

All about Western Snowy Plovers

What is a western snowy plover, and why is this bird so special?

The western snowy plover is a small shorebird that lives and breeds along some west coast beaches from Washington to southern California. It was listed in 1993 as a threatened species under the federal government's Endangered Species Act (ESA). The population is at risk due to:

- Habitat loss, primarily from invasive grasses. The dry, open sand areas of our coastal dunes are much smaller than they used to be.
- Human activity. The birds nest in open sand and rely on camouflage for protection. If disturbed by people or dogs, plover parents will leave their nests to avoid attracting attention to them. Too many disturbances keep them away from their nests for too long. People and dogs can also accidentally step on nests.
- Predators, including crows, ravens and foxes. Although predation is a natural process, the effects are compounded with habitat loss and human disturbance. For example, crows are attracted to areas with people, which means more crows are around to eat plover eggs.

How does Oregon protect plovers?

Snowy plover management areas are part of a coast-wide recovery agreement called the **Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)**, finalized in 2010 after years of public comment and analysis. The HCP is a legal agreement between the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD), which is responsible for managing recreation on Oregon's ocean shore, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), which oversees the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and thus the status of the western snowy plover.

The HCP sets out designated recovery beaches, called **management areas**, based on a variety of factors that include suitability of habitat, historic breeding areas, population surveys and recreation value. Management areas have relatively lower recreation use, which helps to minimize recreation disruptions. The plan calls for restoring habitat, managing predators and reducing human disturbance in these areas.

OPRD manages five of the 15 management areas; the others are managed in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and other coastal land managers. In total, about 50 miles of Oregon's 362 mile shoreline have been identified as part of a seasonal management area.

Where are management areas?

There are 15 management areas between Port Orford and the northern tip of the Oregon coast, Clatsop Spit. The managed areas are always next to beaches without plover-related restrictions, so you can still enjoy all permitted beach activities. Maps are available at oregon.gov/plovers.

What recreation is restricted in management areas?

During nesting season from March 15-Sept. 15, certain types of recreation is restricted in areas where plovers are breeding:

- You'll see signs and/or ropes in dry sand that help identify management areas.
- Keep dogs, vehicles, bikes, kites and drones off these beaches – including the entire dune area and the wet sand, which can be far from signs. (We have to place signs above the high tide line so they don't wash away.)
- If you are walking or riding your horse in a management area, stay on the wet sand.
- We encourage you to take a different route to the beach rather than walk through the areas being groomed to attract plovers or where plovers may already be nesting.
- Generally, there are beaches right next to the managed sites where you can take your pets, bikes and kites. Learn more about visiting the beach with your dog at bit.ly/pawsitiveORparks, or pick up our [North Coast](#) and [South Coast](#) "Places to Play with your Dog" brochures.

Management Areas where no plovers are nesting may have some restrictions during nesting season to help attract plovers to the area. For example, we may ask dogs to stay on their leashes. Please respect posted restrictions in these areas.

What if plovers nest outside of a management area?

If plovers nest *outside* these management areas, we will still install ropes and signs to protect *individual* nests, but no recreation restrictions will be in place. We ask visitors to avoid the roped areas. This is the deal we have with the USFWS to balance public recreation and natural resource conservation on our beaches.

Is the plan working?

YES! We restored habitat and managed predators and recreation, and plovers are returning to areas they historically called home. Plovers have nested in 12 of the 15 management areas, and plover numbers have climbed from a low of 45 breeding birds in 1992 to 468 in 2017. In 2018, plovers started spreading north, and have returned to most north coast managed areas along with some unmanaged beaches along the central and south coast. They are now in all coastal counties!

It sounds like plovers are doing great! Does this mean they can be delisted?

Not yet. Our Oregon birds are part of a larger population that spans coastal Washington to Baja California, and not all of them are doing this well. Our Oregon efforts prove we can make a difference with focused, cooperative management that pays attention to habitat, predators and recreation. Our birds will sometimes stake out new homes in other places like Washington and California, helping overall west coast recovery.

While many partners have worked on plover management, our success is thanks to Oregonians' willingness to share the beach with these little birds and let them nest in peace. Until habitat loss, including predator densities and human disturbance, is reversed across the coast plovers will need our help.

The Habitat Conservation Plan is intended to last until 2035. If plovers are still threatened (or worse) at the end of that time, OPRD will meet with USFWS to review the plan and determine if additional or different conservation measures are needed. On the way to this 25 year mark, we meet regularly with USFWS to make sure it's working as intended.