



Joint New Release
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Photos Available at the USFWS Pacific Region Flickr Photostream:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwspacific/sets/72157624971330290/>

State and Federal Officials Sign Western Snowy Plover Agreements
Balancing Public Recreation with the Plover's Recovery
Oregon's Plover Populations Continue to Rebound

Salem OR – As the threatened western snowy plover steadily edges its way back from the brink, two state and four federal agencies signed off on a plan to help the beach-loving bird reach its recovery targets in the State of Oregon. Marking a milestone for the plover and the culmination of a multi-year public input effort, Governor Ted Kulongoski congratulated the agency leaders who signed a statewide habitat conservation plan. Under the plan, Oregon agrees to improve western snowy plover habitat in at least three state-owned areas on the north coast while keeping those beaches open to public recreation.

“We’re constantly reminded Oregonians are as passionate as ever about protecting the public ocean shore,” says Tim Wood, Director, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. “Under this plan, we can keep Oregon beaches open to people and help the plover recover at the same time.”

Plovers already nest in a few locations on the south coast, where the dry sand in six areas are roped from March-September, but the hard, wet beach also remains open year-round.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service all have a role to play in carrying out the habitat conservation plan. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department has management responsibility for coastal shores where plovers breed and nest.

“In just over 15 years, our Oregon snowy plover population has grown from a few dozen birds to more than 150, which means we’re getting closer to the Oregon recovery goal of 200 breeding birds,” said Robyn Thorson, director of the Pacific Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “The extraordinary cooperation and effort of all the agencies involved in plover conservation, and the care of committed citizens, have been the cornerstone of our success so far. We applaud the Parks and Recreation Department for its leadership and all our partners for helping to put plover recovery within reach.”

In exchange for improving plover habitat, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department received an important permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The “Incidental Take Permit” accepts some plovers may be harmed as visitors and residents use the public ocean shore, but avoids the usual consequences—which could have included closing whole beaches—so long as the harm to plovers is limited and recovery continues elsewhere. Recovery is guided by a Habitat Conservation Plan adopted by the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission earlier this year after extensive public review.

Since 1993, parts of six southern Oregon beaches have included special rules to protect plovers—safeguarding nesting areas from pets, vehicles and foot traffic. Between now and 2012, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department staff will go through a public process to develop more specific ideas for plover management inside the Bandon State Natural Area, which covers part of the ocean shore south of the city of Bandon. Three other areas not occupied by plovers will be groomed to be more inviting to the shorebird: the Columbia River South Jetty, Nehalem Spit and Necanicum Spit. One additional plover-free area—the Netarts Spit—could be added if needed. These beaches will require dogs to be leashed and prohibit beach driving, but will remain open. Beaches next to these state parks already require leashes and are closed to driving, but enforcement will be stepped up. A public plan for these new northern beaches will be developed between now and 2013.

Habitat conservation planning is an important part of our collaborative stewardship approach to recovering listed species. A habitat conservation plan is a necessary component of the state’s application for the federal incidental-take permit; “take” being the legal term for disturbing, harming or killing individuals of the species. This permit can allow activities even when there is a possibility of harming some listed species, so long as the harm is incidental to otherwise legal activities such as, in this case, those associated with the public’s recreational beach use. The proposed plan provides mitigation and minimization measures for potential adverse effects of these activities.

More information on Oregon’s western snowy plover Habitat Conservation Plan is available online at <http://tinyurl.com/oregonplovers> .

General information about western snowy plovers can be found at:

<http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo>

<http://www.westernsnowyplover.org/>

Standard definition b-roll video:

<http://tinyurl.com/ploverbroll>

Photos:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwspacific/sets/72157624971330290/>