, M4 magazine holders, headlamps, individual first-aid kits, and M4 slings;
- Trailers and/or specialized vehicles to transport equipment and supplies, including water, food, and fuel to allow for 72-hour self-sustainment in austere environments;
- Basic medical supplies, to include: nasopharyngeal airways, gauzes, bandages, nitrile gloves, dressings, and tourniquets; and
- Individually issued tactical equipment, to include: weapon systems, night vision devices, ballistic plates, and helmets.

Agents must complete a 10-day training course (with additional yearly recertification requirements) and be certified in the following disciplines:

- Tactical Combat Casualty Care,
- Fundamentals of Marksmanship,
- Tactical Decision-Making Process,
- Vehicle Assaults, and
- Less-Lethal Devices.

E. USBP Marine Units

Composition and Baseline Capabilities

The mission of USBP's marine units is to patrol rivers, lakes, harbors, bays, and waterways on the U.S. borders to provide situational awareness and to resolve illicit crossborder activity. Together, AMO and USBP provide marine patrol capabilities that allow for tactical mobility and freedom of movement to areas of unknown threats and to high-risk areas within the maritime domain. The main capability of USBP marine units is to provide marine patrols to U.S. boundary waters and rescue capabilities to all waters inside emergency and disaster areas.

USBP marine units' response and resolution capabilities allow CBP to react to illicit maritime crossborder activity in a timely and efficient manner and to contribute to investigations into TCOs.

AMO administers marine program standards for training and safety to ensure that CBP's law enforcement professionals are ready to perform the mission safely and effectively.

Currently, the USBP marine units include the following:

- 224 vessels, which are deployed across the United States to further operational control of the international boundaries,
- 90 marine instructors/standards evaluators,
- 250 vessel commanders, and
- Approximately 120 crewmen (some are part-time).

Operational and Resource Requirements

USBP marine units require the following resources to operate (in addition to standard Border Patrol training/equipping):

- Marine vessels (V-Hull (safe boats), riverine shallow draft vessels, airboats, and small boats), including maintenance and fuel;
- Specialized safety equipment, to include personal flotation devices, dry suits/wetsuits, alternate marine uniforms, and throw bags;
- Enhanced training, including an initial Marine Law Enforcement Training Program course in Glynco, Georgia, and advanced training at the National Marine Training Center in Saint Augustine, Florida.

F. USBP National Canine Program

Composition and Baseline Capabilities

The USBP National Canine Program facilitates the training and expertise for the deployment of canines in multiple disciplines: Concealed Human/Narcotics Detection, SAR, Patrol “Special Operations,” Tracking and Trailing, and Human Remains Detection.

The canines are trained to detect persons concealed in all types of conveyances, as well as persons entering through undeveloped areas. As terrorist detection and apprehension improve at the POEs, terrorists and smuggling organizations seek entry through any means available. The canine team is an effective means to detect those attempting unauthorized entry. This detection capability directly supports CBP’s and USBP’s strategic goals by managing risks and supporting BPAs with less-than-lethal, use-of-force alternatives, increasing certainty of arrest through specialized detection capabilities, increasing community engagement, and fostering partnerships with other agencies with SAR capabilities.

The USBP Canine Program currently has 863 certified canine teams and 277 certified instructors deployed across 20 sectors and SOG.

Operational and Resource Requirements

USBP canine units require the following training, supplies, and equipment to operate (in addition to standard Border Patrol training/equipping):

- Enhanced training, including:
 - Concealed Human Narcotics Detection Handler Course (7 weeks)
 - Concealed Human Narcotics Detection Instructor Course (12 weeks)
 - Patrol Canine Handler Course (12 weeks)
 - Patrol Canine Instructor Course (14 weeks)
 - SAR Handler Course (12 weeks)
 - SAR Instructor Course (12 weeks)
 - Tracking and Trailing Handler Course (7 weeks)
 - Tracking and Trailing Instructor Course (10 weeks)
 - Human Remains Handler Course (10 weeks)
 - Human Remains Instructor Courses (10 weeks).
- Continuous weekly/biweekly training and annual recertification.
- Specially equipped canine vehicles with proper safety equipment.
- Veterinary care, proper diet, specially equipped home kennel, grooming equipment/supplies, operational supplies (leashes, harness, global positioning system trackers, and reward objects), and commercial kennel space.

G. National Horse Patrol Program

Composition and Baseline Capabilities

The National Horse Patrol Program's (NHPP) mission is to support USBP operations to disrupt and degrade TCOs and to assist migrants in distress in difficult-to-reach locations. NHPP provides the capability to conduct targeted enforcement operations in areas where the extreme nature of terrain features or environmental concerns prohibit vehicular deployment.

NHPP seeks to foster community engagement in border areas by participating in local events such as parades and school outreach programs. In addition, NHPP has expanded USBP's knowledge and skill sets concerning large-animal technical rescue by attending courses conducted by outside agencies. NHPP utilizes the Border Patrol Horse Equine Rider Database developed by Salesforce and is the USBP's National Horse Patrol closed system of record.

Currently, NHPP has 347 horses and 573 certified riders, and can be found in 11 sectors and 28 stations.

NHPP accomplishments include:

- Support for Operation Terminal Velocity on the west side of the Tucson Sector area of responsibility (AOR). Horses and riders were shifted from the east corridor to the west corridor to increase NHPP response in a targeted enforcement capacity. Operation Terminal Velocity was an operation conducted predominately within the Three Points Station AOR in response to a drastic increase in entries.
- Expansion of the NHPP to the Wellton Station, Yuma Sector in FY 2021.
- Approval of Mounted MFF to be designated as an approved deployment option in conjunction with or operating under MRT purview.
- Renewed partnerships with the Bureau of Land Management and the Wild Horse Inmate Program's correctional facilities to purchase trained mustangs for USBP.

Operational and Resource Requirements

NHPP requires the following training, supplies, and equipment to operate (in addition to standard Border Patrol training/equipping):

- Enhanced training, including:
 - Horse Patrol Basic Rider Course (4 weeks),
 - Horse Patrol Instructor Course (2 weeks),
 - Mounted Mobile Field Force Course (3 days, in addition to MRT Ground MFF training), and
 - Ongoing training and recertification.
- Uniforms, including pants (jeans), PPE such as chaps/chinks, cowboy hats, and cowboy boots.
- Horses (mustangs, quarter horses, and grade horses).
- Horse training (various levels required).

- Advanced and continual training in obstacles and desensitization for mounted MFF horses.

H. Off-Road Vehicle Program

Composition and Baseline Capabilities

The ORV Program (ORVP) mission is to provide the capability to conduct rapid deployment and targeted enforcement operations in areas where the terrain and/or environmental concerns do not permit conventional vehicular deployment or access. ORVP supports and advocates for the field components by aligning program goals with USBP priorities and CBP's vision and strategy.

The platforms included within ORVP are ATVs; off-road motorcycles (dirt bikes); UTVs – Razors, Gators, and Rangers; bicycles; snowmobiles; and personal watercraft (PWC – jet skis). Within these platforms, there are various manufacturers and models that have been determined to perform best in the varying terrain environments from sector to sector.

ORVP seeks to ensure that each sector has an adequate equipment list for purchases required to support operations. The program collaborates with the U.S. Border Patrol Academy to develop and implement ORV training programs at the basic and advanced training levels. In addition, the program collaborates with the CBP Occupational Health and Safety Division to identify and adopt relevant and appropriate risk management practices regarding ORV utilization and works daily with USBP sectors regarding ORV acquisition and mandatory ORV equipment.

ORVP is in the initial stages of standing up the ORV database system, ORV Tracking System (ORVTS). This will be USBP's closed system of record for all ORVs. This will enable HQ and the sectors to store, capture, and data-mine statistics ranging from the total number of ORVs ready for deployment to the certified number of riders and instructors, and training and certification dates. The current number of riders and ORVs is being scrubbed and updated in the new ORVTS. Once this is completed, the closed system of record will allow for accurate numbers. ORVTS will be the repository for all riders and their certifications.

ATV instructors are trained by instructors at the U.S. Border Patrol Academy in Artesia, New Mexico. ATV Basic Rider classes are conducted at the sector level. The Tucson Sector wrote and implemented a basic and instructor motorcycle curriculum that is being expanded to other sectors to include SOG. The Personal Watercraft and Snowmobile programs currently have individual sector-created curriculums.

ORV program accomplishments:

- Working to create the first-ever ORVTS.
- ORV riders assisted with operations during Operation Terminal Velocity on the west side of the Tucson Sector AOR. The ORV assets were assigned to different operational tiers on the basis of platform best performance tactics.
- Special Operations Detachment ORV agents assisted with Operation Desert Soter with the primary responsibility of performing rescue operations for those in distress.

Operational and Resource Requirements

ORVP requires the following resources to operate (in addition to standard Border Patrol training/equipping):

- ORVs (listed above), including test/evaluation and maintenance;
- Agent equipment and PPE, including helmets, gloves, goggles, chest protectors, dry/wet suits, personal floatation devices, water shoes, extreme cold weather gear, and alternate uniforms; and
- Enhanced training, including:
 - ATV Basic Rider Course (10 days),
 - ATV Instructor Course is (5 days),
 - Motorcycles Basic Rider Course (10 days),
 - Motorcycle Instructor Course (8 days),
 - UTV course (1-2 days),
 - PWC course (6 days),
 - Snowmobile Training Course (5 days), and
 - Regular maintenance training and refresher training.

III. Conclusion

As detailed throughout this report, USBP specialty units serve many different functions that are critical to national and border security. Maintaining proficiencies and certifications ensures that performance goals are met and that these units can respond to transnational security threats to the United States, as well as to natural disasters and emergencies.

Appendix. List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definition
AMO	Office of Air and Marine Operations
AOR	Area of Responsibility
ATV	All-Terrain Vehicle
BORSTAR	Border Patrol Search, Trauma, and Rescue
BORTAC	Border Patrol Tactical Unit
BPA	Border Patrol Agent
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FY	Fiscal Year
HQ	Headquarters
MFF	Mobile Field Force
MRT	Mobile Response Team
NHPP	National Horse Patrol Program
ORV	Off-Road Vehicle
ORVP	Off-Road Vehicle Program
ORVTS	Off-Road Vehicle Tracking System
POE	Port of Entry
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PWC	Personal Watercraft
SAR	Search and Rescue
SOG	Special Operations Group
TCO	Transnational Criminal Organization
USBP	U.S. Border Patrol
UTV	Utility Vehicle