



# U.S. Border Patrol Specialty Units

*November 14, 2022*

Fiscal Year 2022 Report to Congress



**Homeland  
Security**

*U.S. Customs and Border Protection*

# Message from the Deputy Commissioner

November 14, 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) 2022 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-103). 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 2022.

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 with a large, sweeping initial "T" and "M".

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

# Executive Summary

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.

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 the units' ability to provide additional resources at or near the borders to combat transnational security threats.



# 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 2022 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-103) and states:

*Specialty Units.*—Within 180 days of the date of enactment of this Act, CBP shall report on the unmet resource requirements of specialty units, including horse units and off-road vehicle units, within each sector along the U.S.-Mexico border.

## 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, 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 within USBP encompass various skillsets 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.

Each unit described in the following subsections has 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 USBP's 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. The SOG's mission is to train, organize, equip, resource, and deploy specially trained tactical, emergency response, and intelligence personnel worldwide to protect the United States.

Of the 20 USBP sectors, 11 also are equipped with Special Operations detachments comprised of BORTAC and BORSTAR agents. These detachments are under the tactical command of the respective chief patrol agents but may be called upon to support SOG for national deployments.

### B. Border Patrol Search, Trauma, and Rescue

#### 1. Composition and Baseline Capabilities

BORSTAR provides a specialized law enforcement search and rescue (SAR) response for conventional to high-risk USBP operations, Federal Emergency Management Agency mission assignments, national SAR operations, national special security events, and specialized training support directed by DHS for 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 BORSTAR's inception 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 is approximately 250. Experienced Border Patrol agents (BPA) from all USBP sectors comprise BORSTAR. 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 annually complete Mission-Essential Task List training, 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 certification. Initial certification for some of these specialties requires months of training followed by recurring training requirements to maintain proficiency. Examples of advanced specialties include:

- SAR canine handler certification,
- Human remains detection (HRD) 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.

## **2. Operational and Resource Requirements**

BORSTAR units require the following resources to operate (in addition to standard USBP training/equipment):

- Advanced training, as described above;
- Tactical specialty uniforms that meet the requirements of domestic and foreign deployments and extreme weather conditions (hot and cold);
- Individually issued laptop computers, mobile phones, and enhanced communications devices such as satellite communication and navigation devices for use in areas 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 HRD 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); and
- Light and medium-lift rotary-wing aircraft support exclusively used by BORSTAR.

### **C. Border Patrol Tactical Unit**

#### **1. 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. 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 provides CBP and 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 operations enhance USBP and CBP operations with additional resources and an unconventional approach to combatting TCOs and drug trafficking organizations. 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 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. The total number of active BORTAC agents is approximately 250.

## **2. Operational and Resource Requirements**

BORTAC units require the following resources to operate (in addition to standard USBP training/equipment):

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

## **D. Mobile Response Team**

### **1. 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. The MRT provides a flexible and enhanced tiered-response capability to counter the emerging and evolving threats in the most challenging operational areas along our Nation's borders. The 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.

The 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. The 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, California; Tucson,

Arizona; El Paso, Texas; Laredo, Texas; Rio Grande Valley, Texas; Detroit, Michigan; Spokane, Washington; Houlton, Maine; Swanton, Vermont; Blaine, Minnesota; and Buffalo, New York.

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-country training in Panama City, Panama. The latter deployment trained local law enforcement officers in crowd control techniques.

Agents must complete a 10-day training course (with additional annual 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.

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

## **2. Operational and Resource Requirements**

MRTs require the following resources to operate (in addition to standard USBP training/equipment):

- 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.

## **E. USBP Marine Units**

### **1. 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, Air and Marine Operations (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, USBP marine units include the following:

- 228 vessels, which are deployed across the United States to further operational advantage of the international boundaries,
- 51 marine instructors,
- 35 marine standardization evaluators,
- 313 vessel commanders, and
- Approximately 119 crewmen (some are part-time).

## **2. Operational and Resource Requirements**

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

- V-Hull platform;
- Riverine shallow-draft vessels, airboats, and small boats, including maintenance and fuel;
- Specialized safety equipment, including 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
- Requirement for advanced training in "near shore" patrolling to be conducted at the National Marine Training Center in Saint Augustine, Florida.

## **F. USBP National Canine Program**

### **1. Composition and Baseline Capabilities**

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

The canine team is an effective means of detecting those attempting unauthorized entry. This detection capability directly supports CBP's and USBP's strategic goals by managing risks and by supporting BPAs with less-than-lethal, use-of-force alternatives, increasing the likelihood of arrest through specialized detection capabilities, increasing community engagement, and fostering partnerships with other agencies possessing SAR and HRD capabilities. Canine teams

conduct various community relation events throughout the United States, improving public awareness of CBP.

The USBP Canine Program has 884 certified canine teams and 347 certified instructors deployed across 20 sectors and SOG.

## **2. Operational and Resource Requirements**

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

- 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), and
  - Human Remains Instructor Courses (10 weeks);
- Continuous weekly/biweekly training and annual recertification;
- Specially equipped canine vehicles with proper safety equipment;
- Class 5 four-drawer safe (training aid storage/security); and
- Veterinary care, proper diet, specially equipped home kennel, grooming equipment/supplies, operational supplies (e.g., leashes, harness, global positioning system trackers, reward objects, first aid kits, and Narcan), and commercial kennel space.
- Specially equipped canine vehicles: Vehicles equipped with a kennel and specialized heat alarms to ensure the safety and security of each canine while being transported.

## **G. National Horse Patrol Program**

### **1. 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 external agencies.

Currently, NHPP has 349 horses and 628 certified riders and is operational within 9 sectors.

## **2. Operational and Resource Requirements**

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

- Enhanced training, including:
  - Horse Patrol Basic Rider Course (4 weeks),
  - Horse Patrol Instructor Course (2 weeks),
  - Mounted MFF 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 (e.g., mustangs, quarter horses, and grade horses);
- Horse training (various levels required);
- Advanced and continual training in obstacles and desensitization for mounted MFF horses;
- Arrest and defensive tactics training, both mounted and dismounted with the horses;
- Horse trailers, horse tack, grooming supplies, and first aid supplies specific for horse needs; and
- Veterinary care, farrier services, and proper feed and supplements for horse health.

## **H. Off-Road Vehicle Program**

### **1. 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 within ORVP are ATVs; off-road motorcycles (dirt bikes); UTVs such as Razors, Gators, and Rangers; bicycles; snowmobiles; and personal watercraft (jet skis).

ORVP seeks to ensure that each sector has an adequate equipment list for purchases required to support operations. The program collaborates with the USBP 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. The program works daily with USBP sectors regarding ORV acquisition and mandatory ORV equipment.

ORVP is standing up the first-ever ORV database system, the ORV Tracking System (ORVTS). This system will enable HQ and the sectors to store, capture, and data-mine statistics ranging from the total number of ORVs ready for deployment and ORV locations to the number of certified riders and instructors, and training and certification dates.

The ORV Program currently has 1,812 ATVs, 544 UTVs, 198 motorcycles, 103 personal watercraft, and 212 snowmobiles with approximately 1,500 agents assigned to ORV units and more than a thousand others certified on the different platforms.

## **2. Operational and Resource Requirements**

ORVP requires the following resources to operate (in addition to standard USBP training/equipment):

- ORV platforms for operations and training;
- Regular test and evaluation of new platforms to determine best asset suitability for areas of responsibility;
- 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;
- Advanced training, including:
  - ATV Basic Rider Course (10 days),
  - ATV Instructor Course is (5 days),
  - Motorcycle Basic Rider Course (10 days),
  - Motorcycle Instructor Course (8 days),
  - UTV course (1 to 2 days),
  - Personal Watercraft course (6 days),
  - Snowmobile Training Course (5 days),
  - Regular maintenance and refresher training; and
  - Remedial training;
- ORV trailers and supplies for ORV maintenance; and
- Equipment and supplies to secure assets, such as tie-down straps, cargo boxes, and nets to secure items on assets; tire repair kits; and portable air compressors to assist in keeping the assets operational in the field.

### III. Conclusion

As detailed throughout this report, USBP specialty units serve many functions that are critical to national and border security. Maintaining proficiencies and certifications throughout these specialty units 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 other emergencies.

## IV. Appendix. List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Definition</b>
AMO	Air and Marine Operations
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
HRD	Human Remains Detection
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
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SAR	Search and Rescue
SOG	Special Operations Group
TCO	Transnational Criminal Organization
USBP	U.S. Border Patrol
UTV	Utility Vehicle