Basics to understand:

1. Western snowy plovers—a threatened shorebird—and people co-exist now on the south coast.
2. A plan to help plovers recover in other specific areas of the coast is like an insurance policy: we can focus our attention on the few most likely nesting areas and keep the ocean shore open, even if people accidentally disturb plovers. These actions meet Federal requirements for protecting the species.
3. We're not controlling access to beaches where plovers don't nest. People who visit a few north coast beaches from March to September will have to keep their dogs on a leash.
4. Even where the dry sand is closed to protect plover nests, the closed area is limited to the space needed for nesting and chick feeding. Larger, open beaches are right next door to these plover areas.

General questions about plovers and the Oregon ocean shore recreation area

1. **Why plan for plovers and recreation?**
   The Western Snowy Plover is on the Federal list of threatened species. Citizens and government agencies take actions to protect threatened species, and create environments where those species can once again thrive and reproduce. In the case of plovers, three main factors threaten their survival.
   a. Changes to traditional sandy nesting areas on the beaches mean that plovers have lost the places that they need to live, feed, and raise their young.
   b. Predators—some native, some introduced by people—take more plovers than are replaced by natural reproduction.
   c. When plovers are nesting, feeding and raising their young, they have a harder time surviving if people accidentally harm or disturb them.

   To help the plover survive and recover, all three forces—habitat, predators and people—are part of the solution. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is legally responsible for recreation on the ocean shore. Our mission balances the public's right to enjoy the natural resources, and the need to protect those natural resources for the future. We have two basic choices when it comes to plovers.

   Choice #1: Do nothing. This would mean that plovers harmed on the ocean shore, even accidentally, could bring serious penalties from the federal government. The bird could also choose to nest in new, unpredicted areas. Were that to happen, the state would have to protect the plover—and perhaps bar people from entering a beach where plovers are living—no matter where the nesting site is, *even if it's a very popular beach.*

   Choice #2: Help the species *recover in a few key areas*—the ones with the best chance of supporting the bird and recovering the population. Writing a good plan ensures that people know where and when they need to be careful on the ocean shore, and land managers know where to focus their attention to improve habitat and control predators.

We believe the stability and predictability of a plan—the **Habitat Conservation Plan**—provides a balanced roadmap for both people and plovers to coexist. Since the Plan concentrates attention on certain areas of the coast, there's a chance plovers could be harmed on some other Oregon beaches. To protect Oregon from the consequences of accidentally harming plovers in unprotected areas, we need something called an **Incidental Take Permit** from the Federal government.

2. **What is an Incidental Take Permit and a Habitat Conservation Plan?**
"Take" is the word used by the Federal Endangered Species Act to describe anything that harms a protected species. Obvious acts like killing or injuring a plover are covered by this word, but so are not-so-obvious things like chasing, interrupting feeding, or scaring birds off nests. "Take" doesn't have to be intentional to be serious; it can be accidental.

   If the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department manages recreation on the ocean shore under an **Incidental Take Permit** issued by the Federal United States Fish and Wildlife Service, a certain level of accidental harm to the plover will be tolerated. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sets this level of harm in the permit so it doesn't threaten the plover population's prospects for recovery, and as long as we're doing our best to help the plover species recover in other places on the ocean shore.

   In exchange for the permit, we agree to use a **Habitat Conservation Plan** to designate a few areas where we and other partners on the Oregon ocean shore will help the plover recover. The Plan spells out what kinds of predator control, habitat restoration and changes to recreation are needed to help the plover recover. If plover nests appear in areas **outside** those designated by the Plan, the individual nest would be protected, but there wouldn't be any changes to the kinds of recreation people enjoy on that beach.

   A description of the Habitat Conservation Plan and its effects on plants, animals and local economies is online at **http://tinyurl.com/oregonplovers** .

3. **What is the ultimate goal for plovers?**
The national goal for the plover is the same one for all threatened species: to get off the Endangered Species List. For this west coast bird, the bar has been set at an average of 3,000 breeding adults per year for 10 years. Oregon and Washington combined need to support 250 breeding plovers. Population numbers are a way to measure success, but they can often just be snapshots. Plovers need reliable places to breed, feed, and spend winters. Otherwise, even if their technical status is not "threatened," they may again become so.

4. **What is already being done for plovers in Oregon?**
State and Federal agencies have worked for the past 17 years to help plovers recover on the south Oregon coast by managing predators like crows, ravens and foxes, and by shifting recreation away from nests to other nearby areas. We use ropes and signs to delineate the dry sand boundaries where plovers are nesting, and talk to people directly about the bird and how they can help it recover. Most people are interested in the bird's story. Eight areas on the south coast have been successfully managed for plovers.

5. **What is the status of Oregon's plover population? How has it changed in the managed areas?**
   Plover numbers have climbed from a low of 28 breeding birds in 1992 to 158 in 2010, thanks to careful predator management and habitat repair, and by directing recreation to the wet sand. To help fulfill the Pacific Northwest's potential for plover recovery, this coordinated approach will be used in other**,** newly-designated areas on the ocean shore.

6. **How has recreation been affected in the areas already being managed?**
   People share the beach with plovers on the south coast. During the nesting season, ropes and signs direct people around the protected dry sand nesting areas. The wet sand remains open all the time, though sometimes the trails to the ocean have to be changed. Dogs stay on leashes in these areas, which also reduces complaints from people who visit the beach. (Dogs are prohibited completely from one area now, and this prohibition will start to apply in all areas where the birds are nesting under the Habitat Conservation Plan.)

7. **Have any unoccupied areas become occupied after management began?**
   After government agencies restored habitat, controlled predators and managed recreation, the plovers returned to areas they historically called home. Some of these areas were next to places the plovers were using, but one was completely cut off from the other areas. Plovers started using this area, the Dunes Overlook, only after restoration began.

8. **What's the overall timeline for starting the new management approach?**
   The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, after several rounds of public comment and review, will issue an Incidental Take Permit to the State of Oregon in December 2011. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will then start to work on a site management plan for Bandon State Natural Area and the three sites on the north coast that do not now support plovers (South Columbia River Jetty, Nehalem Spit, Necanicum Spit). The Department will complete the Bandon plan in 2012—working with local citizens, doing more detailed studies of the areas and following local land use rules—and start work as soon as that same year. The other three northern beach plans will be created with public input and started as soon as 2013.

9. **Under the Habitat Conservation Plan, what else will be managed *aside* from recreation?**
   We also need to improve the habitat and control predators in areas where plovers already nest. In areas where we want plovers to begin nesting, habitat is key. Making the dry sand welcoming to plovers means removing invasive plants and returning the dunes to their original, native shape.

Specific questions about places where people will share the beach with plovers

1. **What does this mean for each beach in the Habitat Conservation Plan?**
   There are two kinds of beaches in the plan:
   - Places owned or leased by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department are called "Snowy Plover Management Areas." One area (south of Bandon) already has plovers, and 3-4 other areas on the north coast will be managed to encourage plovers to start nesting.
   - Places **outside** of land owned by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department are called "Recreation Management Areas." Some have plovers and will be managed now to protect them, but some don't have plovers and will be managed only if plovers show up or if the land manager asks to start managing to attract plovers.

2. **Does this mean the end of the public beach?**
   Not at all. Read on for more specifics, but as you do, remember: in the areas where we manage for plovers, only *part* of the beach is affected. An area of dry sand will be set aside to either help nesting plovers, or to encourage them to start nesting, from March to September. Right next to the managed area, on that very same beach, is a stretch of the coast completely unchanged by plover management. You won't need to leave, or even change your plans, when you arrive at this beach. Just be aware of what's going on, enjoy the view and maybe even see some wildlife you've never seen before. The habitat improvements being done to help plovers will also make the ocean shore a more exciting, ecologically healthy place to visit – and will help preserve Oregon's unparalleled tradition of beautiful, unspoiled public beaches.

3. **So what will happen on beaches owned by State Parks where plovers *already* breed?**
   There's just one state park-owned Snowy Plover Management Area occupied by plovers: Bandon State Natural Area. We will prepare a site management plan by early 2012 that includes managing for plovers:
   - Fences, ropes, and signs will set the dry sand breeding areas apart from the rest of the beach Mar. 15- Sept. 15. Visitors will be directed to the wet sand, or to the nearest dry sand outside the managed area.
   - Close the beach to all vehicles, dogs and kite flying. There are beaches right next to the managed site where people can take their pets and kites.
   - Restore and maintain habitat, and manage predators.
   - Provide public education, and assign a beach ranger (and additional law enforcement as needed) to support public education and enforcement.
   - Monitor plover breeding. Possibly relax these rules if there's no nesting by July 15.

4. **What about beaches owned by State Parks where the plovers *don't* breed now?**
   Four park-managed Snowy Plover Management Area beaches don't have plovers now, but could eventually be managed to encourage them: Columbia River South Jetty, Necanicum Spit, Nehalem Spit and Netarts Spit.
   - First, we will prepare site management plans (with public input) in 2013 for three north coast sites: Columbia River South Jetty, Necanicum Spit, and Nehalem Spit.

- The specifics will be written into the plans, but it's likely as early as 2013 dogs will be required to be on-leash and all vehicles will be prohibited from March to September. These areas are already off-limits to motorized vehicles.
- Restore habitat where needed, and use non-lethal measures to control predators. Check for snowy plovers and nests twice a month.
- Provide public interpretation and education.
- If any of the sites becomes occupied, only then will we start managing Netarts Spit. That way, at least three unoccupied areas will always be managed to encourage snowy plovers until all state park sites are occupied.
- Instead of state park sites, other land managers could volunteer to start managing for plovers, and those voluntary sites would count toward the minimum of three sites being managed for plovers at any given time.

5. **What about the other places on the south coast where plovers already nest?**
Plovers are nesting at six places on the ocean shore owned by other public agencies. People have shared the beach to help them recover. We will continue to cooperate on recovery there—Sutton/Baker Beach, Siltcoos Estuary/Dunes Overlook/Tahkenitch Estuary, Tenmile Estuary, Coos Bay North Spit, New River—as we have since 1994. The management will look the same as the points under (2) above.

6. **What about beaches not owned by state parks where plovers don't live?**
These Recreation Management Areas could be managed to encourage plovers if the landowner decides to join the effort. Six places—Bayocean Spit, South Sand Lake Spit, Tahkenitch South, Umpqua River North Jetty, Elk River Spit and Euchre Creek—all have potential to help plovers. If these other landowners (mainly other federal agencies) join the effort, we'd coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to treat them like the unoccupied state park sites described under **(4)** above.

7. **So when does all this happen?**
    - 2010: Oregon Parks and Recreation Department receives Incidental Take Permit from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
    - 2011: Write plan for Bandon State Natural Area, with public input.
    - 2012: Submit Bandon State Natural Area plan to U.S. Fish and Wildlife and enact it as early as March 2012. Write plans for Columbia River South Jetty, Nehalem Spit and Necanicum Spit, all with public involvement.
    - 2013: Submit these north coast plans to U.S. Fish and Wildlife and enact them as early as March 2013.

8. **How will plover management under this plan affect the economy?**
An analysis of the plan's effects (**http://tinyurl.com/oregonplovers**) shows plover recovery will have next to no effect on the tourism-heavy coastal economy. Plover management areas will not close any whole beach. When a visitor arrives, one relatively small portion of the site will be used for plover recovery, but the rest of the beach will be open and essentially unchanged. People—locals and tourists both—can choose to visit a particular beach where plovers actually live, and will simply have to turn toward the unaffected stretch of beach to play. For beaches where plovers do not live, visitors can go anywhere, but will need to keep their dogs on a leash and vehicles off the shore. Some new visitors could be attracted to plover recovery areas to see or learn about the birds, since birdwatching is one of the fastest growing recreational hobbies.

9. **How will we help visitors understand how to share the beach with plovers?**
The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will design an education program and incorporate it into interpretive programs and the campground reservation system. OPRD has four Beach Rangers assigned to the Oregon coast to talk with visitors and provide information about plovers. Signs, brochures, websites, and interpretive programs will be addressed in individual beach management plans.

10. **How long will we manage for plovers?**
This plan and the Incidental Take Permit are intended to last 25 years. If plovers are still threatened (or worse) at the end of that time, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will meet with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to review the terms of the permit and the Habitat Conservation Plan to determine if additional or different conservation measures are needed.

Courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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